



Italian Ways: On and Off the Rails from Milan to Palermo

Tim Parks

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“So inviting you might find yourself tempted to give the experience a whirl and ride the Italian trains yourself, book in hand.”—Liesl Schillinger, *New York Times Book Review*

Tim Parks’s books on Italy have been hailed as “so vivid, so packed with delectable details, [they] serve as a more than decent substitute for the real thing” (*Los Angeles Times Book Review*). Now, in his first Italian travelogue in a decade, he delivers a charming and funny portrait of Italian ways by riding its trains from Verona to Milan, Rome to Palermo, and right down to the heel of Italy.

Parks begins as any traveler might: “A train is a train is a train, isn’t it?” But soon he turns his novelist’s eye to the details, and as he journeys through majestic Milano Centrale station or on the newest high-speed rail line, he delivers a uniquely insightful portrait of Italy. Through memorable encounters with ordinary Italians—conductors and ticket collectors, priests and prostitutes, scholars and lovers, gypsies and immigrants—Parks captures what makes Italian life distinctive: an obsession with speed but an acceptance of slower, older ways; a blind eye toward brutal architecture amid grand monuments; and an undying love of a good argument and the perfect cappuccino.

Italian Ways also explores how trains helped build Italy and how their development reflects Italians’ sense of themselves from Garibaldi to Mussolini to Berlusconi and beyond. Most of all, *Italian Ways* is an entertaining attempt to capture the essence of modern Italy. As Parks writes, “To see the country by train is to consider the crux of the essential Italian dilemma: Is Italy part of the modern world, or not?”

4 maps

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