



The Grand Tour: or The Purloined Coronation Regalia

Patricia C. Wrede

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In this elegant, old-fashioned rambler, a sequel to the historical fantasy *Sorcery and Cecilia*, a party of five Brits (three of them are wizards)--Kate and Thomas Schofield, Cecy and James Tarleton, and Lady Sylvia--takes a "grand tour" of 19th-century Europe. What promises to be a pleasant exploration of old world antiquities and fancy shops turns out to be an adventure of a lifetime when Cecy receives a mysterious alabaster flask (a coronation treasure) from an agitated Lady in Blue. Before they know it, they are wrapped up in a magical conspiracy to take over Europe.

Written in two voices by two different authors, the novel alternates between Cecy's deposition and excerpts from her dear friend and cousin Kate's diary. Despite the crisp, clever dialogue and wonderful character subtleties in this Jane Austen-style comedy of manners, readers may be confused by the episodic nature of the novel whose mysteries take their sweet time in unfolding. Teens with the patience to savor this slow-as-molasses grand tour, however, will be amply rewarded by the novel's myriad delights. (Ages 14 and older) -
-Karin Snelson

The Grand Tour: or The Purloined Coronation Regalia Details

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From Reader Review The Grand Tour: or The Purloined Coronation Regalia for online ebook

Elizabeth (Miss Eliza) says

*Special Content only on my blog, Strange and Random Happenstance during Regency Magic (March & April 2015)

Cecelia and Kate are back in action, together not separate for this adventure, and they're bringing their new spouses along for the honeymoon. Though Kate doesn't think there's any chance she's going to get used to being called Lady Schofield, much as Cecelia is having a hard time remembering she is Mrs. Tarleton, nevertheless they are in wedded bliss. Heading to the continent with Kate's new mother-in-law, Lady Sylvia, in tow for the first leg to Paris, they have barely arrived in France when magical misdeeds are afoot. They are inexorably drawn into a possibly Bonapartist plot to use items of magical significance to legitimize Napoleon as ruler of Europe, or at least they assume it's the recently deposed despot. The magic adds supernatural significance to the appointed leader making their rule as close to divinity as is possible. Asked by Wellington himself to stop this atrocity from happening, the happy couples are able to move about the continent on their grand tour with the whim of newlyweds, when really their whims are strategic plans to catch a magical mastermind. Hopefully they won't be in too much danger and that there will be lots of operas for Kate.

As you can imagine, reading all these books centered during the Regency in England basically means that I've been living in the early 1800s now for a couple of months. What you might not be aware of unless you've noticed the link on my sidebar is that I'm participating in a year long re-read of all Lauren Willig's Pink Carnation, aka Napoleonic War Regency England, books. This month I'm moderating the discussion of the re-read of *The Orchid Affair* on my friend Ashely's blog, The Bubble Bath Reader. And no, I'm not mentioning this just to get you to go over to her blog, though that would be rather nice, I'm mentioning this because my re-reading of both *The Orchid Affair* and *The Grand Tour* was a nice confluence of events that made me appreciate the later more than I did initially.

The two books serve as complimentary volumes dealing with the loss of the monarchy in France because of the revolution. While *The Orchid Affair* was about restoring a prince of the blood during the reign of Napoleon prior to his self-proclaimed Empire, *The Grand Tour* dealt more with the aftereffects of the war and the desire to not repeat recent history. Because both books, while not exactly being for governance by a sovereign entity, show quite well the fact that there is a benefit to stability. In France the stability is no longer having a fear of the guillotine, in Italy, it is the unification of all of Italy into one nation. By having a better grounding in history due to *The Orchid Affair*, what was on my first read of *The Grand Tour* a rather dull trek through Europe following artifacts, became something more real, something that actually had importance and impact. A little perspective can easily change your opinion if you are willing to let it.

But what I really think is the strength of *The Grand Tour* is that it brings the actual tradition, the coming of age right of the grand tour of Europe into a more visceral experience. Mainly this has to deal with travel during the early 1800s. In so many books of the time, or written about the time, the grand tour was just mentioned as a right of passage, a way to expand your knowledge and tastes by traveling and seeing great works of art. You were expected to gain some culture and then return home with a broadened mind and some stories. So in fiction you usually have the character who mentions they are setting off on this trip or have just returned, but do they talk about the actual day to day travel? No, they talk about art and artifacts. But just wrap your head around the fact that this is before trains, before cars, and there are a lot of mountains in

Europe.

The "Tour" was more of a trek. To get a sense of this one would be better off reading travel narratives of the day, not fiction, or just read *The Grand Tour*. What Stevermer and Wrede have done so expertly is capture the hardships and danger that was involved in traveling through Europe in the 1800s, masked gunmen aside. We think we have it bad when our plane is delayed or we are rerouted? Imagine having to take days in a carriage banging about just to get from one city to another? Not only that. How about crossing the Alps? Here's your donkey, don't look down. Seriously, we, as travelers, have NOTHING to gripe about. Nothing! Poor Kate seems to spend the entirety of the trip cold, wet, and rattled; and that's not even because of evil magicians set on creating an overlord, this is just because of drafty carriages, wet weather, wind, and badly maintained roads. It takes the glamor right out of the grand tour, but in its place it leaves a truth that is universal but is usually glossed over by other writers.

As for Stevermer and Wrede's continuation of the letter game? It fell flat. *The Grand Tour* was written over fifteen years after *Sorcery and Cecelia* and during the interim both the authors have gained a maturity in their writing. While this does lead to a solid writing style, it loses the spontaneity and fun of the previous book. It's more refined, it's more polished, almost to the point where you can no longer hear the distinction between the author's voices. Plus, I know the fact that the characters are on the tour together means that the previous convention of writing letters back and forth isn't tenable, so we are into diary territory, but the whole gimmick of the letter game is that the characters aren't together. So Stevermer and Wrede thought it would be fun to break basically the only rule of the letter game. Maybe they should have realized the rule is there for a reason. Having the narrative shift back and forth between Kate and Cecelia while they are often in the same room led to a bad case of head-hopping and having us readers get whiplash. So the book might have a lot going for it, and it's a solid read, but it lacks that magical spark that makes *Sorcery and Cecelia* so memorable.

colleen the convivial curmudgeon says

2.5

Like the first book, we get the story from the perspective of the two protagonists, Kate and Cecy, through their writings; however, instead of letters written back and forth between the two we get Kate's entries from her "commonplace" book - pretty much a diary - and Cecy's deposition of the incident.

It didn't work quite as well in this book as it did in the first.

For one thing, everyone is together on the Wedding/Mystery Tour, so it makes less sense to have it written this way - though it is interesting to see the same events from the two viewpoints. Moreso, though, the plot dragged more in this one. Even though there was a big mystery and high stakes, I never really *felt* the tension. More time seemed to be spent discussing buying gowns and interviewing maids than the 'who's killing people' aspect, and if this was more of a romance that would be fine, but it felt like it tried to be too many things and sort of failed at fulfilling any of it.

Also, I had a harder time keeping track of who was who. Even though the two character's writings are written by different authors, their voices were just too much the same - not to mention a certain deal of inconsistency. (For instance, at one crisis we're told how Kate (view spoiler).

More than anything, though, it seemed to not work as well because our heroines took a backseat to most of the action. James and Thomas were not only tiresome in constantly trying to protect the girls, which is understandable to some degree, but they were often successful, so we get entries of how Kate, for instance, is sitting at home and waiting for news.

Not exactly the most riveting thing to read.

Even their maids seemed more active, as they were constantly complaining of being tired and going to bed and letting others take care of things.

Also, since Cecy's parts were written as a deposition, we don't really get any personal touches. In Kate's parts we at least see moments of tenderness and romance with her and her new husband, but with Cecy we don't get to see much of that side at all.

If the mystery is going to be tepid I at least want some decent romance, damnit!

Still, it was a pretty short read, though draggy in places (especially the travelling bits), and did have a certain bit of charm. I do intend on reading the third in the trilogy, but I can't not pretend that I'm not hoping for an improvement.

Res says

The one where Cecy and Kate and their husbands go on a marriage tour of Europe and wind up entangled in a plot.

I'm afraid this lacks a good deal of the charm of Sorcery and Cecelia. It's longer, and more conventional in structure, and while we still get first-person accounts from both Kate and Cecy, they're not talking to *each other*, so we lose those hints at the cousins' relationship that made the first book so much fun.

My first problem here is that I *still* can't tell the people apart -- not Kate & Cecy, and not James & Thomas -- and having them all together makes it even worse. I could have kept a chart, I suppose -- X is a magician and Y is not, X likes opera and Y hates it, etc. -- but in the end, if the voices are the same, it doesn't matter what other differences there are.

My second problem is that the structure (with excerpts from one girl's diary and the other's deposition) means that you end up having to read certain key scenes twice, once from each point of view. This is annoying.

Finally, I'm bothered by the book's incuriosity about gender politics. It is in fact *almost* an AU in which there's equality between women and men in the time of the Napoleonic wars -- almost, but not quite. In practice it's just a story in which inconvenient things like a vicious double standard and a lack of civil rights and an inability to earn a living are all just kept offstage.

This is an extremely gender-polarized time period, with rules governing a woman's behavior waking and sleeping; how can there not be limits placed on women's magic? And if there aren't limits on women's magic, why haven't women used that magic to see to it that they get to be full citizens? And how can you have a villain plotting to bring back the cult of Diana of the Woods without it seeming to occur to anyone that, um,

hey, as things currently stand, it turns out that women are really, really powerless!

Chessela Helm says

Cecy and Kate's European adventure is stalled by some baddies that are the outside of enough. They and their new husbands explore the continent while engaging in even more shenanigans. Possibly more hilarious than book one.

Maura says

1. do not attempt to read this without first reading Sorcery and Cecelia -- it will simply not make much sense.
2. i love Sorcery and Cecelia -- while it's fluff, it's terribly well written fluff. and it's in epistolary format, which i'm a sucker for. i think it's safe to say it's one of the most re-read books on my shelf.
3. this doesn't evoke nearly as much love. which disappointed me greatly for about the first half of the book. eventually the plot engaged me enough to get over it. so if you too love S&C, temper your expectations for this one. if you simply *liked* S&C, then maybe that alone will keep your expectations at a proper level.
4. why didn't i love it? the character voices didn't ring true this time. perhaps it was because instead of letters, we had a diary and a deposition -- since there was no direct communication between the two cousins, the comfortable tone was alternately missing or out of place. also, it seemed like the characters hadn't really learned from their previous adventures -- they kept treating each other more like stereotypes rather than close family/friends. it just felt off.
5. but the plot was fine. maybe a little convoluted, but enjoyable.

Emily says

still charming and enjoyable! the scope of the plot of this one is also much more complex / far-reaching than book 1.

some negative-flavored notes from me though:

-i keep on getting cecilia and kate mixed up. their voices are similar enough that i have the epistolary version of faceblindness, especially now that they're in close proximity to each other all the time (in book 1 i could distinguish by "this is the one in the country, and that is the one in london" but now they're always together and honestly they're ... not dissimilar?!)

-i don't actually like james very much... and i don't understand the merits of james. someone explain the merits of james to me, bc yo. let cecy ride whatever horses she feels capable of riding? i guess in terms of voice distinction, i feel like there's a lot more affection between kate and thomas compared to cecy and james, which reflects my lack of affection for james.

-in general, let the ladies do whatever they deem necessary? have these husbands learned nothing about the capacities of their chosen life partners?

tho obviously one of the themes of these books is "ladies being underestimated" so i guess that kind of insufferable male energy is inescapable

bye

Dianna says

Fun!

Cathy says

As with the first book, this was a bit slow and slightly difficult to work through. The story won me over, though, and I powered through the boring bits.

One thing that really irritated me about this book was the fact that several parts of the story were repeated. It is told from the perspectives of two cousins, each taking a turn to fill in a part of their story. But when one ended and the next began, there was often a summarization of the chapter that had just ended, which was unnecessary and frankly annoying.

Mike says

This was pretty much exactly what I was expecting: more of what I got in *Sorcery & Cecilia*. This is a good thing. It's a fun, lighthearted adventure with great characters, some truly funny dialogue, and a goat.

Katie says

I was disappointed by this book - I was charmed by the first one and hoped that the sequel would expand on the adorable characters. Ideally the 'mystery' would have required one or both of the characters to delve into their past or family history. This book was still a quick read, but the slightly disjointed feeling I got from the first novel was increased through the second. Something just felt off and I kept waiting for it to resolve...and it didn't. The men were even more bland, and though I like the new maids I would have liked more character development there as well.

There were still a few amusing moments, like the dissolving desk and Kate falling into the canal (maybe I appreciated that because I can imagine doing the same), but overall the story just didn't draw me in as much...maybe too many characters for the length of the book. I don't plan to read the third installment in the series.

Natalie says

This book was cumbersome. Again, the authors engaged in the Letter Game, but this time the main characters, Kate and Cecily were side by side, involved in the same plot. It was interesting to see the different points of view with which they approached each event, but the way the story was set up, it was fraught with problems that plagued the plot and made the story drag.

Cousins Kate and Cecy are on their honeymoons – touring Europe with their husbands, who are best of friends. They stumble across international intrigue that suggests someone is trying to use magic to bring Napoleon Bonaparte back to power. Kate writes the events of a day or two in her commonplace book (diary), then we read an excerpt from Cecily’s deposition to the British Ministry of Magic, the War Office, and the Foreign Office, which covers the next day or days. Thus, the characters leapfrog in their explanation of events. It is interesting to note Cecy’s direct development of plot, twists, and forthright telling of events. Kate is much better at creating atmosphere, developing relationships, and adding the personal touch with an occasional and usually humorous ‘note bene’.

Beyond that, the story has problems. If both authors are writing about the same characters in the same rooms, the characters never develop completely. When Cecy’s narrative involves Kate’s husband, Thomas, as it naturally must, we see a different Thomas than the one that Kate writes about. Instead of lending richness to his character, his personality becomes so blurred that he becomes more of a bland pawn of the plot, than the unpredictable rascal with the stinging retorts that we came to love in the first book. The same is true for Cecy’s husband, James when Kate is writing. Each author writes not only about her own character, but tells what the others are saying and doing at any moment, and the essential nuances that help the reader visualize setting and personality are lost.

The plot also suffers. The pace drags. (This book is half again as long as the first book, but develops only one storyline instead of two.) It is clear the authors are not discussing the plot, as the rules of the Letter Game dictate, so each advances the action just so much, then leaves hints for the other to pick up and develop. The hints are sometimes ignored, sometimes dwelt on too deeply, and often lead nowhere important. It was much more interesting in the last book when each character had her own adventure to relate – the other could comment, sympathize, offer advice, but couldn’t actually act in such a way to significantly redirect the plot. Here it seems that each author has an idea about what could happen, but doesn’t want to take the action too far – so as not to overshadow each other. After all, though there are many opportunities for extreme suspense (i.e. James is shot and Cecy nearly blows herself up), the characters recover in a matter of hours or days, all along assuring everyone that they are perfectly fine. It’s as if one author doesn’t dare put the other author’s character into anything resembling real danger. The reader senses this polite restraint, and wishes they would actually *do something!* When there is actual suspense, in the last sixty pages, I finally couldn’t put the book down.

There are far too many loose ends and sudden character entrances and exits. Why does Lady Sylvia play such a prominent part in the first sections, then suddenly have so little influence in the rest? After all, much is made of her extensive network – why does it really not come to any significant purpose? Are there only a wizards in Britain? Apart from a select few characters, positioned as authorities on the clues they seek, why do our couples not encounter any other normal, magical folk like themselves?

I’m looking forward, with some reservation, to the next book. The dust jacket suggests that the authors return to the successful formula of the first book, in which the characters don’t actually meet during the course of events. That story takes place ten years later – will it be written from the point of view of their daughters?

Kelly says

Not as evocative as the first. It doesn't pull you in when you start it, and it doesn't hook you afterwards. Unfortunately, the characters are rather boring in this- it might have something to do with the format- there's a switch from the epistolary layout of the first to a diary/testimony layout, and it really is not at all effective.

It makes the story seem flat and dull. It doesn't help that the two title characters have become even more boring- Kate has turned into a wilting flower who only lives for her may-un, and Cecelia is a perfect paragon of sense who seems to enjoy condescending to her cousin when possible. Their husbands are perfectly interchangeable, except one likes to be a bit more demonstrative in a Byron sort of way, and the other is more commonplace, and works for Wellington (which made me roll my eyes pretty high up into my head. He makes an appearance, and his character is just as boring as the rest- not at all how one would expect. Susanna Clarke, you still have far and away the best fictionalized Wellington appearance!) They are all terrible detectives, which makes the mystery incredibly lame- it all could have been over 200 pages in. And yet! When they need to move along the plot, they miraculously discover something that they have no business discovering or knowing or figuring out and everything's just fine. Perfect paragons when they need to be, yet again! You never feel a moment's anxiety for any of them, never a moment of drama between them (all misunderstandings are cleared up in a matter of a page), and yeah, generally- bo-ring.

I've started the third one, though, and it is already better- if irritating in its own special way.

Wiebke (1book1review) says

Sadly this book is lacking the fun and lightheartedness of the first book. For the most part of the book nothing really happens and the two narrators lose themselves in descriptions, whining and not saying anything.

The end revived some of what I enjoyed about the first time we met these characters, but this just had me wishing they would get to the point and flirt more.

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

Amount read: 33%

Though the plot is moving at a faster pace than book one, the episodic nature of the mystery and the lack of character development equals a lack of investment. I was going to force myself through it since it's bought the eBook, but life is short and this book is long.

Emma Rose Ribbons says

So good! Even better than the first even if the magic only makes an appearance at the end. I'm loving the authors' portrayal of marital life, the couples are so sweet. Also enjoyed visiting other countries. This series remains delightful.
