

1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era

Volume 23

Article 9

2016

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Kevin J Hayes

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Recommended Citation

Kevin J Hayes (2016) "THOMAS JEFFERSON, TRAVEL WRITER," *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*: Vol. 23, Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/sixteenfifty/vol23/iss1/9>

THOMAS JEFFERSON, TRAVEL WRITER

KEVIN J. HAYES

Serving as U. S. Secretary of State in Philadelphia during the early 1790s, Thomas Jefferson had the opportunity to renew his friendship with Benjamin Rush. One morning they had breakfast together, an episode Rush recorded in his commonplace book: "Was charmed with Mr. Jefferson's conversation. It was full of instruction upon all subjects. He read several extracts from his Journal of his travels in France."¹ The manuscript that Jefferson read to Rush tells the story of his journey through the South of France and the Italian north in 1787. As Rush's comments indicate, Jefferson recognized the value of his own travel writing in terms of both entertainment and instruction. Though he was happy to share the journal with Rush and other

¹ Benjamin Rush, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush, His "Travels through Life" Together with His Commonplace Book for 1789-1813*, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton: American Philosophical Society by Princeton University Press, 1948), 151.

friends, Jefferson had no intention of publishing it. Instead, he preferred to keep it in manuscript, saving it to share with people close to him.

Jefferson's journal is one of several different versions of the 1787 trip he wrote. Excluding the bare-bones account of expenses in his memorandum books, three different documents detailing the trip survive: "Hints to Americans Traveling in Europe," which is a set of recommendations Jefferson made to John Rutledge, Jr., and Thomas Lee Shippen, two young American men who were embarking on an extensive European tour; "Notes of a Tour into the Southern Parts of France," as his travel journal has been titled; and his correspondence with friends written during the trip. Taken together, these documents illustrate Jefferson's considerable versatility as a travel writer.

✱ "Hints to Americans Traveling in Europe" ✱

More travel advice than travel adventure, "Hints to Americans Traveling in Europe" resembles advice Lord Chesterfield gave in *Letters to His Son*. Perhaps it should be considered more as didactic literature than travel writing, but "Hints" does contain much colorful detail omitted from "Notes of a Tour." Telling Rutledge and Shippen which taverns to patronize and which to avoid, Jefferson supplied the kind of local information he excluded from "Notes of a Tour." Though Jefferson wrote "Hints" quickly, he took enough time to describe cities to visit and objects to notice while traveling. His advice goes a long way toward explaining why he related his own journey as he did in "Notes of a Tour." "Hints" cautions travelers to avoid generalizations based on the behavior of tavern keepers and their ilk—"the hackneyed rascals of every country," Jefferson calls them.² Though the traveler frequently meets these tavern-dwelling rascals, they did not represent their nation and should not be used to gauge national character.

Jefferson's advice reveals that travel meant more to him than pleasurable adventure. He traveled to understand those he encountered, to know them individually but also in the aggregate. His lofty purpose helps explain why his travel writings avoid the specific details of traveling. Looking for the big picture, he neglected the quotidian. The condition of the highways, the quality

² "Hints to Americans Travelling in Europe," *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, et al., 38 vols. to date (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 13: 268.

of the taverns, the food and drink served along the road: these commonplace details seldom seemed worth noting to him.

"Hints" also shows why "Notes of a Tour" largely omits humorous detail. The eccentric behavior of tipplers and tavern keepers can lend much charm to stories of travel, but Jefferson excluded them as he characterized the regions he visited. He told another traveler, "To pass once along a public road thro' a country, and in one direction only, to put up at its taverns, and get into conversation with the idle, drunken individuals who pass their time lounging in these taverns, is not the way to know a country, its inhabitants or manners."³

Jefferson also gave Rutledge and Shippen tips about how to sightsee, as well. Avoid hiring personal guides. Motivated by monetary gain, such guides assume a direct correlation between how much they say and how much they earn. They spout numerous trivial details, which waste time, fatigue the attention, and overload the memory with trifles. Instead of hiring personal guides, it is better to obtain good guidebooks. Upon entering a new town, Jefferson suggested, purchase both a map of the place and a "book noting its curiosities."⁴

Jefferson's penchant for printed guides over personal ones was quite forward-thinking. Hiring local guides while traveling through Europe was standard practice for most eighteenth-century travelers. The guidebook publishing industry would not really develop until the early nineteenth century. Jefferson's advice reinforces the importance of the printed word and anticipates the development of the modern travel guidebook. In terms of their form, his own travel notes look forward to subsequent developments in guidebook literature. On another journey he would place asterisks designating superior accommodations on a list of placenames, a feature which would become an essential aspect of the modern guidebook.⁵

"Hints" recommends more general books, too. Before visiting Italy, for example, travelers should purchase a copy of Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, a work offering a model journey for the well-read tourist. Having prepared for his Italian excursion by rereading the Latin classics, Addison brought his reading to bear throughout his travels, suggesting that a knowledge of Latin poetry and history can make a sojourn in Rome much more memorable.⁶ With Addison's *Remarks* as a guidebook, travelers could

³ "Notes on the Letter of Christoph Daniel Ebeling," after October 15, 1795, Papers, 28: 506.

⁴ "Hints," Papers, 13: 268.

⁵ Kevin J. Hayes, *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 342.

⁶ Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (London: J. Tonson, 1705), 301–02.

apply their own classical knowledge on the spot. Recalling Latin literature while touring the remnants of the Roman Empire could reinforce the memory, letting travelers blend their classical knowledge with their personal experience.

Jefferson provided much other useful advice in "Hints." "Walk round the ramparts when there are any," he advised. "Go to the top of a steeple to have a view of the town and its environs." Sightseeing involves great powers of discrimination. "When you are doubting whether a thing is worth the trouble of going to see, recollect that you will never again be so near it, that you may repent the not having seen it, but can never repent having seen it. But there is an opposite extreme too. That is, the seeing too much," Jefferson explained. "A judicious selection is to be aimed at, taking care that the indolence of the moment have no influence in the decision."⁷ Modern travelers might take such advice to heart.

Since the two young men who sought his help were from the United States, "Hints" supplies further advice specific to their nationality. Traveling through Europe, Americans should note the following subjects: agriculture, architecture, courts, gardens, heavy machinery, lighter mechanical arts and manufacture, painting and statuary, and politics. Under each of these topic headings, Jefferson provided more detailed recommendations. When it came to politics, for instance, he recommended observing people in their daily lives. Pay close attention to the farmers and laborers. Look inside their homes; see what they wear, what they eat, how hard they work, what they pay for rent, and what property they own.⁸ To understand a nation's politics, travelers must examine its folk roots. Only by seeing how people live on a daily basis can the traveler understand how well political systems work.

✱ "Notes of a Tour into the Southern Parts of France" ✱

"Notes of a Tour into the Southern Parts of France" offers the most detailed account of Jefferson's French and Italian journey. Though he had no intention of publishing the work, "Notes of a Tour" resembles contemporary books of travel. Overall, it possesses qualities Jefferson admired in many of the travel narratives he had read, which combined geography, natural history, and civil history with information about a country's agriculture, arts, commerce, manners,

⁷ "Hints," *Papers*, 13: 268.

⁸ "Hints," *Papers*, 13: 269.

manufactures, and occupations.⁹ Jefferson did not consider personal anecdotes of adventure essential to travel writing and, for the most part, omitted such episodes from his journal. These deliberate omissions make "Notes of a Tour" more frustrating for the modern reader than either "Hints" or his travel correspondence. Given Jefferson's profound personal importance to American history, readers would like very much to read about some of his personal moments.

Writing Chastellux from Marseilles, Jefferson characterized his trip as "a continued feast of new objects and ideas." Explaining what he meant, he said that he was getting to know the people who best represented the land: "To make the most of the little time I have for so long a circuit, I have been obliged to keep myself rather out of the way of good dinners and good company. Had they been my objects, I should not have quitted Paris. I have courted the society of gardeners, vigneron, coopers, farmers etc. and have devoted every moment of every day almost, to the business of enquiry."¹⁰

Jefferson's words echo a remark from Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*. After a barber offers some seemingly absurd advice, Sterne's mouthpiece, the Rev. Mr. Yorick comments: "I think I can see the precise and distinguishing marks of national characters more in these nonsensical *minutiae*, than in the most important matters of state; where great men of all nations talk and talk so much alike, that I would not give nine-pence to chuse amongst them."¹¹ Though Jefferson shared a similar perspective, his traveling style differed considerably from that of his fictional predecessor. Sterne identifies many different types of travelers in *A Sentimental Journey*: idle travelers, inquisitive travelers, lying travelers, proud travelers, sentimental travelers, splenetic travelers, and vain travelers. Jefferson best fits the category of inquisitive traveler. Though the correspondence he wrote during the trip sometimes shows elements of sentimentality, the quest for new objects and ideas he displays in "Notes of a Tour" reveals his deeply inquisitive nature. Jefferson's desire for knowledge overrode his natural shyness: seldom did he hesitate to ask questions when the answers could broaden his knowledge and expand his mind.¹²

Given his impulse to mingle with farmers and laborers, Jefferson wanted to travel alone and anonymously—much to the horror of his French friends.

⁹ Jefferson to George Watterston, May 7, 1815, *Jefferson Papers*, Library of Congress.

¹⁰ Jefferson to Chastellux, April 4, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 261–262.

¹¹ Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Virginia Woolf (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 91.

¹² Hayes, *Road to Monticello*, 344.

Determined to keep his identity secret, he left Paris the last Wednesday in February 1787, traveling alone in his carriage and hiring post horses along the way. Besides keeping himself incognito, traveling alone gave Jefferson much time for reflection. At Dijon, less than a week into his journey, he hired a manservant named Petit Jean, mainly for the sake of propriety. Petit Jean accompanied him for the remainder of the trip. They reached Sens on Friday. The stretch from here to Vermanton on Saturday, March 3, supplied the subject for the first entry in Jefferson's "Notes of a Tour." This initial two-paragraph entry established a pattern for the entries that would follow.

In his first paragraph, Jefferson described the topography, soil, and agriculture of the region. In the second, he depicted its people. He found it strange that families should congregate in villages instead of living on farms of their own and blamed the Catholic Church for the situation: "Are they thus collected by that dogma of their religion which makes them believe that, to keep the Creator in good humor with his own works, they must mumble a mass every day? Certain it is that they are less happy and less virtuous in villages than they would be insulated with their families on the grounds they cultivate."¹³ Clearly, Jefferson's rural ideal and his religious skepticism shaped his understanding of the French.

Thinking about the local diet a few days later, he noticed that though French country folk generally lived on bread and vegetables, the type of bread differed from one place to the next. Some people ate good wheat bread while those in a neighboring region ate coarse rye bread. Curious to learn the reason underlying this difference, he asked a local man about it. Generally speaking, the people Jefferson approached were happy to respond to his questions. In the rye-eating region, his informant told him, the stony soil prevented red wine grapes from growing. Consequently, the region produced only white wine. Since the production of white failed more often than that of red wine, people in these white-grape-growing regions were less prosperous than those living in the adjacent red-grape-growing regions. Basically, the quality of the bread was contingent on the stoniness of the soil.¹⁴

"On such slight circumstances depends the condition of man!" Jefferson exclaimed to his journal.

By Thursday, March 15, he had reached Lyons. He was having mixed feelings about the French countryside so far. The long, straight, tree-lined

¹³ "Notes of a Tour," *Papers*, 11: 415.

¹⁴ "Notes of a Tour," *Papers*, 11: 417.

roads, which form such a quaint and characteristic aspect of rural France, induced feelings of ennui in him. On the other hand, he enjoyed watching the native plants push forth the new growth of the season; his remarks in "Notes of a Tour" recall comments he made back home in his *Garden Book*. One day he noted, "The wild gooseberry is in leaf, the wild pear and sweet briar in bud."¹⁵

"Notes of a Tour" constitutes the main source of information for Jefferson's Italian experience. Its matter-of-fact nature detracts from a trip that, by all other indications, involved exciting adventure, culinary delight, aesthetic pleasure, and new information. Learning that the snowy pass through the Alps was still closed to wheeled traffic, Jefferson had to leave his carriage and much of his kit in Nice and hire mules and men to take him through the Alps. Though space for his gear was limited, he managed to find room in his panniers for some books, not just travel guides but also works on Italian history, too.

In terms of visual pleasure, the Chateau of Saorge gave Jefferson the most picturesque experience of his journey so far and thus prompted one of the most poetic entries in "Notes of a Tour": "The castle and village seem hanging to a cloud in front. On the right is a mountain cloven through to let pass a gurgling stream; on the left a river over which is thrown a magnificent bridge. The whole forms a bason, the sides of which are shagged with rocks, olive trees, vines, herds etc."¹⁶

Sometimes the factual details in "Notes of a Tour" inadvertently convey the charms of travel. Recording the agricultural products and natural resources of Italy, Jefferson occasionally captured its culinary pleasures. After a few days in Milan, he turned south toward Genoa. Along the way, he passed through Rozzano, where he observed how to make Parmesan cheese and recorded the process for posterity. He also sampled mascarpone, which he found delicious.¹⁷ And he fell in love with pasta.

In Genoa, Jefferson spent time enjoying what sights there were to see and made arrangements to return to Nice, where he could retrieve his carriage and resume his roundabout journey through France. Without a proper road, he faced a tough choice between alternatives: by sea or by a narrow, rocky mule path. Despite his dread of seasickness, the water route offered the most expeditious way to return. Or so he thought. He quickly regretted his

¹⁵ "Notes of a Tour," *Papers*, 11: 420.

¹⁶ "Notes of a Tour," *Papers*, 11: 432; Jefferson to Maria Cosway, July 1, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 519.

¹⁷ *Papers*, 11: 464.

decision to travel by sea. Before the vessel left the Gulf of Genoa, the wind from the southwest picked up, and he became quite nauseous. The ship's captain recognized that the sea was too rough to reach Nice, so he sought safe harbor at Noli, a sleepy fishing village where the only place Jefferson could find lodgings was at a broken-down tavern. The menu compensated for the tavern's other shortcomings. This evening, he not only had good fish—sardines, fresh anchovies—he also had ortolans—tiny game birds with little meat but lots of flavor—and fresh strawberries, too.

On the way to Albenga, he enjoyed walking along the Mediterranean shore and letting his mind wander wherever it wished. The ever-changing Mediterranean was beautiful, but he was not content to view it from a distance, as "Notes of a Tour" reveals. Fascinated by the appearance of the water, Jefferson found a drinking glass somewhere, walked to the shore, scooped up a glass of water, and held it to the sunlight. When viewed in a drinking glass, the waters of the Mediterranean were remarkably clear and colorless, he observed, but on the whole the sea "assumes *by reflection* the colour of the sky or atmosphere, black, green, blue, according to the state of the weather."¹⁸

Like others who have visited this coastal region, he imagined lingering here and putting behind him other earthly concerns. "If any person wished to retire from their acquaintance, to live absolutely unknown, and yet in the midst of physical enjoiments," he observed, "it should be in some of the little villages of this coast, where air, earth and water concur to offer what each has most precious." Jefferson continued at some length, listing local agricultural products ("wine, oil, figs, oranges, and every production of the garden in every season"), game birds (ortolan, partridge, pheasant, quail), and seafood (crab, lobster, oysters, sardines). He also appreciated the climate, especially because it offered "the power of changing it from summer to winter at any moment, by ascending the mountains."¹⁹ Jefferson's level of detail is impressive, but what stands out about this entry is the way he distances himself from what he describes. He obviously enjoyed wondering what it would be like if he were to live here, but in the journal, he relates his reflections in the third person.

Throughout its length—sixty pages in the modern edition—"Notes of a Tour" reinforces the discomfort Jefferson felt writing about himself. Its scanty personal details anticipate a comment he would make decades later. About halfway through the composition of his autobiography, Jefferson questioned whether he would ever finish writing it because he was already tired of talking

¹⁸ "Notes of a Tour," *Papers*, 11: 441.

¹⁹ "Notes of a Tour," *Papers* 11: 441–42.

about himself. From his view, personal details were unnecessary to suit the travel journal's purpose. He saw "Notes of a Tour" as a practical work filled with practical information. Despite the absence of anecdotes, "Notes of a Tour" does capture Jefferson's sense of purpose. His inquisitive nature countered his natural shyness, and he greatly enjoyed his conversations with the working people he met. The journey provided a great change of pace from Parisian society, bringing Jefferson closer to the soil by bringing him together with those who tilled it. The pride he took in Virginia, its farms and farmers, frequently shows in "Notes of a Tour," but Jefferson was not so proud of his native land that he could not learn from others how to improve it.

* Travel Letters *

The letters Jefferson wrote during his journey through France and Italy are uneven. Those to William Short and other male friends in Paris contain good information, but his letters to female friends embody a sense of fun absent from the ones he wrote the men, with the exception of his letters to Lafayette, which are almost as endearing as those he wrote the women. The travel letters to his daughter Martha belong to the category of didactic literature. For the most part, they admonish her to keep studying. Infrequently did Jefferson reward his older daughter with a glimpse of his travels.

Lately, Jefferson's social circle had expanded to include Madame de Tessé and Madame de Tott. His friendship with Lafayette had brought him in contact with Madame de Tessé. Despite being Lafayette's aunt, she was only two years older than Jefferson, and the two got along famously. She shared Jefferson's love of art, literature, and gardening. Madame de Tessé had a passion for English novels and maintained a lavish garden decorated with all sorts of exotic flora. She and Jefferson often walked through her garden. He greatly admired it and promised to send her some unique American plants once he returned home. Through Madame de Tessé Jefferson met Madame de Tott or, properly, Mademoiselle de Tott, who had become a part of the Tessé household through a heady combination of intrigue, sympathy, and chance. Once Jefferson's friendship with these two women blossomed, he began dining with them regularly. His correspondence suggests that he was closer to Madame de Tessé, but he was obviously quite fond of Madame de Tott.

South of Lyons, he saw remnants of the Roman Empire or, as he told Madame de Tessé, he began to be "nourished with the remains of

Roman grandeur.”²⁰ Using a food metaphor to describe what ancient Rome meant to him, Jefferson revealed how essential contact with the Ancients was to his very being. This comment occurs in the letter he wrote her from Nîmes, possibly the finest letter he wrote throughout this journey. He painted a vivid picture of himself at Nîmes, where he greatly enjoyed the Maison Quarrée, the Roman edifice that inspired his design for the Virginia State Capitol.

Describing the pleasure this building gave him, Jefferson depicts himself as a lovestruck melancholic:

Here I am, Madam, gazing whole hours at the Maison quarrée, like a lover at his mistress. The stocking-weavers and silk spinners around it consider me as an hypochondriac Englishman, about to write with a pistol the last chapter of his history. This is the second time I have been in love since I left Paris. The first was with a Diana at the Chateau de Laye Epinaye in the Beaujolois, a delicious morsel of sculpture, by Michael Angelo Slodtz. This, you will say, was in rule, to fall in love with a fine woman: but, with a house! It is all out of precedent! No, madam, it is not without a precedent in my own history.²¹

Jefferson sounds like he just stepped from the pages of an eighteenth-century English novel. Having given his heart to an object that cannot return his love, he has reached the brink of despair and is ready to end it all. He knew Madame de Tessé and her fondness for novels well enough to know that she would enjoy this fanciful self-portrait—and recognize it as a literary pose.

Like any good letter writer, Jefferson made his subject matter suit the person whom he addressed. To Madame de Tessé, he wrote that he had remembered her while seeing sights that she would enjoy and imagined seeing them together with her. Having considered writing several times, he kept hesitating. Upon reaching Nîmes—“where Roman taste, genius, and magnificence excite ideas analogous to yours at every step”—all hesitation disappeared, and he put pen to paper.²²

The letter he wrote Madame de Tott is personal without being as intimate or affectionate as the one to Madame de Tessé. He told Madame de Tott

²⁰ Jefferson to Madame de Tessé, March 20, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 226.

²¹ Jefferson to Madame de Tessé, March 20, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 226–27.

²² Jefferson to Madame de Tessé, March 20, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 227.

that he had been thinking of her, too, but in less emphatic terms. Speaking of himself in the third person, he gives his reflections the quality of a fable:

A traveller, sais I, retired at night to his chamber in an Inn, all his effects contained in a single trunk, all his cares circumscribed by the walls of his apartment, unknown to all, unheeded, and undisturbed, writes, reads, thinks, sleeps, just in the moments when nature and the movements of his body and mind require. Charmed with the tranquillity of his little cell, he finds how few are our real wants, how cheap a thing is happiness, how expensive a one pride.²³

Jefferson also indulged in some creative prose that starts as humorous, pseudo-scientific discourse and ends with some fanciful remarks in direct discourse: a clever dialogue incorporating a charming play on words.²⁴ Explaining how he spent his time on the road, he wrote: "Sometimes I amuse myself with physical researches. Those enormous boots, for instance, in which the postillion is incased like an Egyptian mummy, have cost me more pondering than the laws of planetary motion did to Newton," he told Madame de Tott. "I have searched their solution in his physical, and in his moral constitution. I fancied myself in conversation with one of Newton's countrymen, and asked him what he thought could be the reason of their wearing those boots?"

"Sir," responds the imaginary English conversationalist, "it is because a Frenchman's heels are so light, that, without this ballast, he would turn keel up."

"If so, Sir," Jefferson puns, "it proves at least that he has more *gravity* in his head than your nation is generally willing to allow him."

Jefferson varied the tone of his letters to suit different correspondents, as well. Writing to William Short from Aix-en-Provence, he not only dropped the melancholic pose, he completely abjured it: "The man who shoots himself in the climate of Aix must be a bloody minded fellow indeed.—I am now in the land of corn, wine, oil, and sunshine. What more can man ask of heaven? If I should happen to die at Paris I will beg of you to send me here, and have me exposed to the sun. I am sure it will bring me to life again."²⁵ The cloud cover of Paris sometimes depressed Jefferson,

²³ Jefferson to Madame de Tott, April 5, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 271–72.

²⁴ Jefferson to Madame de Tott, April 5, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 272.

²⁵ Jefferson to William Short, March 27, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 247–48.

but the sunshine of Provence gave reason to cheer. In the letter to Short, he scoffs at the man who took suicide as a way out. With gobs of food, casks of wine, and plentiful sunshine, why would anyone want to write the last chapter of his life with a pistol?

As his journey progressed, Jefferson's sense of purpose became more defined. Reaching Nice the second week of April, he wrote Lafayette a letter encapsulating his philosophy of travel. In its basic thrust, the letter contains similar ideas as those in "Hints to Americans Traveling in Europe," but Jefferson polished his prose to a much higher sheen for Lafayette. On the road, he had developed a routine: "In the great cities, I go to see what travellers think alone worthy of being seen; but I make a job of it, and generally gulp it all down in a day. On the other hand, I am never satiated with rambling through the fields and farms, examining the culture and cultivators, with a degree of curiosity which makes some take me to be a fool, and others to be much wiser than I am."²⁶ Jefferson realized his method of sightseeing differed greatly from that of contemporary travelers, but he happily endured the stares of wide-eyed gawkers he passed along the road.

He obviously took great satisfaction traveling the way he did. To learn the most while traveling, he thought anonymity essential. Only by going incognito could the traveler get a true picture of the country. As he said in a letter to Lafayette:

You must ferret the people out of their hovels as I have done, look into their kettles, eat their bread, loll on their beds under pretense of resting yourself, but in fact to find if they are soft. You will feel a sublime pleasure in the course of this investigation, and a sublimer one hereafter when you shall be able to apply your knolege to the softening of their beds, or the throwing a morsel of meat into the kettle of vegetables.²⁷

Jefferson's comments to Lafayette are charming, but they also serve a practical purpose. Much as he told Rutledge and Shippen how to travel in order to learn what they could to benefit their own nation, he told Lafayette how to learn more about his nation as he traveled and to use what he learned in order to make it a better place.

Extending his journey from Nice to Milan, Jefferson grew uneasy about being away from Paris for so long, but he really wanted to observe the

²⁶ Jefferson to Lafayette, April 11, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 283.

²⁷ Jefferson to Lafayette, April 11, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 285.

rice-growing regions of northern Italy, which were much deeper in Italy's interior than he realized. It was easy to justify the extra travel time: his observations on rice farming would benefit his countrymen, especially the rice farmers in the Carolina lowlands. He predicted beforehand that the Nice-Milan-Nice round trip would take about three weeks. Writing Short before plunging into Italy, he said good-bye for the time being. There was no point in posting letters from Italy. He would be back in France before his letters.

Arriving in Marseilles after his time in Italy, Jefferson wrote his daughter Martha again. Having been her father's riding companion after her mother's death and having been his traveling companion from Philadelphia to Boston to Paris, she remained at school in Paris while he toured southern France and northern Italy. At the very least she was hoping for some good letters describing the trip en route. The early ones she received contain little colorful detail. From Aix, her father admonished Martha to pursue her studies diligently regardless how difficult they may seem. Writing Martha from Marseilles, Jefferson told her about the arduous mule trip to Nice but did little beyond name the places through which he had passed. In fact, a list of placenames fills almost half the letter. Her father kept his comments brief because he wanted to spark her curiosity, not satiate it. He expected her to use his letter as the basis for a self-taught geography lesson. She should have been able to identify all of the places he visited, locate them on a map, and trace her father's route.

From the Mediterranean coast, he headed inland via the Canal de Languedoc. This lazy journey gave him the chance to write Martha the kind of letter she wanted and deserved. He created a vivid picture of his canal passage, complete with image and sound: "cloudless skies above, limpid waters below, and on each hand a row of nightingales in full chorus." The sound of nightingales gave him the opportunity to flashback to an earlier moment in his trip when he had visited Petrarch's home and its environs. He told his daughter:

This delightful bird had given me a rich treat before at the fountain of Vaucluse. After visiting the tomb of Laura at Avignon, I went to see this fountain, a noble one of itself, and rendered for ever famous by the songs of Petrarch who lived near it. I arrived there somewhat fatigued, and sat down by the fountain to repose myself. It gushes, of the size of a river, from a secluded valley of the mountain, the ruins of Petrarch's chateau being perched on a rock 200 feet perpendicular above. To add to the

enchantment of the scene, every tree and bush was filled with nightingales in full song.”²⁸

Jefferson mingled the sound of the nightingale with the music of Petrarch’s verse to accompany his idyllic canal journey. Even while capturing these beautiful sounds, Jefferson turned his letter into a lesson for his daughter. He urged Martha to familiarize herself with the nightingale’s song while in Europe, so she could compare it with the song of the mockingbird once she returned home to Virginia. Writing his daughter while traveling down the Canal de Languedoc, Jefferson’s heart was in Virginia. Celebrations of the mockingbird’s song were already an important literary tradition in the American South.²⁹ Expressing his preference for the mockingbird over the nightingale, he was perpetuating an American tradition.

✱ Conclusion ✱

Though Jefferson conveyed his ideas in many different ways over the course of his trip, similar patterns run through his various forms of travel writing. In “Hints,” he told Rutledge and Shippen to make their observations useful for their countrymen. With “Notes of a Tour,” he personally exemplified what he recommended to them. He may have depicted himself as a lovesick melancholic gazing at the Maison Quarrée in his letter to Madame de Tessé, but his gazing had a practical intent. He was using the ancient building to inspire ideas for developing the architecture of a new nation. His travel letters to his daughter Martha may seem overly didactic, but he held himself to a similar standard. He, too, was using his travels as a way of learning. He never lost sight of what he saw as the main purpose of traveling: to learn new ideas that could help improve mankind.

²⁸ Jefferson to Martha Jefferson, May 21, 1787, *Papers*, 11: 369–70.

²⁹ Edward Kimber, *Itinerant Observations in America*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 105–06.