



Ruth Picardie envies an American abroad
Grand Tour

Most young Americans travelling through Europe have unnaturally white teeth, big trainers, oversize rucksacks and t-shirts advertising their university. They seem confident and often talk loudly.

The heroine/narrator of Lynne Tillman's **Motion Sickness** (*Serpent's Tail*, pbk, £8.99) is none of these things. She reads Henry James, Freud and *The New York Times*. She knows quite a lot

about Italian painting. She signposts some chapters with quotes from Flaubert, Camus, Adorno and Kristeva. But her heroine is funky too, because she also reads Mickey Spillane and sends Cindy Sherman postcards to her friends. Everything happens in the present tense and she doesn't have a name, which is probably very clever and postmodern. Tillman's heroine has great

taste. She zig-zags around all the most glamorous cities in Europe and its edges: Paris, Istanbul, Amsterdam, Venice, Budapest, Barcelona, missing all the ugly bits, though she does check out Rhodes and Crete (slightly down-market, I thought). She even makes London sound romantic: 'In the tube the escalators at Holborn and Piccadilly climb forever and are long enough to be runways in old Busby Berkeley musicals. Someone might burst into song or do a dance routine, passengers might become a high-kicking chorus line on their way to work'. (Must remember that next Monday morning.) In London she meets Jessica, an expatriate American buddhist, whose husband has disappeared. In Italy she meets Alfred and Paul, two English brothers. She meets lots of other people and, strangely, they all seem to know each other.

Early on she writes: 'It's never easy to imagine or sympathise with someone else's epiphanies'. But I identified

with *all* her epiphanies. Like: 'Mirrors are defeating because they don't tell you what you look like to someone else'. Or: 'For a moment or two I want him, and then he becomes ugly, horrible to think about sexually... I want him, I don't want him. It's unthinkable, it's inevitable.' She's the kind of girl we all want to be - clever, independent, funky, and free, a kind of grown-up, happy, female version of Holden Caulfield.

A man she meets in Amsterdam calls her 'a footloose babe and sometimes a drifter with big ideas' - a compliment to die for. She can drink hot chocolate without worrying about her weight. She has sex, but it's no big deal: frankly, she spends more time thinking about movies. She never ends up on a beach in Israel over the sabbath, with no money and no food surrounded by swarms of Israeli soldiers strumming Beatles songs to her friend with big tits. Next summer I plan to do a European tour with an artistic American.*