

Imaging Italy Through the Eyes of Contemporary Australian Travellers (1990-2010)

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By

Roberta Trapè

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

For centuries Italy has been the destination of a lifetime for an endless stream of travellers. It became the main destination of Continental travel in the golden age of the Grand Tour, which started at the beginning of the seventeenth century and, after being interrupted by the Napoleonic Wars, lasted until the mid-nineteenth century. At the end of this period travel to Italy continued to be made by wealthy elites, progressively replaced by tourists. In the nineteenth century, affluent travellers from the “New Worlds”, first from the United States and later from Australia, added to the flow of visitors that for centuries had journeyed to Italy to quench their thirst for history, art and beauty.

In retracing Australian travel to Italy, I am largely indebted to Roslyn Pesman, the author of a number of well-documented and insightful contributions to the study of this subject.¹ Pesman’s studies cover the period from the 1850s up to the 1990s, focussing in particular on the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. This study will concentrate on these last two decades (1990-2010) in order to identify possible new trends in Australian travellers’ attitude towards Italy and in their way of approaching and responding to this country. For my purposes, writers and artists will be considered the most important category of travellers, since they are the ones who usually leave the most articulate and eloquent records of their travel experiences.

In attempting a periodization of Australian travel to Italy, three different phases may be distinguished.² The first lasted over one hundred years, from the first settlement in 1778 to the 1890s. In this period, Britain, or “Home” (either literally or metaphorically), was the longed-for goal of

¹ Roslyn Pesman is Professor Emeritus at the University of Sydney. In 1961 Pesman boarded an Italian ship and “embarked upon that Australian middle class rite-of-passage, the overseas trip”. Roslyn Pesman, “The Past: Australian and Tuscany 1850-1950”, in *An Antipodean Connection. Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany*, eds. Gaetano Prampolini and Marie-Christine Hubert (Geneva: Slatkine, 1993a) 135. A regular visitor to Italy since 1961, Pesman lived in Florence in 1976 working on Florentine history in the Archivio di Stato.

² The criteria by which I distinguish the different phases are sociology of the traveller and typology of visit (destinations, interests).

the trip and the continental tour was usually a popular addiction. In the nineteenth century, the typical Australian visitors to Italy were members of the wealthy colonial elite who could afford extended and leisurely tours; sojourns of several weeks in Rome or Florence were not uncommon. The Australians who came to Italy in the nineteenth century “were there for the most part as tourists, to visit the sites, Roman ruins and Renaissance architecture and art, to acquire the patina of culture, the status of having been there”.³ In this period Australians do not seem to have been particularly interested in developing a knowledge of Italians and Italian society.

With the rapid demographic and economic expansion of Australia in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the rise of a prosperous middle class, the number of Australians going “overseas” increased and so a second phase of Australian travel to Italy can be identified lasting from the 1890s up to the 1950s. “Judges, lawyers, clergymen, academics, journalists, business men, their wives and daughters, provide the typical travellers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries”.⁴ In this phase, Australians began coming to Italy also in order to study the language, literature, history, art, architecture, archaeology and music of the country.

During these first two phases, the expectations that helped construct these Australians’ perceptions and opinions,

[...] the images and attitudes which accompanied [them] derived from Great Britain. The cultural tradition that the colonial elites and educated middle classes had brought to Australia included a deep interest in Italian literature, a view of Italy as literary inspiration and a whole corpus of English literature with ‘Italian’ settings.⁵

Australian travellers differed from each other in the intensity of their interest in Italy as well as in the extent to which their vision was informed by real knowledge of its culture, literature, language and art; consequently, their perceptions and responses to Italy were by no means uniform. However, as Pesman points out,

³ R. Pesman, “Australians in Italy 1788-1988: the Long View”, in *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, eds. Bill Kent, Ros Pesman and Cynthia Troup (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University ePress, 2008) 2 and R. Pesman, “Australian Visitors to Italy in 19th Century”, in *Australia, the Australians and the Italian Migration*, ed. Gianfranco Cresciani (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1983) 129.

⁴ Pesman, “Australian Visitors to Italy in 19th Century”, 126.

⁵ Pesman, “The Past: Australian and Tuscany 1850-1950”a, 136.

[w]ithout homogenising experience or erasing diversity some general observations can be made for the period from around the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century. This is possible only because the vast majority of the travellers came from the same social class and background: a provincial, Protestant British-Australian bourgeoisie.⁶

Not surprisingly, the responses of Australian travellers have much in common with those of the British and the Americans: “[t]heir images of Italy derived from English literature and travel guides as did the widely, but not universally held assumption that Italians were a people inferior to the British race”.⁷ Australian travellers were very conscious that their country was lacking in high culture, did not have a millennial history and could not vaunt ancient monuments, but, like their American counterparts, with whom they shared the anxieties of provincial societies, the majority of Australians in Italy had little doubt as to the superiority of their own country in terms of material progress, the people’s health and happiness and their country’s wonderful prospects for the future. Therefore, they shared most of the common perceptions of Italy and of Italians that are found in British and American travel literature and fiction. Gaetano Prampolini lists them as follows:

complaints concerning the physical hardships of traveling in Italy, the difficulty of communicating due to the language barrier, diffidence concerning the sort of Italians with whom travelers [are] obliged to come into daily contact [...]. [...Also] the blooming of [the traveler’s] sensuality thanks to the country’s mild climate, [...] the haughty derision of Italian superstitions [...] the disconcerted discovery of the importance placed on ‘appearances’ in Italy.⁸

Most Australians also commented on the supposed lack of industriousness of Italians, their *dolce far niente*, the oppressive preponderance of the past over the present, and also the all-pervasive decay overpowering a long-gone grandeur. Australian travellers did not meet Italians in social situations and had little knowledge of the language, so contact with Italians

⁶ Pesman, “Australians in Italy 1788-1988: the Long View”, 3.

⁷ R. Pesman, “Some Australian Italies”, *Westerly* 39, 4 (1994a): 96. Referring specifically to the trip to Tuscany, Pesman stresses how “Australians went to Tuscany fortified with British race pride, the British sense of superiority to all other peoples”. Pesman, “The Past: Australian and Tuscany 1850-1950”a, 136.

⁸ G. Prampolini, “Metafiction in the Italianate Novel”, *South Carolina Review* 40, i (Fall 2007): 200.

was usually minimal, confined to waiters, hoteliers, guides and beggars; nonetheless, they judged Italian people quite patronisingly. More specifically, after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and up to the 1960s, for the majority of Australians travelling to Europe Naples was first port of call or disembarkation point: “[a]s the point of entry and exit, Naples was for Australians the boundary of Europe just as London was the centre. It was also a kind of synecdoche for Italy, for Southern Europe, for Mediterranean society”.⁹ Therefore for the Australian tourists travelling by ship, it was Naples that usually represented Italy and confirmed all their preconceptions:

[a]ll the common images and stereotypes which Australians associate with Italy—noise, colour, dirt, passion, excitability, sensuality, indolence, devotion to pleasure—could be confirmed in the south. Thus Italy becomes Naples; and the *Italianità* of the rest of Italy was judged by its degree of conformity to the Neapolitan norm. In Naples the travellers from the land of sun and warmth of the south met southern Europe and the Mediterranean. And it is possible that part of the explanation for their hostility and rejection might be that when the Australians confronted the Other in Naples, they confronted their hidden fears of the impact of a seductive southern sun and warmth on the moral fibre of their people—of indolence, sloth, sensuality, pleasure-seeking.¹⁰

Sensuality, pleasure, but also dirt and indolence were associated with this warm South, and contemporary Naples and its people were judged—and usually condemned—by most Australian travellers on the standards of the British colonial bourgeoisie: sobriety, order, cleanliness, comfort, industriousness and material progress. In their perceptions filth and dirt were associated with immorality and decadence; the people were often described as dishonest, impulsive and lazy. Disgusted by filth and squalor, the bourgeois travellers do not appear to have grasped the main cause of such flaws: poverty. When the traveller had the South under their eyes “[p]erhaps the most common distancing technique employed to deal

⁹ R. Pesman, “Majestic Nature—Squalid Humanity: Naples and the Australian Tourist 1870-1930”, *Australian Cultural History* 10 (1991a): 46. Pesman continues: “[f]or some travellers intent only on Britain, a day in Naples was their only experience of Italy, the only basis for the views which they expressed. For others, it was the most important segment of the Continental tour, the place where more time was spent, and the place which absorbed more space in the accounts of their travels”.

¹⁰ Ivi, 54-55.

with the teeming humanity [...] was to present daily life as another sight, as spectacle".¹¹

On the other hand, it is worthwhile noticing that some Australian travellers already showed a genuine interest in Italian history, and people as well, a strong hostility towards British imperialism and an awareness of their own "colonial condition" in the form of a certain humility, often subsumed by the term "cultural cringe".¹²

During these first two phases of Australian travel, Italy underwent epochal changes, from the plethora of regional and subregional states up to the mid nineteenth century through the Risorgimento and unification under the Savoy monarchy to the Fascist *regime* and the post-World War II Republic. However, Australian travellers to Italy rarely seem to have been interested in the political situation, although there were some exceptions, mainly among artists, writers and scholars.¹³ Among those Australians

¹¹ Ivi, 51.

¹² Among them Pesman points out Randolph Bedford (1868-1941), who showed a strong hostility towards British imperialism. Interested in Italian mines Bedford travelled to Tuscan Maremma, into remote regions of the Appenines, to Sardinia and to Lecce. His newspaper articles described an Italy of misery and despair. R. Pesman, "Rome in the Australian Imagination", *Bollettino del Centro interuniversitario di ricerche sul 'Viaggio in Italia'* 23 (1991b): 62. Among Australian travellers in the nineteenth century who showed a genuine interest in Italian history and people, and learnt the language in order to get closer to them, Pesman also mentions James Smith, a journalist who had migrated to Victoria from England in 1854; he spoke good Italian and wrote articles on Italian literature for Australian journals. Smith was also an enthusiastic follower of the events of the Risorgimento, and wrote a five-act play celebrating Garibaldi's life and work. Another Australian conversant in Italian was Sir Samuel Griffith, a former premier of Queensland and future first Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia; he made his first trip to Italy in 1867 while on a scholarship from Sydney University, and translated Dante's *Divine Comedy* into English. However, it was not until the late 1930s that an awareness of the country's poverty and specifically, that of Naples, began to emerge in Australian writing on Italy in the works of writers and artists who lived in the Italian South in the twentieth century. Pesman refers to writers Christina Stead (1902-1983) and Morris West (1916-1999), and painter Alan Mc Culloch (1907-1992). Pesman, "Majestic Nature—Squalid Humanity: Naples and the Australian Tourist 1870-1930"^a, 52-53.

¹³ Pesman, "Australians in Italy 1788-1988: the Long View", 5. The painter Adelaide Ironside (1831-1867), probably the first Australian to live in Italy, was in Rome from 1856 until her death in 1867. Ironside wrote enthusiastic letters about Garibaldi's deeds, and also expressed her sympathies for the Republicans through her paintings. Many of Ironside's letters, which are conserved at the Mitchell

who visited Italy in the 1920s and 1930s enthusiasm for Mussolini was frequent. Owing to the widespread opinion that Italians were lazy, frivolous and dishonest, Mussolini and Fascism were credited with having cleaned up buildings and streets, and also the people; under the new *regime* the Italians were now seen as an orderly people, with moral fibre and national dignity. Not all the Australians who visited Italy were impressed by Mussolini and Fascism, but the dissenters were a small minority; again, those exceptions were scholars and writers.¹⁴ The Italian belligerency against the Allies put a stop to travel to Italy during the war.¹⁵ Diplomatic relations, broken in 1940, resumed in 1947, with the Paris Peace Treaties; in July 1949 Australia opened a legation in Rome. The Australia-Italy Migration Agreement was signed in 1951; for the next twenty years “Italian migrants in a steady stream made the journey to set up a new life on the other side of the world”.¹⁶ After the Second World

Library in Sydney, have been published in Jill Poulton, *Adelaide Ironside, The Pilgrim of Art* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1987). Other Australians who had been inspired by the Risorgimento struggles travelled to Italy after 1861 to see the new Italy reborn. Andrew Inglis Clark, one of the architects of the Australian Constitution, and a great admirer of Mazzini, visited Italy in 1890 and recounted the events of his journey in a long poem, *My Pilgrimage* (Pesman, “Some Australian Italies”a, 95-100). According to Pesman women artists were among the first Australian residents in Italy.

¹⁴ Among them the historian Keith Hancock (1898-1984), who may have been the first Australian to write a scholarly work on the Risorgimento. Pesman, “Australians in Italy 1788-1988: the Long View”, 7.

¹⁵ Alan Moorehead (1910-1983) was born in Melbourne and travelled to England in 1937. He became a foreign correspondent for the *London Daily Express*, where he gained an international reputation for his coverage of World War II campaigns, and he also served as the chief public relations officer in the Ministry of Defence. After 1945, he turned to writing books, becoming one of the most famous Australian writers of his time; his works include: *Gallipoli* (1956), *The Russian Revolution* (1958), *The White Nile* (1960), *The Blue Nile* (1962), and his autobiography, *A Late Education: Episodes in a Life* (1970). Moorehead was in Italy in 1948; he moved into Villa Diana, a 15th-century villa above Florence which had survived the Second World War despite being occupied by the troops of seven different armies. From there he wrote *The Villa Diana* (1951) which contrasts the dramas of daily life in post-war Italy and the enchanting beauty of the land. Moorehead’s book has been recently reprinted as *The Villa Diana: Travels in post-war Italy* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Rory Steele, “Twentieth-century Diplomatic and Trade Relations” in *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, 3. Immigration reached its peak

War diplomatic and trade relations between Australia and Italy became in fact significant; “migration was the main driving force in the establishment and development of closer political and diplomatic ties”.¹⁷ Australia’s first ambassador to Italy, Paul McGuire, was appointed in 1957; this was the beginning of ever closer and friendlier relations between the two countries.

At the beginning of the 1950s a new stage began in Australian travel to Italy: “Australia entered a period of unprecedented prosperity at the end of the Second World War, and cheap berths on the returning migrant ships opened the possibility of travel abroad to a wider group of Australians”.¹⁸ This third phase of Australian travel is characterized by a consistent increase in the number of travellers; among them was quite a large number of writers, painters and intellectuals, who rejected and fled, at least for a while, an overwhelmingly Anglophile and conservative Australia.¹⁹ From the 1950s on, a growing number of Australian writers and artists chose to live in Italy in search of a place where they could express themselves more freely: “[t]he two conditions were the weakening of the Anglocentric world view and the growth of an Australian intelligentsia”.²⁰ To artists and writers, travel to Italy meant a reclaiming of a European heritage which did not necessarily coincide with Great Britain. Most of them returned home, some remained abroad for years, some others never went back. Martin Boyd (1893-1972), A. D. Hope (1907-2000), Morris West (1916-1999), Shirley Hazzard (b.1931) and David Malouf (b.1934) travelled to

during the 1960s. Steele continues: “[d]uring the early 1970s migration from Italy effectively ceased as that country’s economy boomed”.

¹⁷ Ivi, 1.

¹⁸ Pesman, “Australians in Italy 1788-1988: the Long View”, 9.

¹⁹ Pesman, “Majestic Nature—Squalid Humanity: Naples and the Australian Tourist 1870-1930”a, 55.

²⁰ Pesman, “Rome in the Australian Imagination”b, 63. However, numerous artists had already lived in Italy: beside the above mentioned Ironside, the sculptor Margaret Thomas (1843-1929), who spent years in Rome. Another sculptor, the twenty-year-old Theodora Cowan (1868-1949) arrived in Florence in 1889, to study at the Accademia di Belle Arti. The first Australian writer to live in Italy and to leave significant records of her Italian experience appears to have been Louise Mack (1870-1935). In Florence between 1904 and 1910, Mack was for a time the editor of the local English language weekly, the *Italian Gazette*, and wrote novels which usually included Italy as part of their settings (Pesman, “Some Australian Italies”a, 95-97). Writer Ethel Turner (1872-1958) travelled to Europe for the first time in 1911 and writer Doris Dinham Gentile (1894-1972) lived in Italy in the 1930s and 1940s. Pesman, “Majestic Nature—Squalid Humanity: Naples and the Australian Tourist 1870-1930”a, 46.

or resided in Italy in the 1950s. Peter Porter (b.1929), who moved to London in 1951, also travelled to Italy in the 1960s and continued to visit frequently.²¹ In 1958 Patrick White was staying in Italy as well.

Boyd settled in Rome in 1957 and spent a large part of his mature life there; much of his most successful fiction was written while he was in Italy. Boyd's Italianate novels "project traditional British images of Italy as well as images that correspond to the new awareness of Australia's European cultural roots in the nineteen-fifties, as expressed in Hope's 'A Letter from Rome'"²² from which it is worthwhile to quote in this context:

The source is Italy, and hers is Rome
The *fons* and *origo* of Western man;
[...] Here the great venture of the heart began.
Here simply with a sense of coming home
I have returned with no explicit plan
[...] to find/Something once dear, long lost and left behind.²³

The powerful recognition of Italy as the source of Western European—and therefore also Australian—culture in this phase of the travel, generates a longing for return, reinforced by the distance of Australia from this ancient civilized world. West left Australia in 1955 to further his career as a writer; he lived in Austria, Italy, England and in the United States; in 1959 he worked for six months for *The Daily Mail* as the correspondent from the Vatican. His best-known works set in Italy are *Children of the Sun*, *The Slum Dwellers of Naples* (1957); *The Devil's Advocate* (1959) and *The Fisherman's Shoes* (1963). Hazzard spent the 1950s working in New York, travelled to Italy in 1956 and worked for a year in Naples; since then she has continued to spend her time between Manhattan and Italy. Malouf, one of Australia's leading contemporary writers, moved to England in 1959, disembarking in Naples, and returned to Australia in 1968. In 1978 he moved to Italy and settled in Tuscany, in Campagnatico, where he bought a house. He lived there for some years and divided his

²¹ In "The Cats of Campagnatico" from *Fast Forward*, Porter casts Italy as paradise, the "rational landscape" everyone seeks. P. Porter, *Fast Forward* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²² Rudolf Bader, *The Visitable Past. Images of Europe in Anglo-Australian Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1992) 277.

²³ A. D. Hope, "A Letter from Rome" in *Collected Poems: 1920-1965* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1966 [1958]) 129-48. The poem continues: "[...] The thing I came to find was lost in me,/ [...] The graves may open and their dead appear,/But mine is the voice I hear".

time between Italy and Australia, going back to Sydney in 1985. Malouf describes his house in “A Village in Tuscany” included in his collection of four autobiographical essays, *12 Edmonstone Street*, uses Italian settings in his poems, in the novella *Child’s Play* (1982), and also in the short story “Around Midnight” collected in his latest book *Every Move You Make* (2007). In an essay entitled “The South” Malouf writes:

[o]n a soft, sunlit morning in March 1959, just a few days before my twenty-fifth birthday, I stood at the rails of an Italian liner, the *Fairsky*, and after a five-week sea voyage that had taken me via Singapore, Colombo, Bombay, Aden and Port Said, saw the Bay of Naples open before me, and utterly familiar in the distance the dark slopes and scooped-out cone of Vesuvius—all just as I had always imagined it, like the breaking of a dream.²⁴

Poet Judith Rodriguez remembers:

I made one of a group seeing David Malouf off to Europe on board of the *Fairsky*. We in our early twenties were fish in a shoal all darting the same way and caught in the same light. Aghast, it seems—and has it changed? —at being on an island we might never escape... In hindsight, I’d like to think it was an imaginative move different from the British exile’s return, and beyond the cringing colonial pilgrimage.²⁵

And Shirley Hazzard:

[t]hose of us who first came to Italy in the 1950s were more than lucky: we were blessed. The timing was itself a stroke of destiny, in the aftermath of the receding war, and in the moment of hope. We were surprised by pleasure, which had never been quite acceptable in our own countries; and which came, in Italy, with simplicity and inexpressible charm. One was young, and needed little in the ways of material trappings. The day was an adventure of discoveries, mortal and immortal, inward or external, and occasionally somber. There was loneliness, loveliness, grace, grief, a prevalent civility, and, when misfortune struck, a prompt humanity. The impressions that poured over us in those years and our own readiness to be pleased can never be mocked or repudiated. One was learning to look, to respond, to value the moment and the gesture; coming to know—and, once in a while, to forget about—oneself. One was the object of a lively, and

²⁴ David Malouf, “The South” in *Heat*, New Series, 1 (2001) 119.

²⁵ Judith Rodriguez, “Away in the Sixties” in *David Malouf: A Celebration*, ed. Ivor Indyk (Camberra: Friends of the National Library of Australia, 2001) 9.

ancient, curiosity. And the word 'Beauty', ever on one's lips, never staled. It was not an affluent era. All Italy had been a battlefield. In cities, there was frayed grandeur, shabbiness, need, [...].²⁶

Hazzard reflects: "[t]hose of us who, when young, chose 'to live' in the Italy of the post-war decades felt we were doing just that: living more completely among the scenes and sentiments of a humanism the New World could not provide".²⁷

At the same time, in the 1950s, images of post-war Italy were circulating in Australia thanks to the *neorealismo* films of Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini first, and those of Michelangelo Antonioni, Luchino Visconti and above all Federico Fellini, later. As Pesman points out,

[t]hese were films to which my generation flocked. [...] For the young like myself travelling to Italy was underpinned by vague longings to escape home, and what we saw as the monoculturalism, Anglophilia and philistinism of Mr Menzies' Australia. We were in pursuit of difference.²⁸

A great number of scholars, artists and writers went to Italy in the 1960s and in the 1970s.²⁹ Australian academics became a significant presence in Italy as a result of generous scholarship schemes and the expansion of Australian universities. In the early 1970s there was in fact a sense of new vigour in Australian culture, also due to the disappearance of literary censorship in 1970 and the foundation of the Literature Board of the Australia Council in 1973, whose main purpose was to support artists and writers in developing their work. For the young Australian writers in

²⁶ Shirley Hazzard, *The Ancient Shore. Dispatches from Naples* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008) 126-27.

²⁷ Hazzard, *The Ancient Shore. Dispatches from Naples*, 2.

²⁸ Pesman, "Australians in Italy 1788-1988: the Long View", 10.

²⁹ Raymond Maxwell Crawford, Professor of History at the University of Melbourne from 1937 to 1970, travelled extensively to Italy for his investigations. Archaeologist Dale Trendall held a scholarship in the 1930s in Rome where he spent four years, and kept on visiting the South of Italy regularly for his research ever since. So did Renaissance Historian Bill Kent, who undertook research in Florence in the late 1960s and in 2000 was appointed founding director of the Monash University Centre in Prato. Bruce Bennett, Professor of English at the University of New South Wales in Canberra, "fell in love with Italy and the Italians in the 1980s and has never fallen out of love" (Bruce Bennett, "More than a Love Affair: Australian writers and Italy" in *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, 1).

the Seventies this meant easier working conditions, more outlets for their publications, means for overseas travel and an increased critical interest in their work on an international level. Some of them sought out forms to challenge the work of earlier generations and many also resisted any colonial dominance of Britain or America. Some of these writers decided to go to Europe, and to Italy, to develop their art. In December 1972 Gough Whitlam was elected Prime Minister of Australia, reinstating Labor Party rule after twenty-three years of Liberal party dominance. This political change created a new confidence and a new hope among Australian artists and writers; they believed that arts and culture in Australia would at last have genuine government support under Whitlam. Writer Robert Dessaix says: “Whitlam seemed ‘cultured’ and sympathetic. In retrospect I’m not sure that he made much difference, it was more a sense of optimism that we all had that at last Australia had a Prime Minister who was interested in more than sports and politics”.³⁰ Whitlam himself has felt a life-long fascination with the history of Italy; he went there first in 1962 and has continued to visit regularly.³¹ Desmond O’Grady (b. 1929), literary editor of *The Bulletin* in Australia, moved to Rome in 1962, where he still lives. He reported the Red Brigades’ kidnapping and killing of Aldo Moro, the Christian Democrat Party President and former Prime Minister, on an almost daily basis for 55 days. As correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and other papers he has aimed to establish his role as an independent witness of events in Italy.³² Art critic Robert Hughes left Australia for Europe in 1964, and lived for a time in Porto Ercole, Tuscany, travelling extensively to study the painting and architecture of Europe; he settled in London and then moved to New York, where he still lives. In an interview in 1999 Hughes said:

[e]xpatriation made me [...] it enabled me to stock up on the experiences and memories of experiences on which I got stuff that I’ve been drawing on ever since. [...] There’s nothing odd about the artists’ desire or the writers’ desire to expatriate themselves. [...] The hostility towards the expats that emanates from some quarters of Australia is a function of insecurity, I mean, they think not that you are going abroad in order to find something, but that you are going abroad to shake something off, that you are embarrassed by your Australian origins. [...] [When I left] there was good art around actually in Australia, but the thing is that the stuff that you

³⁰ Robert Dessaix, correspondence with Roberta Trapè, November 2009.

³¹ *My Italian Notebook* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002) covering art, architecture and politics, is the record of his profound interest in this country.

³² Bennett, “More than a Love Affair: Australian writers and Italy”, 7.

wanted to see, the stuff that you would have to see in order to describe yourself as truly visually literate, generally was not in Australia. [...] Whereas in any library there are all the books that you would wish to read which will enable to hook into the great tradition of European and English writing, the same is not true of paintings and sculptures, which do not travel in that way, so you've got to go to them.³³

At the end of 1964 Jeffrey Smart (b.1921), widely acclaimed as one of Australia's greatest painters, moved to Italy, and in 1971 bought the house where he still resides, in Posticcia Nuova, near Arezzo. In 1972 Germaine Greer (b.1938) acquired a property in a valley in Tuscany; her mother was of part-Italian extraction and Greer spent three months in a Calabrian village in 1967. Tom Shapcott (b.1935), poet, novelist, playwright, librettist and editor, visited Italy for the first time in 1975, staying in Florence. Judith Rodriguez (b.1936) travelled to Italy in the early 1960s as a student, and went back in 1977. The author of *Second Sight* (1986), Janine Burke (b.1952) travelled to Venice and Florence in 1976, went back to Florence and Rome in 1978, and again to Tuscany at the end of 1983, where she returned in 1988 and in 1989. In the 1980s Australian university students and graduates in the humanities and social sciences started to travel to Italy as well.

In 1982 Judith Blackall, who lived and worked in Italy for fifteen years, set up the Australia Council's Arthur Boyd Studio, Il Paretaio, in Boyd's villa near Palaia in the province of Pisa, and coordinated the visiting artists' program there until 1990.³⁴ In 1989 a conference, organized by Gaetano Prampolini and Marie-Christine Hubert in Florence, "An Antipodean Connection: Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany", emphasised the literary connections between Australia and Italy, specifically Tuscany. It certainly was, as Pesman suggests, a

³³ Phillip Adams, Interview with Robert Hughes, *Late Night Live*, first broadcast on ABC Radio National, Classic LNL, 27 October 1999.
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/latenightlive/stories/2008/2244985.htm>.
 (accessed 30 May 2008).

³⁴ Bill Kent, "Gaining a Foothold: Australian Cultural Institutions in Italy" in *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, 2. The major initiative was the Arthur Boyd Foundation. In the middle of 1994 it became the Australian Foundation for Studies in Italy (AFSI). Also because of the difficulties in getting financial support, AFSI became, and remained, a modest grant-giving body until its demise late in 2007. In 1999 the Australia Council Rome Studio Residency awards were established; they allowed a number of Australian artists and writers to work at the British School in Rome.

pioneering treatment of the theme of Australians in Italy,³⁵ but it also highlighted, I believe, a peak in the cultural relations between these two countries. The 1980s saw other writers significantly affected by their journeys in Italy: Leon Trainor (b.1945), the author of the novel *Livio* (1988), travelled from Western Australia to Abruzzo and Naples in 1975, and visited again in the 1980s and in 1992; Kate Grenville (b.1950) resided in a Tuscan farmhouse where she set her novel *Dreamhouse* (1986), the antithesis of the idyllically idealized experience of Italy; David Foster (1944) was inspired by his first visit to Venice, in 1986, when writing the comic novel *Testostero* (1987). Poet Diane Fahey (b.1945) travelled to Italy in 1987 and 1989, moving from Venice through Florence to Rome.³⁶

Peter Robb (b.1946) travelled to Italy in 1974; he returned in 1978 and lived there for almost fifteen years. The answer Robb gave an interviewer after the publication of *M* (1998), his biography of Caravaggio, to the question of what drew him to Italy in the late 1970s, holds for many other Australians travelling in the third quarter of the twentieth century:

[w]hat drew me to Italy, specifically southern Italy, and the Mediterranean countries and cultures in general, was a sense I'd had since I was very young that these countries and people were richest in the qualities my Anglophone culture was poorest in. The visual, the plastic, the musical, the physical, the erotic, the culinary, a sense of continuity with the past. All these things, and people's resources of emotional intensity, seemed to me marvellous compared with Anglo calculation and control.³⁷

Those same aspects associated with the South which had been perceived as negative during the second phase of travel to Italy, namely the sensuality and pleasure connected to the physical and the emotional, are now prized as an "alternative" way of living.

The stream of Australian travellers to Italy did not for sure abate in the 1990s, also thanks to the revolution in transport which has certainly made distance less of a problem. In the twenty-first century Australians continue

³⁵ R. Pesman, "Introduction" in *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, x.

³⁶ I am gratefully indebted to Gaetano Prampolini for the as yet unpublished interviews he had in Australia in 1992 with Shapcott, Rodriguez, Trainor, Foster, Fahey, from which I drew information on their respective journeys to Italy.

³⁷ Duffy and Snellgrove, "Speaking with Peter Robb about *M*". Interview with Peter Robb, 1998. http://www.duffyandsnellgrove.com.au/extracts/m_interview.htm. (accessed 10 January 2008).

to travel to Europe in great numbers with Italy as their favourite destination, second only to the United Kingdom. In 2007 the Australian Embassy in Rome observed that the number of Australians present in Italy on either a short-term or permanent basis is slowly increasing.³⁸ Today, more Australians than ever are travelling to Italy and more of them linger for longer periods; but they mainly come to carry out business in the global market, to learn about food and wine as integral parts of the currently prevailing idea of a country's culture, to participate in cookery classes, to experience some form of rural life in Tuscan or Umbrian villages. Young Australians in Italy are said to be growing as a group; this category includes people between twenty and thirty years of age, who are in Italy to study or to work.³⁹ The available sources reveal that

more recently there appears to have been a growing 'variety' of Australians living and working in Italy. As a group they are increasingly becoming demographically diverse in terms of age, background, the range

³⁸ The Australian Embassy estimates that in 2007 there were approximately 30,000 Australian citizens resident in Italy. More than 100,000 Australians would have travelled to Italy by the end of 2007 (from material available on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] website—country brief for Italy: <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/italy>). In her article "Some Facts and Figures" in *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, 1, Cathy Crupy observes that "[o]f these 18,000 are dual-national. Most Australians (almost two-thirds) are based in Rome, while many are also resident in Milan (almost 10,000)". In the last decade, an average of 357 Australians have departed permanently each year for Italy. While most permanent departures that took place in the 1960s and 1970s were of Australian citizens of Italian origin, or of returning migrants, an increasing number of permanent departures today are of Australian-born citizens. (Cathy Crupy, "Some Facts and Figures" in *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, 2 and Steele, "Twentieth-century Diplomatic and Trade Relations" in *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, 6). Research for these articles was carried out in the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and in the (DFAT). On the other hand, the number of Australian diplomats "on the ground" in Italy has been diminishing over the last three decades; the Australian Embassy in Rome is now half the size that it was thirty years ago. Some of the reasons for this might be Australia's increasing economic and cultural interest for and involvement in Asia in the last decade.

³⁹ Crupy, "Some Facts and Figures", 5.

of professions in which they work, and the reasons for which they find themselves in Italy.⁴⁰

This “variety” is what mainly distinguishes the present state of Australians’ travel to Italy, which today not only means art and antiquity, but fashion, style, design, the art of “posh” living. The Italian lifestyle spreading in Australia, “[t]he ubiquity of pizzas and pasta in Australia today, of the so-called ‘cappuccino culture’”⁴¹ often attributed to Italian migration, has of course had a great impact on the perception of Italy by Australians themselves, and on their desire to visit the country.

But that is only part of the story and the role of the migrants was not that of trendsetters but of caterers to demand. Much of this culture has come to us as a global trend, through multinational marketing. However, I would also argue that important in the demand for this new ‘Italian’ lifestyle were those Australians who left to find other ways of living, and on their return pushed and then provided the market for the changes that came from the late 1970s.⁴²

In some cases the “imported Italian” lifestyle powerfully contrasted with the images and often with the stereotypes Australians had of the Italian migrants.

With regard to the specific aim of my study, the Australian writers’ and artists’ approach and responses to Italy from the early 1990s to the present, there is a significant element to take into account when looking at the present picture of Australians in Italy. Although Australian writers and artists kept on visiting the country in the 1990s, and continue to do so in the twenty-first century, I have noticed that even if they are still numerous, they no longer represent the major component of the flow of visitors from Australia. They usually stay for a while, and go back to their own country.

⁴⁰ Ivi, 6. It is worth mentioning Crupy’s analysis again when she underlines that “[a]ccording to the Australian Embassy in Rome, there are two main problems associated with the collection of accurate statistics. First, Australians are not obliged to register with the Embassy; second, not all Australians register with the *questura*. [...] Gathering demographic information concerning Australians living in Italy is also difficult because there is no comprehensive listing available. [...] Furthermore, unlike some other nationalities, Australians who find themselves in Italy tend not to congregate or form communities or associations, thereby excluding another possible source of important demographic information” (Ivi, 6-7).

⁴¹ Pesman, “Australians in Italy 1788-1988: the Long View”, 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*

However, their Italianate writings certainly continue to testify their interest for and attraction to Italy. In fact contemporary Australian literature clearly suggests that travel to Italy remains a phenomenon of great significance. From the beginning of the 1990s onwards there has been a sizeable output of books set in or having to do with Italy, which add to a considerable corpus of texts by Australian writers based on their travel experiences in this country: novels by scholar Paul Carter (*Baroque Memories*, 1994) and writer and translator Robert Dessaix (*Night Letters*, 1996); David Malouf's short story "Around Midnight" (in *Every Move you Make*, 2007), but also Jeffrey Smart's autobiography (*Not Quite Straight*, 1996); Peter Robb's *Midnight in Sicily* (1996), *M* (1998) and *Street Fight in Naples* (2010); Desmond O'Grady's *The Victory of the Cross: a History of the Early Church in Rome* (1991) and *Rome Reshaped: Jubilees 1300-2000* (1999); Shirley Hazzard's *Greene on Capri, A Memoir* (2000) and *The Ancient Shore: Dispatches from Naples* (2008); Gough Whitlam's *My Italian Notebook* (2002); historian Richard Bosworth's essays *Mussolini* (2002) and *Mussolini's Italy* (2005); art critic Robert Hughes's *The Seven Ages of Rome: a Cultural History* (2009).

In the same period there has been a spate of best sellers mainly by Australian journalists who have spent time in Italy. Basically meant to serve as guidebooks for tourists, these works focus on the pleasures of living in Italy, whether they are describing Italian life in a village in Tuscany or Umbria or in one of the main Italian cities; their favourite topics are food and wine, and Italians' reputation as great lovers.⁴³ I have

⁴³ I refer to such works as David Dale's *The 100 Things Everyone Needs to Know about Italy* (1998) and *A Delicious Ligurian Memoir* (2007); Geoffrey Luck's *Villa Fortuna: An Italian Interlude* (2000); Virginia Ryan's *Where the Cypress Rises: An Australian Artist in Umbria* (2000); George Negus's *The World from Italy. Football, Food and Politics* (2001); Ann Rickard's *Not Another Book About Italy* (2004) and *The Last Book About Italy* (2005); Carla Coulson's *Italian Joy* (2005); Sue Howard's *Leaning Towards Pisa* (2005); Brian Johnston's *Sicilian Summer. A Story of Honour, Religion and the Perfect Cassata* (2005); Judith Armstrong's *The Maestro's Table* (2006); Sara Benjamin's *A Castle in Tuscany* (2006); Sally Hammond's *Just a Little Italian. Exploring the South of Italy* (2006); Penelope Green's *When in Rome: Chasing La Dolce Vita* (2006), *See Naples and Die* (2007) and *Girl by Sea: Life, Love and Food on an Italian Island* (2009); Peter Moore's *Vroom with a View. In Search of Italy's Dolce Vita on a '61 Vespa* (2003) and *Vroom by the Sea. The Sunny Parts of Italy on a Bright Orange Vespa* (2007); Chris Harrison's *Head over Heel* (2008); Simon Capp's *Italy, It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time* (2008); Dianne Hales' *La Bella Lingua: my Love Affair*

decided to exclude these works from my study essentially because they correspond to a sort of global genre, a new kind of travel book that is fast proliferating and to which Australia is contributing in a surprisingly large measure.⁴⁴ This new kind of travel book has mainly originated from the great emphasis on lifestyle in global consumer culture and does not represent a peculiarity in Australian literature, although it powerfully proves the great curiosity felt by Australians for Italy and the fascination that this country still exerts on them.

All these works “do reveal a perennial attraction to Italy and Italians. The literary evidence suggests that the idea and actuality of Italy have long haunted Australian writers, and will continue to do so”.⁴⁵ There is still the need to explore further the experience of Australian writers and artists in Italy; to ask why they keep on coming, what it is that continues to attract them to this country, how the experience shapes or enriches their lives; to ask whether it is possible to detect new trends in their attitude towards Italy and whether in the last twenty years they have continued or broken with the tradition of the Australian writers and artists who travelled to Italy before them. For my investigation, I have selected the texts that I consider the most interesting examples of the Australians’ continuing fascination with Italy: Jeffrey Smart’s *Not Quite Straight. A Memoir* (1996); Shirley Hazzard’s *Greene on Capri. A Memoir* (2000) and *The Ancient Shore: Dispatches from Naples* (2008); Robert Dessaix’s *Night Letters* (1996) and Peter Robb’s *Midnight in Sicily* (1996).

My method has been essentially drawn from Nathalia Wright’s *American Novelists in Italy. The Discoverers: Allston to James* (1965). In her study of nineteenth-century American novelists in Italy, Wright uses the same four-part approach with each writer: first she gives an outline of the Italian itinerary taken; next she summarizes the writer’s comments on their Italian experiences in such private and mainly unpublished accounts as letters, diaries and travel books; then she briefly surveys the use of Italian material in all their published works and finally analyses the

with Italy and the Most Enchanting Language in the World (2010) and Victoria Cosford’s *Amore and Amaretti: a Tale of Love and Food in Tuscany* (2010).

⁴⁴ Suffice to mention, as regards the United States, the extremely popular *Under the Tuscan Sun* (1996) by Frances Mayes and the most recent *Eat, Pray and Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert (2006). There have been numerous publications of this kind in other English speaking countries as well. From this phenomenon originates as a consequence a huge amount of popular fiction and non-fiction published in Australia mainly intended as travel guides for Australian visitors to Italy.

⁴⁵ Bennett, “More than a Love Affair: Australian writers and Italy”, 10.

treatment of Italy in the writer's fiction.⁴⁶

The present study will accordingly begin with an outline of the four writers' journeys and life in Italy and with their comments on their Italian experiences. It will then move on to the treatment of Italy by each of them. I will analyse which views of Italy the writers present in their works in order to define specifically their way of approaching and responding to this country. I will do this by mainly focussing on their descriptions of Italy and will avail myself of the theoretical discussions of description provided by Gérard Genette⁴⁷ and Philippe Hamon.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Nathalia Wright, *American Novelists in Italy. The Discoverers: Allston to James* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965) 7.

⁴⁷ Gérard Genette, *Figures II* (Paris : Seuil, 1969); G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁴⁸ Philippe Hamon, "Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive", in *Yale French Studies*, 61 (1981): 1-26; P. Hamon, "What is a description?" trans. R. Carter in *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 147-78.

PART I

JEFFREY SMART AND SHIRLEY HAZZARD

