

# Australians' Literatures and Cultures in Tuscany

Roberta Trapè

## Abstract:

Italy has been the destination of a lifetime for an endless stream of travellers and since the start of Australian travel to Italy, Tuscany has always had a special and persistent attraction for Australian writers and artists. The connection between Italy and Australia will be explored here highlighting two periods in which Tuscany, and particularly Florence and Prato, became active and lively hubs for the reflection and study of the relationship between Australia and Italy. I will refer to a conference organised by Gaetano Prampolini and Marie Christine Hubert in 1989 at the University of Florence, "An Antipodean Connection: Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany", and to the first decade of the 21st century when Annamaria Pagliaro was Director of the Monash Prato Centre (2005-2008).

**Keywords:** Australia and Italy, Australians in Tuscany, Australian Travel to Italy

## 1. Introduction

This paper draws heavily from a previous study of mine on Australian travel to Italy, a book that focussed on the experience of contemporary Australian intellectuals who travelled to Italy in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century<sup>1</sup>. It explored an aspect as of yet scarcely stud-

<sup>1</sup> A detailed analysis of the Australian Travel to Italy is found in Trapè 2011. 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. The book concentrates on 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. In the 19th 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 since the golden age of the Grand Tour in the 17th century. Three different phases may be distinguished of Australian travel to Italy. The criteria by which I distinguish the different phases are sociology of the traveller and typology of visit (destinations, interests). The first, from the first settlement from 1778 to the 1890s, when Britain was the longed-for goal of the trip and the continental tour was a popular addiction; a second phase, from the 1890s up to the 1950s, when the number of Australians going "overseas" increased due to the rapid demographic and economic expansion of Australia and the rise of a prosperous middle class. During these two phases the vast majority of the travellers came from the same social

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Roberta Trapè, *Australians' Literatures and Cultures in Tuscany*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-597-4.11, in Samuele Grassi, Brian Zuccala (edited by), *Rewriting and Rereading the XIX and XX-Century Canons: Offerings for Annamaria Pagliaro*, pp. 129-143, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-597-4, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-597-4

ied within the global phenomenon of travel to Italy. Looking into what it is that continues to attract Australian writers and artists to the country, I concentrated on writings of these twenty years in order to identify possible new trends in Australian intellectuals' attitudes towards Italy and in their way of approaching and responding to this country. My purpose was mainly achieved through the juxtaposition of works of four authors; my study highlighted the differences between Jeffrey Smart and Shirley Hazzard on the one side, and two writers of a younger generation, Robert Dessaix and Peter Robb, on the other. I analysed the four writers' views of Italy by focussing on the ways their narrators describe the country, and discovered an image of Italy starkly different from the one that had prevailed in previous writings. The image of Italy that emerges from the most recent works is, no doubt, a superb picture – not flattering but certainly not false – of its contemporary times. By building up this thought-provoking image of contemporary Italy, my study was intended to give a contribution to the history of the unexhausted (because inexhaustible?) fascination this country exerts on travellers from all over the world.

This paper does not aim to add a further development within the scholarly tradition of travel writing about Italy. It was conceived as a reflection on the special and persistent attraction for Australian writers and artists that Tuscany has always had since the beginning of Australian travel to Italy, and in particular on the role that Tuscany has had in the development of the studies on the Australia-Italian connections. Most importantly, what triggered the essay certainly was the desire to highlight the seminal contribution Annamaria Pagliaro made to the Monash Centre in Prato, and her pivotal role in the development of the studies of the relationship between Italy and Australia.

The connection between Tuscany and Australia will be explored here by highlighting two periods in which Tuscany, and particularly Florence and Prato, became active and lively hubs for the reflection and study of the relationship between Italy and Australia. I will refer to a conference organised by Gaetano Prampolini and Marie Christine Hubert in 1989 at the University of Florence, "An Antipodean Connection: Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany", and to the first decade of the 21st century when Annamaria Pagliaro was the Director of the Monash Prato Centre (2005-2008), and contributed to the organization of an international workshop "Australians in Italy".

class and background: a provincial, Protestant British-Australian bourgeoisie. "Their 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" (Pesman, in Kent, Pesman, Troup eds 2008, 3). 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" (ivi, 9). The 1950s saw a considerable 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.

## 2. Annamaria Pagliaro at Monash University Prato Centre

The Emeritus Professor Bill Kent, a world authority on the Italian Renaissance, was the Founding Director of Monash University Prato Centre (2000-2004) which was officially opened on 17 September in 2001 at Palazzo Vaj, in the heart of Prato's historical centre. On 3 and 4 October 2005 an international workshop was held at Monash Prato Centre, "Australians in Italy". The project leaders were Ros Pesman, University of Sydney and Bill Kent, Monash University. Camilla Russell, Monash University, and Tony Pagliaro, LaTrobe University, completed the organising committee. The organisers highlighted the fact that while "Italians in Australia" has been, for very good reason, a much studied theme in Australian history, "Australians in Italy, on the other hand – the hold Italy has long had on the Australian creative, learned and popular imaginations – is a shining thread in our national story that deserves to be teased out and put under the microscope"<sup>2</sup>. This workshop undertook the study and analysis of the on-going Australian engagement with Italy fifteen years after the above mentioned conference organised by Gaetano Prampolini and Christine Huber in Florence. Once again Tuscany was the place where this phenomenon is explored. Speakers included Rory Steele, Chris Wood, Peter Porter, Peter Howard, Silvana Tuccio, Lorenzo Perrona, Judith Blackall, and Bruce Bennett. Other participants presented vignettes on their experiences as Australians in Italy<sup>3</sup>.

On 3 October the workshop was introduced by the new Director of the Monash University Centre in Prato after Bill Kent, Annamaria Pagliaro, who, together with the Australian Ambassador in Italy, Peter Woolcott, welcomed all the participants and opened the workshop. Dr. Annamaria Pagliaro, former Convenor of Italian Studies at Monash, was the Centre's Director from 2005 to 2008. A specialist in 19th and early 20th century Italian literature, she had had a long association with the Centre and was involved in its establishment, being a member of its first working party. After her direction, she continued her association with the Prato Centre as a member of its Advisory Group.

Roslyn Pesman, one of the main experts on this theme<sup>4</sup>, opened the conference with her paper "Australians in Italy 1788-1988: Themes and Perspectives", an introduction to the following presentations. Peter Porter and Judith Blackall, who had also attended the conference "An Antipodean Connection: Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany" held at the University of Florence in 1989, presented respectively their papers "A Great Tradition Revisited" and "Australian Artists and Italy". Bruce Bennett analysed the presence of "Australian Writers and Italy", and Bill Kent gave his personal view on Australians and the Italian Renaissance ("Australians and the Italian Renaissance – A Personal View"). In her paper "The Gente Nuova: Young Australian Scholars

<sup>2</sup> From the programme of the workshop.

<sup>3</sup> The information about the conference were taken from Monash University Prato Centre archive.

<sup>4</sup> Roslyn Pesman is Professor Emeritus at the University of Sydney. See Pesman in Prampolini, Hubert 1993, 135.

of the Renaissance in Italy, 1990-2000” Camilla Russell traced the scholarly interests, activities, and experiences of the “new breed” of Australian scholars of Renaissance Italy, who travelled to Italy and Tuscany in particular for research in the last decade of the 20th century. She explored the heritage of the Australian School of Renaissance historians, with a view to understanding their influence on the scholarship of the new generation: the similarities, the differences, and the shape of things to come. She also briefly outlined some of her personal experiences and memories of the *gente nuova*, as they, she included, negotiated their own way through the adventure, and allure of being a young scholar in Italy.

In the years in which Annamaria Pagliaro directed the Centre, it became a very active hub for the reflection and study of the phenomenon of Australians in Italy, a space to explore and study this connection, and to reflect on the special role Tuscany had in this relationship. This activity is documented in a valuable publication *Australians in Italy. Contemporary Lives and Impressions*, a collection of essays in which Bill Kent, Ros Pesman and Cynthia Troup map the past and present of the Australian “love affair with Italy” (2008, back cover), exploring its causes, motivations and transformations in depth. The authors spent time in Prato to develop their research and study.

Symbolically, Annamaria Pagliaro’s direction of the centre neared its end with the event held on 26 June 2008 “Melting moments”, moments of encounter between Australia and Italy, and Australia and Tuscany. An evening built on the idea of the power of the intercultural encounter between the two countries, where arts and literatures, sounds, images, words from Australia were brought into the local community in Prato and shared with its people. Words from David Malouf’s collections of stories set in Tuscany, “Towards Midnight” in *Every Move You Make*, from Robert Dessaix’s *Night Letters* and from Melina Marchetta’s *Terza generazione*, the occasion to reflect upon the most recent generations in the history of Italian migration to Australia. During this event a passage from the yet unpublished Italian translation of the novel *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright, from the Waanji people from the highlands of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, was read, an event which opened possible directions for future encounters and investigations. In the first months of 2012, the artist-in-residence at Monash Prato Centre was Maree Clarke, an independent, multi-disciplinary artist of the Mutti Mutti, Yorta Yorta and Boonerwung people of North West Victoria. She spent three months at the Monash University Prato Centre for its #VisualResidency programme. In Prato, she ran a series of workshops with the local community to produce a unique cloak, similar to those worn by her ancestors for ceremonial purposes, but featuring textiles woven in Prato instead of possum skins. She also gave public lectures on her artistic practice, intertwined with her cultural heritage.

I will conclude this section by recalling the vividness of my personal memories of the fervent and stimulating activity on the theme of the encounter between Australia and Italy at that time in Prato, having had the luck, thanks to Annamaria Pagliaro, of having been part of most of those events. With her initiative, passion and energy she greatly contributed to develop this “antipodean connection” and to make it stronger.

### 3. An Antipodean Connection: Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany

The stimulating workshop “Australians in Italy” held at Monash Prato Centre in 2005 was preceded by an international conference organised by Gaetano Prampolini and Marie-Christine Hubert in Florence in 1989, “An Antipodean Connection: Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany”. It emphasised the literary and artistic connections between Australia and Italy, specifically with Tuscany. As Pesman suggested (in Kent, Pesman, Troup 2008, x), it certainly was a pioneering treatment of the theme of Australians in Italy, but it also highlighted, I believe, a peak in the cultural relations between these two countries. This conference gathered some of the most valuable writers, artists and scholars from Australia whose work and life were influenced by Italian culture: Shirley Hazzard, David Malouf, Richard White, Peter Porter, Roslyn Pesman, Janine Burke, Judith Blackall, Peter Quartermaine, Laurie Hergenhan, Desmond O’Grady, William Grono.

Prampolini and Hubert felt that it was high time to draw attention to the role played by Florence and Tuscany, particularly in the 60s, 70s and 80s, “in that major phenomenon of Australian culture which is known as expatriation- a ‘going overseas’, temporary or permanent, which appears to have been one of the primary aspirations of, and at times, almost an obsession for, so many artists, writers and scholars” (Prampolini, Hubert 1993, 13). The aim of the conference was also to provide an inventory of Australians in Tuscany. But it was mainly to find out what it was that attracted Australian intellectuals, travellers and tourists to this region, to understand what this “antipodean connection” meant in their lives and work, to see whether there was such a thing as a distinctively Australian way of approaching and responding to Florence and Tuscany. The answers provided by the speakers at the conference were varied although an area of convergence emerges quite clearly. Australians chose Florence and Tuscany because of the essential contribution which this city and this region have made to the development of Western civilisation – in history, art and culture generally. Another very interesting recurring aspect is that they were struck by the similarities between the Tuscan landscapes and some of their Australian landscapes. Many felt a sense of belonging to Tuscany; they claimed that living in Tuscany had helped them both to know their country and themselves better, by making them familiar with a land which had been for centuries more densely populated than Australia.

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” (Hazzard, Steegmuller 2008, 2). In Tuscany, in Florence, Shirley Hazzard, in her paper “The Tuscan in Each of Us”, said at the conference:

[w]e celebrate an environment that is both a revelation and a repose to us, a consolation and a home. Like all love, this love of foreigners for Tuscany is easy to mock. [...]. We are told that it is not original, it is not realistic. It is true that there may be illusion in it, and a lack of what is currently defined as realism. [...].

Illusion is part of civilised power. Wherever there is civilisation, there is to some degree illusion. (Hazzard in Prampolini, Hubert 1993, 77)<sup>5</sup>

She continued:

We embrace this culture as our own, in the beautiful phrase of Burckhardt, ‘by a kind of hereditary right of admiration’ – not so much undergoing a transformation as acknowledging at last the Tuscan in each of us. That sense of rightfulness has its definable source in humanism. Outsiders have been drawn to Tuscany and to Florence as to the centre and capital of their own civilised values. (AC, 78)

I have seen Florence under many conditions, and I have known this city in dark as well golden days. I remember a beautiful June morning, just after daybreak, when, arriving overnight by train from Genoa, I crossed from the station to have my coffee at Caffè Italia, [...]. And I sat there lacking nothing, in a state of perfect happiness I’ve never forgotten, realising I was again in Tuscany. I remember too, years later, another arrival by train – this time on a December evening in 1966, when for a last freezing hour, the train laboured through the mud-laden track of the city’s outskirts, surrounded by detritus of the flood. In those drastic weeks Florence lay as if stranded along the Arno; one looked upstream through the skeleton of Ponte Vecchio; the familiar streets were befouled water-courses; [...]. I remember, in streets and shops, the tears and courage, and the Florentine durability – the Florentine toughness. (Ivi, 80-81)

And I remember the hippies in their hundreds, digging out mud and sewage, sleeping on damp floors, [...]. I recall the experts and museum curators, the art historians who converged on the city from Europe and America and raised funds abroad for restoration – funds that came from all around the globe; for the world was moved, and so was the Tuscan in each of us. [...]. This lovely place, in its endless richness and hospitality, [...] has touched the Antipodes, and Australians who have never visited Tuscany have known it by influence and in imagination. It has moved us to do our best. (*Ibidem*)

At the conference, in his paper “Listening to the Voice of Tuscany”, David Malouf started by saying:

I should begin by confessing a minor disloyalty. Like all Australians of my generation I first came to Europe by ship – a six weeks voyage along a route that had been laid down in my memory on long hot afternoons in primary school, so that actually travelling it at last from port to port was more like a re-enactment than a first experience. I had been over it so often in my

<sup>5</sup> Henceforth, the pagination of quotations taken from the conference papers *An Antipodean Connection. Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany*, preceded by the abbreviation of AC, will be given at the end of each quotation.

imagination that at my first sight of Singapore, Colombo, Bombay, Aden, Port Said, I was filled with nostalgia but at the same time overwhelmed with sights and smells and fears and small surprises that my imagination had not quite allowed for. (Ivi, 85)

He went on to explain the “quite explosive effect” on him of [his] first land-fall in Europe, in Naples: “it is still, in my imagination, the quintessential Italy to which in my imagination, and my affections, I remain loyal. My idea of Italy was based almost entirely on my reading. Italy was a classical place, a place of pagan joys and freedom” (ivi, 85-86).

When at the end of the year (this was 1959) I came to [...] Tuscany, I felt badly put off. Florence was altogether too serious, too austere. Its life seemed to me too sober and restrained, [...]. It wasn't exuberant and musical and outgoing as Naples was and as I thought Italy ought to be. I missed the noise and disorder, the colour too, and found Florentine art too intellectually rigorous, too geometrical and demanding”. However, Malouf affirms “my progress in getting to see and know Italy has largely been a move from the literary world to the real, [...] to a recognition of daily reality. It has been largely a matter of learning the language – not so much Italian itself as the language in which daily life can be apprehended from inside rather than out, and in my case, through a particular Italian voice, that of my old friend Agatina, who was seventy-six when I first got to know her, is now eighty-six, and has been for these ten years or so my real guide to things. Tuscany is where I have learned to see Italy as it is. (Ivi, 86-87)

Malouf bought a house in a small village in the Maremma, a wild area of Tuscany, a harsh and wild landscape: “There are times when it reminds me of Australia” he said at the conference, “you get the same sense of being in a place that has barely been touched” (ivi, 87) “by the hand of man, as history were still to happen; but then (and in this way is *not* like Australia at all) you turn a corner and are in a village as old as anything you could find, in a bit of landscape that has the mark of centuries on it” (ivi, 88). He continued:

One other aspect of culture has been particularly important to me in the discoveries I have made by living somewhere other than where I belong. It has to do with history. [...]. History is for most of us an impersonal thing, a series of important events and turning points in time from which most of us – most men and women at all times – are excluded [...]. History for an Australian is what happened at other times and elsewhere. [...]. Living in Campagnatico and listening to Agatina [...] I have become aware of *another sort of history, the history that never gets recorded [...] a history to which ordinary life is central and which is made up of all the ordinary lives of all those who have ever lived* – just the kind of history, in fact, that fiction pays reverence to by taking insignificant ordinary lives and giving them weight that pays reverence, for their own sake, to objects and happenings that are intended, in the ordinary course of things, to get lost. (Ivi, 89-90; my emphasis).

### In Tuscany he felt:

a sense of permanence: of having a life in the place they live in that goes back to time beyond memory and a history in which their own history can be subsumed. [...]. In belonging so securely to the past, and to the progress of time through them, they also have a grasp of the future. [...]. Perhaps you can only fully believe in the future, and feel passionately about it, if you know what it is like to be in time and to feel the full weight of the past. [...]. To grasp things in space is the conqueror's way. The settler's, the artist's, is to grasp things also in time, in the spirit as well in the act. Something of what that might mean I had to leave Australia to understand. I have learned it here in Tuscany. (Ivi, 90-91)

Jeffrey Smart did not take part in the conference but his presence in Tuscany in that period was all the same very perceivable, and images of his ground-breaking paintings are included in the publication of the conference papers. At the conference, in his paper "The Cypresses of Erewhyna: Jeffrey Smart in Italy" Peter Quartermaine defined him as "a great interpreter of the postwar Italian scene – especially of the urban environment" (ivi, 127). "There is little that is specifically Tuscan in Smart's paintings [...] yet Smart's documentation of Tuscany is impressive. Smart's Tuscany reflects an ongoing interrelation between mankind and a landscape transformed over the centuries" (ivi, 128). All the ordinary elements which catch Smart's attention in the Italian, often Tuscan, scene become iconic and symbolic in his paintings; he ingeniously shapes this scene into images of order, harmony and purity, a world of stillness freed from the disorder and randomness of the places from which his images and motifs have been extracted. The means of creating order will be mainly compositional, but a fundamental prerequisite is the artist's detached, impersonal perspective, in which it does not seem arbitrary to see Smart's debt to the Italian art of the *Quattrocento*. Smart's admiration for the high Renaissance art of Piero della Francesca is well-known. It explains the bright, dispassionate lighting whose primary function is to define and sculpt form. Most critics agree in saying that the strength of Smart's work lies in applying the technical and compositional techniques of Renaissance Italian painters to an Italy largely created by the *miracolo economico*, the economic boom that produced its phenomenal growth and change in the second half of the 20th century. In Italy Smart found that spiritual nourishment he took from Italian high Renaissance, which he seemed to see lingering, if dimly, in the geometry of urban life.

Peter Porter closed the conference in Florence with his paper "In a trance to Paradise" saying:

Somehow one has to disentangle the real Tuscany from the products of the travel book industry and the coffee-table compilations. But we all exoticise [...]. Settling in Tuscany may not be the best way to possess the mystery of the country. Too many expatriates live in what John Mortimer has christened Chiantishire. I admit to selfishness of motive. I came to Tuscany for what I can get out of it, an exploitation fortunately which does the environment no harm.

Chiefly I remind myself that the past is not dead, that the present is made up of siftings from the past, and that all manifestations of the spirit, from whatever era, are contemporary in the mind. (Ivi, 193-194)

At the conference the Australian writers and artists stressed, in different ways, the perception in Tuscany of a powerful sense of continuity between the past and the present.

#### 4. Australian travels to Italy and Tuscany

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” (Pesman 1991, 63). To artists and writers, travel to Italy meant a reclaiming of a European heritage which did not necessarily coincide with that of Great Britain. Most of them returned home, some remained abroad for years, others never came back.

A great number of scholars, artists and writers came to Italy in the 1950s, 1960s and in the 1970s. Martin Boyd (1893-1972) settled in Rome in 1957 and spent a large part of his mature life there; A. D. Hope (1907-2000), Morris West (1916-1999), Shirley Hazzard (1931-2016) and David Malouf (b. 1934) travelled to or resided in Italy in the 1950s and in later decades as well. In 1958 Patrick White was staying in Italy. Peter Porter (1929-2010) travelled to Italy in the 1960s. Art critic Robert Hughes (1938-2012) 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 lived until his death.

Shirley Hazzard spent the 1950s working in New York, and in 1956, while working at the UN Secretariat, she was sent on a year’s mission to Naples; thereafter she continued to spend her time between Manhattan and Italy until her death. Hazzard arrived in Italy in 1956 to practically never leave it, since she has kept coming back almost every year; her published work offers plenty of images of the Italy she has known best, Naples, Capri and Tuscany.

At the end of 1964 Jeffrey Smart (1921-2013) moved to Italy, and in 1971 bought the house where he lived until his death, in Posticcia Nuova, near Arezzo. Like many other Australian writers and artists Smart felt trammelled in Australia as an artist and as a person, and like many of them he was attracted by Europe. In 1948 Smart left Adelaide for a journey to England via the USA and Canada which lasted over three months. Travelling by ship, the *Kaipara*, he worked his way as pantry boy, cleaning toilets, floors and walls. When in Europe he travelled through Europe by bus and by hitching rides, from London moved to Paris and then Italy. When in Florence, Smart “indulged in an orgy of paintings”; he wanted to see the works of art he had only seen in books; at the monastery of San Marco he saw Fra Angelico’s “great Deposition, of which [he] had been dreaming for years”. “I gradually began to think that I should live

in Italy – a financially preposterous idea, an impossible dream” (Smart 2000 [1996], 218-219). He visited Rome, returned to London and moved back to Italy to live in Ischia. He moved to Sydney in 1951, but in late December 1963 he left Australia for Europe again. He moved to Rome. When living in Trastevere became fashionable, the owners of the apartment Smart was renting decided to reoccupy their property. So it was that Smart left Rome for the country. In 1970 he was shown an old farmhouse not far from Arezzo, in October paid a deposit and in January 1971 he completed the purchase of *Posticcia Nuova*. “Because we were isolated, I had felt apprehensive about living in the country, but there was much more society than I dared hope for” (ivi, 416) since that was the time when expatriate communities (including not a few Australians) were proliferating all over Tuscany. Being near Arezzo, Smart was also close to Piero della Francesca’s frescoes, which he had always fervently admired. Arezzo had been an obligatory stop when he first travelled to Italy, and in the 1960s he did not fail to go to Borgo San Sepolcro and Monterchi.

David 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 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 1961 Roslyn Pesman, Professor Emeritus at the University of Sydney, boarded an Italian ship and “embarked upon that Australian middle-class rite-of-passage, the overseas trip” (AC, 135). A regular visitor to Italy since 1961, Pesman lived in Florence in 1976 working on Florentine history in the Archivio di Stato. She is the author of a number of well-documented and insightful contributions to the study of the phenomenon of Australian travel to Italy. Pesman’s studies cover the period from the 1850s up to 1990, focussing in particular on the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. However, in the first decade of the 21st century Pesman had a fundamental role in the studies which were carried on at Monash Prato Center on the developments of this phenomenon. Desmond O’Grady (b. 1929) literary editor of *The Bulletin* in Australia, moved to Rome in 1962, where he still lives.

In the 1970s 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 a new vigour in Australian culture, due also 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 the 70s 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 North 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. Whitlam himself has felt a life-long fascination with the history of Italy; he went there first in 1962 and continued to visit regularly<sup>6</sup>.

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 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.

The 1980s saw other writers significantly affected by their journeys in Italy, and in Tuscany: 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 idealised 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. Peter Robb (b. 1946) travelled to Italy in 1974; he returned in 1978 and lived there for almost fifteen years. Two Australian poets, Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Andrew Taylor were inspired by Italy while living in Florence (O'Grady 2012, 66-67).

The stream of Australian travellers to Italy did not at all abate in the 1990s and in the 21st century, also thanks to the revolution in transport which has certainly made distance less of a problem. Australian writers and artists, until the Covid-19 pandemic stopped travel from Australia to Italy, have continued to visit this country. However, 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. Their Italianate writings certainly continue to testify their interest for

<sup>6</sup> *My Italian Notebook* (2002) covering art, architecture and politics, is the record of his profound interest in this country.

and attraction to Italy. Italian experiences continue to have vital repercussions on the work of contemporary Australian writers such as Robert Dessaix, Peter Robb, Paul Carter, Simon West and Michelle de Kretser.

Robert Dessaix visited Italy a number of times, he travelled to Italy in 2009; at the end of April, I organised a conversation between him and the Australian students at Monash Prato Centre on his novels *Arabesques* and *Night Letters*<sup>7</sup>.

Scholar Paul Carter, born in the U.K., lived in Spain and Italy before migrating to Australia in 1980. He has a considerable knowledge of Italy, where he lived for four years. His enquiry into Italian urbanism, art, history, literature and languages has remained motile, continuing to shift and find expression in different media. Many of his contributions to Australian studies, to radiophonic art and public art involve an imaginary dialogue (historical, poetic and aesthetic) between Australia and Italy<sup>8</sup>. Carter stayed at Monash Prato Centre as visiting scholar from 25 to 30 August 2010.

Poet Simon West has been profoundly impressed by the millennial history of Italy and enchanted by the language, he felt he had to engage with classical tradition in his creative practice, and so he does in his three books (*First Names*, 2006; *The Yellow Gum's Conversion*, 2011; *The Ladder*, 2015). In 1996, while an undergraduate at the University of Melbourne, he decided to take a year off to travel around Europe. Before leaving Australia, from a list of organisations that facilitated voluntary work around the world, he found work in Northern Italy, outside Turin, in one of the *valli valdesi*, the valleys in the Cottian Alps where Waldensians settled in the 13th century. Italy became his first destination for the year overseas. Back to Australia, West re-enrolled at the University of Melbourne, attending courses in Italian language and literature for two years, before getting a Bachelor of Letters degree in English. Later, he obtained a PhD in Italian Literature. Entitled “*È tant'e dritta e simigliante cosa*: Translating the Poetry of Guido Cavalcanti”, which developed into *The Selected Poetry of Guido Cavalcanti* (2009), a critical edition as well as a translation of the poems included in the selection<sup>9</sup>.

In contemporary Australian literature inspired by Italy, Michelle de Kretser's novel *Questions of Travel* (2012) stands out for its depth and originality, also in the author's treatment of this country. Short sections of the novel are set in Naples; I analysed which views of Italy the writer presents in *Questions of Travel* in order to define her way of approaching and responding to this country<sup>10</sup>. De Kretser first visited Italy in 1981, and returned in the 1990s, always visiting the north and the centre, specifically Florence and Tuscany. In September 2008, she

<sup>7</sup> Dessaix arrived in Rome on 24 April and stayed in Montefiascone (VT) for four days, gave the talk at Monash Prato Centre in Prato on 28 April, went to Torino, and on 3 May took a train to Paris.

<sup>8</sup> I explored Paul Carter's connection with Italy in two articles: Trapè 2018, 155-173 and Carter, Trapè 2018, 227-238.

<sup>9</sup> I studied West's connection with Italy in Trapè 2017, 193-211 and Trapè 2019, 285-295.

<sup>10</sup> See Trapè 2016, 95-117.

travelled to the South of Italy for the first time. De Kretser has always travelled in Italy for short periods only, but this notwithstanding, her experience has been of great use to her in writing part of her truly valuable novel.

Contemporary Australian literature clearly suggests that travel to Italy remains a phenomenon of great significance<sup>11</sup>. 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, mainly in a Tuscan village or in one of the main Italian cities; their favourite topics are food and wine, and the Italians' reputation as great lovers<sup>12</sup>. 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. Suffice to mention here, 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). It can be said that it was *Under the Tuscan Sun* that triggered the

<sup>11</sup> 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), Michelle De Kretser's *Questions of Travel* (2012); Australian poet Simon West's *First Names* (2006); *The Yellow Gum's Conversion* (2011) and *The Ladder* (2015).

<sup>12</sup> 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 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); Shamus Sillar's *Sicily, It's Not Quite Tuscany* (2012); Amanda Tabberer's *My Amalfi Coast* (2012); Lisa Clifford's *Death in the Mountains* (2008) and *Naples. A Way of Love* (2013). Virginia Duigan, a journalist, broadcaster, editor and TV scriptwriter, and a freelance contributor to various newspapers, wrote a novel set in Tuscany *The Biographer* (2008).

phenomenon of the fatal attraction of foreign travellers to Tuscany. 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.

However, 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” (Bennett in Kent, Pesman, Troup 2008).

In the second decade of the 21st century, before the block imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Australians continued to travel to Europe in great numbers with Italy as their favourite destination, second only to the United Kingdom. In the first two decades of the 21st century, more Australians than ever travelled to Italy and more of them lingered for longer periods; but they mainly came 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. The available sources reveal that more recently until the Covid-19 pandemic there appears to have been a growing ‘variety’ of Australians living and working in Italy. As a group they are becoming increasingly demographically diverse in terms of age, background, the range of professions in which they work, and the reasons for which they find themselves in Italy. This “variety” is what mainly distinguishes the state of Australian travel to Italy before the pandemic; it not only means discovering art and antiquity, but Italian fashion and design, style, the art of “posh” living.

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. The Covid-19 pandemic stopped all travel from Australia to Italy, with severe consequences for the development of Study Abroad programmes between the universities and institutions of the two countries, and of research projects.

## 5. Future development

In 2012 Desmond O’Grady and Stephen Tobin published a book *Australians and New Zealanders in Tuscany*, which added to the previous studies on the subject of Australians in Italy, with a focus on Tuscany. The purpose of the authors is to evidence the presence of the Antipodean community, alongside those of Britain and North America, which helped forge “the deep pact of friendship that binds Tuscany to the English-speaking world” (VII). The book also aims to be a guide for the many Australians and New Zealanders who decide to visit or live in Tuscany, by showing them the lives and experiences of their forebears.

O’Grady wrote the first section of the book, “Tuscany, Antipodean-Style” where he traced the Antipodean relationship with Florence and Tuscany, which lasted over 150 years and has taken various forms. O’Grady lists and briefly talks about Australians who lived in Tuscany from the second half of the 19th cen-

tury to the present time, highlighting the significant contribution Australians have given to the region's life with their professional work in various fields (arts, education, law, design and architecture, medicine, sociology, tourism). He also refers to "the illustrious figures, the thinkers and men and women of letters, art and culture, but also to the many young men who gave their lives during World War II" (O'Grady, Tobin 2012, vii). This survey stops with the year 2012 and my own study ends in 2010 (Trapè 2011), but they could both be catalysts for further critical thinking. At the end of the second decade of the 21st century the pandemic has stopped the Australian journeys to Italy and to Tuscany, but hopefully before too long there will be many more stories to investigate.

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