

New titles

Reviews and round-ups of recent and forthcoming Australian titles

Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions (edited by Bill Kent, Ros Pesman and Cynthia Troup, Monash University ePress, \$37.95 pb, ISBN 9780980361681, August)

★★★★

This book makes an important contribution to an emerging field of study: the Australian diaspora in Europe, but it is more complex than this description implies. While it describes the experiences of the Australian-born who have permanently immigrated to Italy, it is also the story of those who have visited Italy, those who have returned to settle there from their second home, Australia, and the institutions that have developed to connect Australians in Italy and promote Australian culture and commerce there.

The introduction insists that it is merely a sketch, but because of the range of its offerings it is much more than this. The great variety of genres this collection boasts is, for the most part, its great strength. *Australians in Italy* spans the scholarly, the autobiographical, the poetic and the anecdotal. The editors have drawn together some fine academic writing that effortlessly gestures towards the depths of the experience and knowledge of its authors. Ros Pesman's introduction is a case in point. As lively and engaging as ever, she offers insights into the Australian-Italian experience that can only be gained by building a robust and fine body of work on Italian history and the history of Italian migration to Australia.

Loretta Baldassar offers fascinating accounts of the experiences of returned migrants—fleshing out a rather neglected (except in the case of Hammerton and Thomson on British immigrants to Australia) area of migration studies. Bruce Bennett's evocative descriptions of literary lives and Ian Britain's transporting chapter locating Italy in the story of artist Donald Friend's fused creative and sexual pursuits bring to life the history of Australians inspired by the physical and spiritual landscapes of Italy.

Peter Porter shares his poetic craft with the reader, offering an example of the artistic

inspiration found in Italy discussed by the biographers just mentioned. This feature of the collection is framed by commentary that reaches into a rich and varied history that is personal, literary and scholarly. Reading Porter's poetry and prose here can be likened to sharing in a deep and meandering conversation where the poet does most of the work, but never makes it look like work.

The contributions of Bennet, Porter and Jane Drakard, who writes of Australian gardeners in Italy, speak to each other and in combination offer detailed accounts of the Italian experiences of the likes of Germaine Greer and Jeffrey Smart. Similarly the drier but informative contributions of Judith Blackall, Silvana Tuccio and Aldo Lorigiola combine to offer a picture of the ways in which initiatives to promote Australian art and community have developed in Italy. The vignettes of autobiography contained in each section range from the mildly pedestrian to the resonant accounts of Mark Coleridge and Cynthia Troupe as young scholars negotiating the vagaries of Roman libraries, archives and religious institutions.

As an Italophile, much of this collection was a great pleasure to read. It will be of interest to others from the English-speaking world who love Italy and have flirted with the idea of making it their home, to scholars of biography and autobiography, particularly those interested in the forces that have stimulated the creativity of Australian writers and artists, to those entering the burgeoning field of work on the Australian diaspora and to anyone embarking on a journey of research—work or pleasure—to Italy.

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