Bill Kent, Ros Pesman and Cynthia Troup (eds), *Australians in Italy: Contemporary Lives and Impressions* (Monash University ePress, 2008)

This collection of essays and vignettes on Australian activities in Italy has its origins in the symposium ‘Australians in Italy’ held at the Monash University Centre in Prato (Tuscany) in 2005. The book is timely and much needed, since there have been few publications that capture some of the connections, past and present, that have been forged between Italy and Australia. In 1989 Giovanna Capone, in her *Australia and Italy: Contributions to Intellectual Life*, edited a collection of papers by Australian and Italian academics from a wide variety of disciplines. In 1993 Prampolini and Hubert, in their *Antipodean Connection*, highlighted mainly the literary links between the two countries. In 1995 Desmond O’Grady’s *Correggio Jones and the Runaways: The Italo-Australian Connection* provided a selection of essays by O’Grady on both historical and contemporary Australians attracted to Italy, Italians drawn to Australia and those caught in between the two countries.

The cross-connection between Italy and Australia is today more equal than in the past, when, especially at the time of mass migration, movements were largely one way, from Italy to Australia. In the early post-war decades over a quarter of a million Italian migrants settled in Australia. However, in the nineteenth century Italians knew little about Australia and, vice versa, Australians’ knowledge of Italy centred mainly on art, architecture, Italian opera and the most renowned Italian writers. In Adelaide in 1852 Alessandro Manzoni’s famous novel *I promessi sposi* was on sale at an Adelaide bookshop and in the latter part of the century Queensland Colonial Secretary Sir Samuel Griffith, an Italophile, read and translated Dante. The handful of Australians who travelled to Italy was interested mainly in doing the Grand Tour, and had little contact with Italian society. The time it took to travel to Italy and the expense involved were always an impediment. Even as late as the 1960s this reviewer, on his first journey to Italy, took thirty-five days by ship to reach an Italian port.

Today much has changed. With the availability of cheap air fares Australians travel to Italy in large numbers and for many reasons: not only to study the language and the culture of Italy but also to paint, write, compose, sing, learn to cook, buy a property, develop trade, and to promote Australia in a variety of ways. In addition, a number of Italian-Australian retirees have chosen to repatriate to Italy. In her excellent and informative contribution to this book Cathy Crupi has estimated that today there are as many as 30,000 Australian citizens resident in Italy, of whom some 18,000 are dual-nationals.

The volume is divided into seven sections and vignettes, which include contributions on: ‘Setting the scene’ in an historical context (Ros Pesman), with an overview of the genesis of today’s Australian cultural institutions in Italy (Bill Kent); selected Australian writers who have written about or have lived in Italy, including Martin Boyd, Patrick White, Germaine Greer, Desmond O’Grady, Peter Porter, and journalist and writer Lisa Clifford; Australian artists Arthur Boyd, Jeffrey Smart, Tony Clark, Ian Britain, Donald Friend, Euan Heng and others; the effect of encounters with Italy told through the personal vignettes of Antonio Pagliaro and Cathy Crupi.
Cynthia Troup and the vicissitudes of their experiences when studying and researching in Rome. Jane Drakard explores the function and appeal of Italian gardens and garden styles and the way that Australians such as Germaine Greer and Jeffrey Smart see the function of their own Italian garden. Chris Wood outlines his involvement in educational tourism, Alison Leitch describes her experience of living near the marble quarries of Carrara and Camilla Russell her time spent doing Renaissance studies in Pisa. Peter Howard highlights the complexity of the relationship between the Australian Catholic Church and Rome and tells of his ‘affair’ with a Roman theological college. Mark Colleridge, who also studied theology in Rome, gives an insight into living and working in the Vatican. There is a section on the wide variety of Australian studies on offer in Italy today, which range from indigenous culture to Australian cinema and Australian identity. The poignant and very readable vignette by Brian Matthews on the late, much admired, Bernard Hickey, the Italy-based scholar who arguably was the one who first brought Australian literature to the attention of Italian academics, moves from their initial distant contacts by letter to their first meeting in Venice, where Hickey lectured for many years, and their contact later in Lecce where Hickey had transferred, a city that, according to Matthews, Hickey ‘conquered ... and [where he] became as dazzling an institution and cultural hero ... as ever he had been in Venice’ (24.4).

Most appropriately there is a section in the volume devoted to the many Australian-Italians who return home for a visit or who settle permanently. Loretta Baldassar discusses their new, and sometimes difficult, relationship with today’s Italy and includes the group that is often passed over, the second-generation Australian-Italians who have decided to settle in the country of their parents. Aldo Lorigiola gives a brief overview of the national association he established in Italy in 1976 for the purpose of bringing together these Italian-Australian migrants and ex-migrants (ANEA). The contemplation and discovery of identity is movingly expressed by second-generation Luisa Panichi in her vignette:

By establishing a spiritual relationship to the land of Italy, I felt I was finally ready to accept my Australian heritage as well. If it is true that you belong to the land and that the land does not belong to you, then I can never lose my connection with the Australian land because I am part of it spiritually and physically, even in absentia. Indeed, the land receives all and repels no-one. Land is multicultural. (26.3)

The contributors to the volume include academics, artists, writers, journalists and Italian-Australians. Many are well known in their field. Given the fact that the book is the result of a symposium organised by the Monash University Centre in Prato, one can ignore the overall bias towards contributors connected to Victorian universities, and especially Monash. The editors acknowledge that the book ‘is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of its subject’ (xi) but should instead be considered no more than an antipasto and a taste in preparation for the main course to which others will, hopefully, contribute in the future.

Desmond O’Connor