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The *Italian Historical Society Journal* invites submissions from its readers. Guidelines for submissions can be found on the last page of this issue.

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Front cover: Doctored image based on the front cover of *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, June 1937.

Back Cover: Cover of *Mockin' Bird Hill* by Vaughn Horton and played by Enzo Toppano, 1951.
[Image courtesy John Whiteoak.]

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TO THE READERS

The *Italian Historical Society Journal* (vol. 21 – 2013) finally sees the light several months behind schedule due to the intense cultural events program at the Museo Italiano, which have absorbed an increased portion of our team's resources.

The activities of the Museo Italiano, the Italian Historical Society's daughter organisation, are integral to the fulfilment of the Society's mission, namely to collect, preserve and share the living heritage of Italian Australians. The Museo showcases the Society's collections and provides a vibrant community hub where people can come together as both producers and consumers of Italian Australian culture – on offer are temporary exhibitions, lectures, book launches, workshops and film and music nights.

The *Italian Historical Society Journal* fulfils a role that is in some ways comparable to that of the Museo. Coming out once a year, as well as in special editions connected to major exhibitions at the Museo Italiano, the Journal provides an ongoing forum for all those interested in Italian Australian history and culture and in cognate topics, which may enrich our understanding by providing relevant contextual information or comparative perspectives.

The present issue of the Journal continues in the tradition of providing a wide variety of contributions, ranging from scholarly studies to community testimonies. The fact that these genres are not separated into different sections is symbolic of the democratic and conversational nature of the cultural work carried out at the Italian Historical Society and Museo Italiano, where everybody's contribution is valued for the experience and expertise it brings to bear on its subject, to which no-one holds unique interpretative keys.

A novelty in this issue of the *Italian Historical Society Journal* is the inclusion of a narrative piece, "Amati e Salia" by the well known Italian Australian writer Giovanni Andreoni. This is an extract from his forthcoming novel, *Il mandarino nel cervello*, which is based on a real story. The story starts during the Russian campaign in the Second World War and, after a part set in Italy, finishes in Australia.

It is with pride, and with gratitude to all contributors and readers that we present vol. 21 of the *Italian Historical Society Journal*.

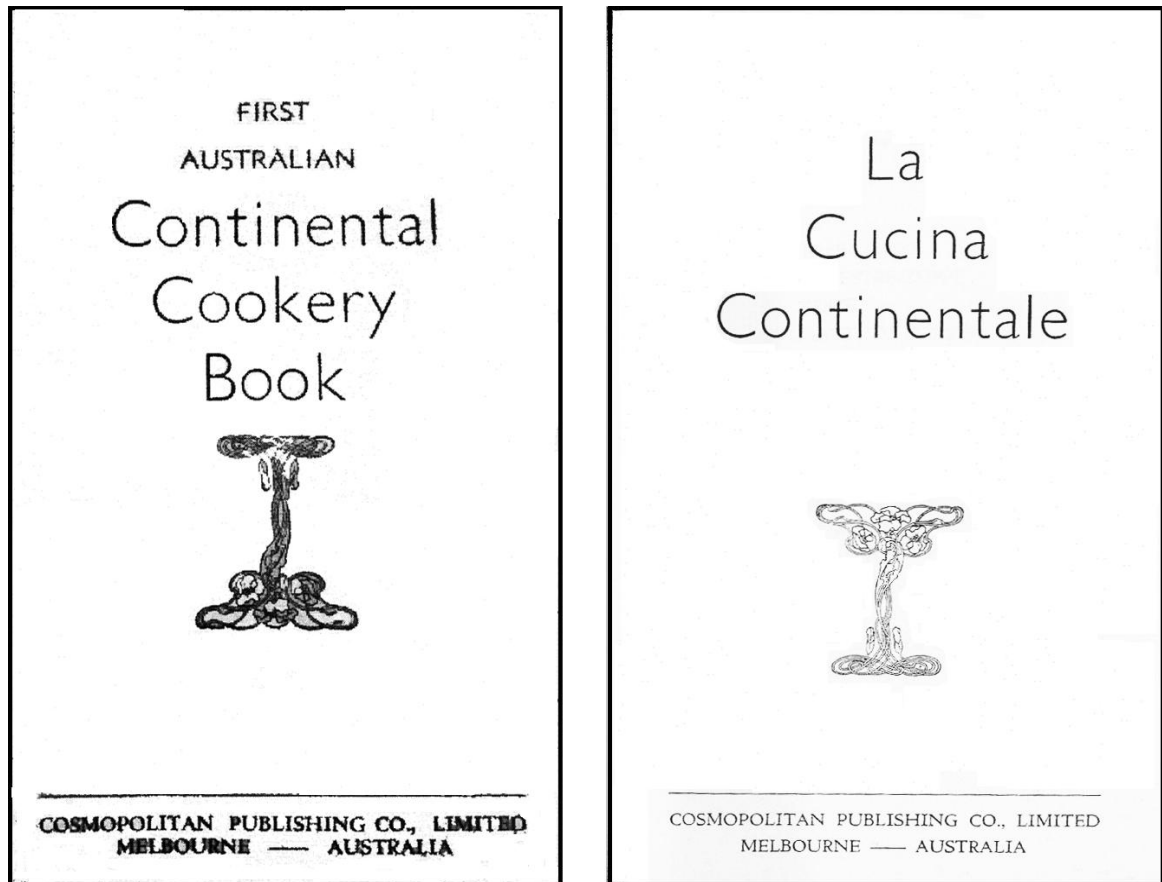


Fig. 1. The title pages of the English and Italian version of 'Australia's first Italo-Australian cookbook'.

food, fascism and forward thinking: australia's first italo-australian cookbook

by tania cammarano

Tania Cammarano is a PhD student at the University of Adelaide who is researching the history of Italian food and foodways in Australia. She has a Masters degree in Gastronomy (Food Studies) as well as an extensive food journalism background. She has presented papers on different historical aspects of Italian food at conferences in both Italy and Australia, and has one upcoming publication – a paper co-written with Dr Rachel Ankeny on the 'Italian' identity of Australian brand Leggo's which will appear in Italian Food: Fact & Fiction to be published by Berg; and the paper below which is part of edited volume Eat History – Food and Drink in Australia and Beyond, published in 2013 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

The *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, printed in 1937, could be described as the first major Italian cookbook published in Australia.¹ Despite the lack of 'Italian' in its title and no certainty about the identity of its anonymous author, this pa-

per will show that the book was published by a group of Italian migrants, and while it includes recipes from many other cuisines, the authorial intent was primarily to promote the Italian culinary tradition as the most desirable and suitable model for Australians to follow. On the other hand, with its calls for local ingredients and expressions of enthusiasm for Australia's culinary possibilities, the book is also very much a product of the country in

¹ There are six known copies of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* in Australian libraries. See <http://trove.nla.gov.au/version/22081629> for details.

which it was published. In this way, the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* can be said to be both Italian and Australian, or Italo-Australian, and therefore an example of a hybridised cultural product.

In addition to examining how the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* communicates its hybrid identity, this paper will explore possible reasons for the book's publication. The publisher – the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company – was run by Italian migrants who were branded fascists by the Australian Government and considered so dangerous that, as soon as Italy entered World War II, some of them were interned and their company was forced into liquidation.² Why a group of Italians linked with fascism, who were also responsible for the principal fascist Italian-language newspaper in Australia, would publish a cookbook is a chief concern of this paper. Clues to understanding their motives can be found in the book itself, and this paper will argue that the tone and style of the cookbook, as well as the way it was marketed and advertised, were an attempt by the author and publishers to make a connection with mainstream Australians, in a bid to show them that there was a different and, in their opinion, better way to cook and eat. In a time when there was considerable discrimination against Italians, the book aims to show that Italian food, and as an extension Italians themselves, had much to offer Australian society.³

It is difficult to ascertain the popularity of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*. Evidence suggests it was for sale in prominent bookshops in Sydney and Brisbane, and from the publisher's CBD offices in Melbourne.⁴ The

book featured advertisements from firms based in these three cities, as well as for grocery products which were available across Australia. The nature of these advertisements supports the theory that the book was intended for large-scale distribution.⁵ Despite its availability, there is no evidence that the book was a best-seller, or that further editions were published.⁶ However, we cannot discount that the reason for an absence of new editions was not the book's lack of popularity but rather the beginning of World War II and the subsequent liquidation of the publishing company.

Despite uncertainty about the book's popularity, there are many reasons why the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, which is made up of 321 pages and contains no illustrations, is worthy of study. With its small size, simple dark green hard-cover binding and embossed gold letters declaring "Continental Cookery Book" on its cover, it might look like many other cookbooks published in Australia during the inter-war years, but it had a distinctive tone, style and purpose.⁷ According to

advertisement in *The Courier-Mail* states it is available "at all leading book shops and stores [in] Brisbane", see 'A Boon to the Housewife', *The Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, October 14, 1937, p. 3; The above mentioned advertisements, as well as those in *Il Giornale Italiano*, say that the book can be purchased from the publishing company's Melbourne offices. See, for example, 'It's Smart to Entertain Continentally', *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, September 28, 1938, p. 1.

⁵ There are 27 advertisements in the book. The majority fit into one of the following categories: Cooking appliances (in particular electric and gas cooking ranges), continental foods (for example Tibaldi Smallgoods), convenience foods (for example Kraft Grated Cheese) and wine (for example Thomas Fiaschi Wines).

⁶ Only one edition of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is noted in the National Library of Australia, *Australian National Bibliography, 1901-1950, Volume 1*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1988, p. 661; and John Hoyle, *An Annotated Bibliography of Australian Domestic Cookery Books, 1860s to 1950*, Billycan Cook, Willoughby, NSW, 2010, p. 150.

⁷ There are some inconsistencies in the dimensions of the book listed in the *Australian National Bibliography*, Hoyle's *An Annotated Bibliography of Australian Domestic Cookery Books, 1860s to 1950* and my own measurements; however they are all between 18.5cm and 20cm in length and 12cm and

² Of the 11 men listed as directors, founders or involved in the setting up of the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company in the 1937 *Vade Mecum*, four were interned, including the company's founder. See NAA: MP1103/2, PWV11011; PWQ7283; Q7369; PWN9001; 'Paper Merchants, Printers and Others', *The Argus*, Melbourne, July 10, 1940, p. 10.

³ See 'Racism and Italians' in N. Randazzo and M. Cigler, *The Italians in Australia*, AE Press, Melbourne, 1987, pp. 122–26.

⁴ Classified advertisements in the *Sydney Morning Herald* state that the book is available from Angus and Robertson and Dymock's Book Arcade, see 'For the Housewife', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, September 15, 1937, pp. 2–5; A classified

historian Michael Symons popular cookbooks from this period tended to come primarily from “the CWA [Country Women’s Association], the fund-raising committees of private schools, domestic science teachers, home economists with gas companies and newspapers”.⁸ Culinary historian Colin Bannerman largely agrees, pointing out that most books could be categorised in four broad classes: textbooks, books from newspapers, magazines and journals, product promotion books, and fundraising and charity books.⁹ In addition to these, there were many cookbooks from overseas available in Australia, particularly from Britain, such as *Beeton’s Book of Household Management* as well as collections of recipes from “celebrities”, such as *Mrs. Maclurcan’s Cookery Book* by hotelier Hannah Maclurcan.¹⁰ The *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* does not easily fit within any of these categories. Secondly, the book has not been studied in the context of its Italian migrant heritage, though Symons mentions it in his now classic history of food in Australia as proof of “foreign” food prior to post-World War II mass migration and Bannerman describes it as demonstrative of the renewed interest in non-British food that re-emerged as “Continental cookery” in the 1930s.¹¹ Bannerman also notes the “fascinating mixture” of recipes in the book and the “many Italian specialties”, including “a no-frills approach to pizza”, but neither he nor Symons call it an Italian cookbook.¹²

Perhaps the most intriguing reason to study the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is because it challenges a number of stereotypes and myths about migrant food culture that we often see portrayed in both contemporary Italo-Australian cookbooks and in other narratives about Italian food in Australia. These stereotypes include the maintenance of traditional foodways by Italian migrants and their descendants in an attempt to feel connected to their family, their heritage and, ultimately, their past. This can be seen in the best-selling 2011 cookbook *Mangia! Mangia!*, written by the children of Italian migrants: “As well as saving our families’ signature recipes, *Mangia! Mangia!* is about preserving a way of life, a philosophy, that is under threat. This way of life stems from our families’ respectful relationship with the land ... [t]here was pride in cooking and pleasure in eating. It was about family and community; about love. Such is the spirit of this book.”¹³ These accounts often present a romanticised and idealised past, heavy with nostalgia, and tend to suggest that Italian migrants were happiest and most comfortable cooking and eating familiar foods in a bid to create a taste of home in a foreign environment.¹⁴ That the Anglo-Celtic majority would eventually see, taste, tentatively adopt, subsequently embrace and feel enriched by some of these migrant foodways, is a popular narrative of Italian food in Australia, especially in the period after World War II which saw large-scale migration from Italy.¹⁵ This linear model is obvi-

13cm in width. As the differences are small it is probably due to the quality of the binding rather than different bindings.

⁸ M. Symons, *One Continuous Picnic: A History of Eating in Australia*, Duck Press, Adelaide, 1982, p. 140.

⁹ C. Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes: Celebrating Australia’s Culinary History*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1998, pp. 45–49.

¹⁰ Bannerman cites Hannah Maclurcan’s work as an example of a cookbook by what today would be considered a “celebrity” in C. Bannerman, *A Friend in the Kitchen: Old Australian Cookery Books*, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst, NSW, 1996, p. 24.

¹¹ Symons, *One Continuous Picnic: A History of Eating in Australia*, pp. 223–24; Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes: Celebrating Australia’s Culinary History*, p. 56; For a discussion of foreign recipes in early Australian cookbooks see Bannerman, *A Friend in the Kitchen: Old Australian Cookery Books*, pp. 158–59.

¹² Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes: Celebrating Australia’s Culinary History*, pp. 56–57.

¹³ T. Oates and A. Villella, *Mangia! Mangia!*, Lantern, Camberwell, VIC, 2011, p. ix. See, for more examples of this kind of narrative, R. Momesso and M. Harden, *Antonio & Lucia: Recipes and Stories from My Australian-Calabrian Kitchen*, Plum, Sydney, 2012; M. Di’Bartolo, *The Sicilian Kitchen*, Lantern, Camberwell, VIC, 2008; R. Mitchell, *My Cousin Rosa*, Murdoch Books, Sydney, 2009.

¹⁴ The tendency of migrants to maintain their food culture in adopted countries is not exclusive to Italians as can be seen in the way Australians largely followed English food traditions. See B. Santich, *What the Doctors Ordered: 150 Years of Dietary Advice in Australia*, Hyland House, South Melbourne, 1995, p. 6.

¹⁵ This narrative applies to other migrants as well as Italians and can be seen in J. Newton, *Wogfood: An Oral History with Recipes*, Random House Australia, Milsons Point, NSW, 1996; H. Greenwood, ‘Migrants and Mavericks: Defining Australian Cuisine’, in *Voracious: The Best New Australian Food Writing*, ed.

ously overly simplistic, ignoring the complex interplay that occurs when foods come into contact with new cultures. It could also cast Italian migrants in a passive role – cooking their traditional foods, albeit with the modifications that occur when migrant food cultures are transported, perhaps in a ghettoized environment, till they are “discovered” by the dominant host society and the changing diet is popularised and validated by cultural interpreters and intermediaries such as food writers and restaurant critics. This would be in stark contrast to the migrants behind the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*. Far from being insular and ghettoized, the author and publishers sought to change Australia’s diet not by waiting to be “discovered” but by publishing a cookbook which pro-actively engages in the discourse of the dominant culture. They were their own interpreters and intermediaries. Their cookbook does not present a nostalgic view of their past as a means of fortifying an ethnic identity but boldly, confidently and authoritatively lays out an alternative vision for Australia’s dietary and culinary future. These forward-thinking Italian migrants were interested in proselytising the creation and promotion of a new and better food culture suitable for their adopted country. In publishing the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, these individuals demonstrated that they fit the Italian fascist ideal of the “new man” who did not cling to the stereotype of Italians as happy with the status quo, but rather were mobilised for the good of the nation, or, in this case, the good of their new nation’s stomachs.¹⁶ In this way, there is a

firm link between the publishers and Italian fascist ideology.

The importance of cookbooks in codifying cuisine and, more broadly, ethnic food cannot be underestimated.¹⁷ In the context of ethnic food in Singapore, Huat and Rajah have explained this codification as a two-step process. The first step is the presentation of “ethnic” food by “ethnic” people, usually by way of a menu, where the ethnicity of the food is an extension of the ethnicity of the person cooking or producing it. The second step is the production of a cookbook, where these “ethnic” recipes are (re)presented: “Once so codified, anyone can prepare an ‘ethnic’ dish by following the recipe; the food is detached from the ethnicity of the producer”. According to Huat and Rajah, “[a]t this point, a particular style of cooking and its results may be said to be fully inscribed with ‘ethnicity’.”¹⁸ The *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is an early attempt at codifying ethnic food in Australia, as many, but not all, of the recipes are assigned nationalities. As well as this, the author goes a step further by suggesting that these ethnic recipes should be cooked by all Australians, hence recommending foreign dishes become fully integrated and part of the Australian national diet. At the same time, it should be remembered that ascribing a nationality or ethnicity to food is a construct: Panayi gives the example of curry, commonly thought of as Indian, when “[i]t is both English and Indian, the marriage of two civilizations, perfectly symbolizing the artificiality of giving food a nationality.”¹⁹ Even describing the union of curry as a marriage between two cuisines, however, implies English and Indian were “pure” to begin with, which is not the case.²⁰ For cuisines do not remain static – they are transformed in response to technological,

Paul McNally, Hardie Grant Books, Prahran, VIC, 2011, pp. 60–69; R. Beckett, *Convicted Tastes: Food in Australia*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984. For a discussion of the theme of “cultural enrichment” see G. Hage, ‘At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Food and Migrant Home-Building’, in *Home/World: Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney’s West*, ed. Helen Grace et al., Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW, 1997, pp. 136–38.

¹⁶ The importance of the “new man” in Italian fascism is discussed in P. V. Cannistraro, ‘Mussolini’s Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?’, in *Journal of Contemporary History* 7, no. 3/4, 1972, pp. 129–130. For a definition of fascism which explains the pre-eminence of the nation and the importance of a “mobilized national community” to the ideology, see K. Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, 2002, p. 31.

¹⁷ See A. Appadurai, ‘How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India’, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1, 1988, pp. 3–24.

¹⁸ C. B. Huat and A. Rajah, ‘Hybridity, Ethnicity and Food in Singapore’, in *Changing Chinese Foodways in Asia*, ed. David Y. H. Wu and Tan Chee-beng, The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 2001, pp. 162–63.

¹⁹ P. Panayi, *Spicing Up Britain: The Multicultural History of British Food*, Reaktion, London, 2008, p. 28.

²⁰ Huat and Rajah, ‘Hybridity, Ethnicity and Food in Singapore’, pp. 165–66.

social, economic, political and cultural factors – both within the confines of the society that spawned them, and when they are transported elsewhere.²¹ In fact, as cuisine is an area where “cross-fertilization, appropriation, re-appropriation, infusion, diffusion, absorption, invention [and] bricolage” all occur with “hybrid vigour”, it is inevitable that hybridization should take place.²² This “hybrid vigour” is evident in the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, as will be argued, and was actively fostered by the author who made a conscious effort to promote change in the national food culture by broadening the culinary influences to which Australians were exposed.

Is it an ‘Italian’ cookbook?

If we consider the key attributes of an ‘Italian’ cookbook to be the inclusion of recipes which belong to the Italian culinary tradition and Italian authorship, there is abundant evidence both within and external to the text that demonstrate this. More recipes are explicitly identified as being part of Italian cuisine in the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* than any other national food culture.²³ Overall they represent 13% of the 703 recipes, which isn’t a large percentage; however, if we consider that the next best represented cuisine is French, which encompasses only 5% of recipes, then the percentage of Italian recipes appears to be more significant. Given the high status of French cooking in Australia during this period, where it was the most prestigious foreign cuisine, it would not be unreasonable to expect there to be more French than Italian recipes in a continental cookery book.²⁴ The

author explicitly acknowledges the Italian influence in the introduction to the “Soups” chapter: “Our recipes are not confined to Italy, though largely indebted to her”, but he or she could have been referring to the entire book.²⁵

In addition, the Italian recipes contain greater historical detail than other recipes, and, more often than not, are identified by their city or region of origin. Of the 92 Italian recipes in the book, 64 are said to belong to a particular place. For example, to sample “Artichokes in the Jewish Style ... cooked in the genuine Jewish way” it is necessary to go not just to Rome, but “one should ... enter one of the inns of Trastevere”; and “Siennese ‘Little Horses’”, a recipe for biscuits, “come from Sienna, the old Italian city, not far south of Florence. One still goes there each year to witness the famous Race for the prize Banner (‘Palio’).”²⁶ It is worth noting that the majority of Italian recipes ascribed regional origins come from Tuscany, with Sicilian recipes a distant second.²⁷ Only 11 of the 37 French recipes are given a city or region of origin and, the next best represented cuisine, German, of which there are 18 recipes, has just two exact locales provided; one of these, “Berlin ‘Panettone’”, is described in decidedly Italian terms: “Really the name ‘panettone’ (little rolls) belongs to a well-known Italian sweet. It is a Milanese specialty and we describe it further on. The German sweet we are discussing is different from the genuine ‘panettone,’ but they claim it, so what’s to be done?”²⁸

All of this suggests a great deal of knowledge about Italian food on the part of the unnamed

²¹ P. L. van den Berghe, ‘Ethnic Cuisine: Culture in Nature’, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7, no. 3, 1984, pp. 387–97.

²² Huat and Rajah, ‘Hybridity, Ethnicity and Food in Singapore’, p. 164.

²³ This count includes only recipes that have been labelled by the author as belonging to these cuisines, or recipes whose title contains a national or regional identifier. Recipes which have been described as belonging to general regions (eg. “Mediterranean”) or more than one country have not been included in the count.

²⁴ For a discussion of the role of French food in Australia, see B. Santich, ‘The High and the Low: Australian Cuisine in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, in *Culinary Distinction*, ed.

Emma Costantino and Sian Supski, API Network, Perth, 2006, pp. 37–49.

²⁵ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, Cosmopolitan Publishing Co. Limited, Melbourne, 1937, p. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 169, 229.

²⁷ Twenty-one recipes are given Tuscan origins (9 from Florence, 2 from Livorno, 1 from Siena and 9 are attributed to the region of Tuscany) whereas there are 9 recipes listed as being Sicilian (1 from Palermo and 8 from the region of Sicily). Grouping the remaining recipes into their region of origin, the count is: Veneto (6), Emilia-Romagna (6), Lombardy (5), Campania (5), Lazio (5), Liguria (4), Sardinia (1), Marche (1) and Piedmont (1).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

author, which supports the theory that he or she was of Italian origin. Other evidence is the advice given in regards to pronunciation, which is more often given for words of Italian origin than others: “Chianti”, the author advises the reader to “sound the ‘ch’ like ‘k’” and of “Panettone”, “[i]f you are Italian it is unnecessary to remind you that the final ‘e’ is sounded like the ‘a’ in day.”²⁹ In addition to this, recipe names in other languages are often not given because the author says they are unpronounceable: “Dried Ling in the Spanish Way”; “In Spain they call it by a name that it takes a Spaniard to pronounce” and of “Potatoes in the Russian Way”; “This dish is not so difficult to make as its Russian name is to pronounce.”³⁰

The author’s declaration in the “Foreword” that Italian cooking is well suited to Australia’s climate is one of many pro-Italian statements, and reveals that even though the book includes recipes from a variety of cuisines, it is primarily concerned with promoting Italian food:

*It is time for Australians to realise, in fact, that what one may call Mediterranean cookery has much to offer them. Italian cookery, for instance, embodies ideas, aims and methods that have not only been ripening for literally thousands of years, but have been doing so under climatic conditions far more closely resembling those of Australia than do the British. Many of the Italian recipes that figure in our pages may have been already hoary antiques when Lucullus, that famous Roman epicure, was the great gastronomic dictator of the world half a century B.C.*³¹

French cookery is practically an offshoot of the Italian. British cookery, with all its merits, can boast no such

*illustrious pedigree. It is only common sense, then, for Australians to avail themselves of what, in the very nature of things, must offer them most valuable and interesting examples of food preparation. To ignore such a mine of information is not merely to confess, but to cherish, one’s own ignorance.*³²

Along with climatic similarities, what is apparent from this quotation is that the author believes it is the long pedigree of Italian food, that Italians and their ancestors have been thinking about and experimenting with how food should be cooked and eaten “for literally thousands of years”, which should be of value to Australians. In addition to this, the reference to Lucullus, “that famous Roman epicure”, invokes the glory of the Roman Empire, a much perpetuated myth in fascist Italy, and provides another link between the author and fascist ideology.³³ The concept of historical pedigree being important in developing strong food traditions pervades the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*: “Excellent dishes” are made with onions because they have “been in constant use from the earliest ages”; Southern Europeans know that endives are “a first-rate stomachic” because they have been administered “from time immemorial”; and salad which “constitute[s] an almost complete form of nourishment” “takes a very prominent place in the dietary of the Mediterranean peoples, and the custom of eating raw vegetables goes back to the very earliest times.”³⁴ The author states that Italians have had the advantage of time to develop a culture around food, whereas Australians clearly have not, and it is the benefits of this venerable culture which he or she wants to share with the Australian audience.

There is ample evidence that the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is Italian in origin within the book itself. However while

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 243, 294.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 38, 186.

³¹ The dietary advice that Australians should eat more like those in the Mediterranean rather than the British because of climatic similarities dates to the mid-19th century and is discussed in Santich, *What the Doctors Ordered: 150 Years of Dietary Advice in Australia*, pp. 1–66.

³² *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 2.

³³ Italian fascists glorified Imperial Rome, with Caesar and Mussolini “presented as heroes of the same great national tradition, with Caesar as predecessor of fascism”, see Cannistraro, ‘Mussolini’s Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?’, p. 126.

³⁴ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, pp. 176, 177, 205.

“cookbooks are important primary sources for food historians”, it is necessary, in the opinion of culinary historian Elizabeth Driver, to gather evidence beyond the book, including bibliographic information, publishing history and social context, in order to interpret the meaning on the page in a useful way.³⁵ In looking outside the primary source, we also find plenty of evidence of the book’s ‘Italian-ness’, not least of which is the history of the publishing company which is behind the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*.

The Cosmopolitan Publishing Company was comprised primarily of politically-minded Italian migrants and described itself as “ITALIANA AL CENTO PER CENTO” (“One hundred per cent Italian”).³⁶ It was the brainchild of Filippo Maria Bianchi, who came to Australia in 1928, and who, together with journalist Franco Battistessa, founded *Il Giornale Italiano*, a pro-fascist Italian language newspaper published from 1932 until 1940.³⁷ The newspaper predated the founding of the publishing company, and it was to ensure continued publication of *Il Giornale Italiano*, which had been disrupted by Australian reaction to Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in late 1935, but also to meet the commercial needs of Italians in Australia that the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company was said to have been formed.³⁸

³⁵ E. Driver, ‘Cookbooks as Primary Sources for Writing History: A Bibliographer’s View’, in *Food, Culture & Society* 12, no. 3, 2009, p. 258.

³⁶ ‘Avviso Importante’, *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, July 7, 1937, p. 7. On the transcription of article names and quotes in Italian, the author has transcribed them as they appear in the original source which means that errors, in particular the lack of capitalisation and the incorrect placing or omission of accents, are reproduced here. The author has not included <sic> after every error as this would make the quotes more difficult to read.

³⁷ ‘I Dirigenti Del ‘Giornale Italiano’’, *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, June 30, 1936, p. 101; G. Rando, ‘Aspects of the History of the Italian Language Press in Australia 1885-1985’, in *Italians in Australia: Historical and Social Perspectives: Proceedings of the Conference on the Italians in Australia, the First 200 Years, Held at the University of Wollongong and Macquarie University, 27-29 August 1988*, ed. Michael Arrighi and Gaetano Rando, Department of Modern Languages, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW, Dante Alighieri Society, Wollongong Chapter, 1993, pp. 197–214.

³⁸ ‘Nel Gennaio 1935...’, *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, October 28, 1937, p. 21; ‘Rapporto



Fig. 2. Filippo Maria Bianchi (left) with the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane James Duhig. Photograph published in *Il Giornale Italiano* di Sydney, 14 April 1937, p. 3.



Fig. 3. Portrait of Franco Battistessa published in *Vade Mecum* degli Italiani in Australia. Rivista Annuale Illustrata de ‘Il Giornale Italiano’, June 30 1936, p. 101.

Based in Melbourne, the publishing company attracted shareholders from across the Italian diaspora in Australia, notably from as far away as North Queensland and Western Australia, many of whom were listed with short biographies in the *Vade Mecum*, an annual magazine described as the “Trade and Social Guide for Italians in Australia” published by *Il Giornale Italiano* and printed by the Cosmopolitan Pub-

dell’Amministratore Delegato Rag. F. M. Bianchi La Fondazione Della Cosmopolitan Publishing Co. Ltd.’, *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, February 3, 1937, p. 3.

lishing Company.³⁹ While Bianchi was noted as the founder of the company, other prominent directors listed in the 1936 *Vade Mecum* included president of the publishing syndicate Severino De Marco, of the well-known De Marco Brothers' terrazzo firm; his brother Annibale and lawyer Valentino Adami. Of interest is also the number of directors in the company with direct links to the food and wine business, particularly in Melbourne, including wine merchant Frank Lanteri, Italian food importer Azzo Ongarello and, perhaps most pertinently, restaurateur Rinaldo Massoni.⁴⁰ Massoni, a surgical instrument maker by trade, was proprietor of Melbourne's Florentino restaurant, and his family was later included as part of the "Spaghetti Mafia", a moniker given by the food media in the late 1970s and early 1980s to the handful of Italian restaurants established in the 1920s, often credited with introducing Melbourne to Italian food.⁴¹ What makes Massoni's inclusion particularly tantalising is his Tuscan origins, given that so many of the recipes in the book are identified as being from Florence or Tuscany; however no evidence could be found linking Massoni to the authorship of the book.⁴² The much-expanded list of shareholders in the 1937 *Vade Mecum* included another promi-

nent "Spaghetti Mafia" representative, Giuseppe Codognotto, of Melbourne's Italian Society restaurant, and Niccolò Mirabella, who the magazine credits with opening Victoria's only Italian patisserie in 1925.⁴³ Franco Battistessa, labelled as a director and executive of *Il Giornale Italiano*, is not listed as being involved with the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company.⁴⁴ The lack of evidence to suggest a link between Battistessa and the book is vexing because Battistessa, who was educated in England, was a staunch defender of Italian food, and his writing style and wit is not dissimilar to that displayed in the cookbook.⁴⁵

The exact politics of those behind the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company is difficult to establish. For example, Bianchi has been described as being more interested in business than fascism, though he had "outbursts of patriotism that identified him as a fascist".⁴⁶ At the same time, government records indicated that when Bianchi was taken to the Tatura Internment Camp in 1940 he demonstrated "pro-Fascist and pro-Nazi sympathies".⁴⁷ Three years later, now an inmate at

³⁹ The *Vade Mecum* was printed from 1934 to 1939, with the exception of 1935, which could be attributed to printing difficulties experienced during the Italo-Abyssinian War. The 1934 issue was the only one not printed by the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company; 'Special Anniversary Number 'Il Giornale Italiano'', *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, July 25, 1934, p. 1; 'I Fondatori e Dirigenti Della 'Cosmopolitan'', *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, October 28, 1937, pp. 31–49.

⁴⁰ 'I Dirigenti Del 'Giornale Italiano'', p. 101; 'I Direttori Della 'Cosmopolitan Publishing Co. Ltd.', *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, June 30, 1936, pp. 103–05.

⁴¹ The Florentino was an Italian and continental restaurant which attracted a sophisticated clientele; For details of the Massoni family's restaurant history, see A. Latreille, 'French Food From An Italian Tradition', *The Age*, Melbourne, August 28, 1979, p. 15; For details of the "Spaghetti Mafia", see E. Page, 'The Spaghetti Mafia', *The Herald*, Melbourne, September 8, 1980, p. 7; Massoni's trade was noted in his naturalisation record, see NAA: A659, 1939/1/11297.

⁴² Rinaldo Massoni's granddaughter Michele Massoni-Dubuc found no documents among Massoni's personal papers about the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company or the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*. Personal communication, Michele Massoni-Dubuc, 15th & 17th August 2012.

⁴³ The Italian Society changed its name to the Society Restaurant when World War II began, according to A. Latreille, 'The 'Club' Top O'Bourke', *The Age*, Melbourne, August 14, 1979, p. 15; 'I Fondatori e Dirigenti Della 'Cosmopolitan'', pp. 35, 43.

⁴⁴ 'I Fondatori e Dirigenti De 'Il Giornale Italiano'', *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, October 28, 1937, p. 29.

⁴⁵ There was no evidence in Battistessa's private papers held at the Mitchell Library in Sydney to connect him to the book. However, he wrote many letters to newspapers defending Italian food and wine. An example is a letter he wrote in response to Dame Zara Holt's comment published on the 28th October 1968 in *The Australian* about the poor quality of continental wines: "Such incredible, unjustifiable, slashing, slur against the superior, fine wines of Italy, France, Portugal, Spain and Germany, to name the foremost, famous wine-growing, Continental countries, will make the bones of such expert connoisseurs [sic], and discriminating gourmets: Cato, Horace, Cicero, Virgil, Pliny, Lucullus, Omar Khayam, to mention only a few portentous wine-lovers, rattle with anger in their grave." See Franco Battistessa Correspondence, 1916-1977 (being mainly letters received), F. Battistessa – Papers, 1912-1982, MLMSS 5288 Add-on 1917, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

⁴⁶ A. Cappello, 'Italian Australians, the Church, War and Fascism in Melbourne 1919-1945' (Masters' diss., Victoria University of Technology, 1999), p. 24.

⁴⁷ NAA, series 1233/1, item N25326, Italian Enemy Aliens and Naturalised British Subjects of Italian Origin

South Australia's Loveday Internment Camp, a report on his character and "political outlook" noted that "Bianchi, although having a Fascist history and even now being a firm believer in the Fascist ideals, is undoubtedly anti-Mussolini".⁴⁸ Similarly Battistessa, who established the first *Fascio* in India and politically "belonged to the fascists of the 'first hour'"⁴⁹, is described by historian Gianfranco Cresciani as a dissident fascist, not happy with the Italian state's control over the *Fasci*.⁵⁰ Some of the men listed in the *Vade Mecum* as founders, directors or shareholders of the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company are described as exemplary fascists and/or patriots, and many of them belong to fascist-leaning clubs and organisations. However this is not helpful in attempting to understand their political beliefs when you consider what Battistessa himself told the Commonwealth Investigation Branch in 1939: "Only 6% of the Italians in Australia are registered Fascists ... of these merely 10% are genuine Fascists by conviction and ex militants from Italy, 15% are merely opportunists who joined up for fear or in the hope of material advantages, while the remaining 75% have linked up with Fascism for sentimental reasons and in sympathy with the movement which they sincerely believe has regenerated Italy."⁵¹ While Battistessa's comments may have been politically motivated, they are supported by Italian journalist Pino Bosi who believes "most Italians attended its [the Fascist Party's] functions [in Australia], making little distinction between patriotism, nationalism and Fascism".⁵²

suitable for review in relation to release and employment under supervision of national work quoted in G. Cresciani, 'A Not So Brutal Friendship. Italian Responses to National Socialism in Australia', in *Altreltalie* 34, 2007, p. 20.

⁴⁸ NAA: B741, V/16878S.

⁴⁹ Author translation of “appartiene ai fascisti della ‘prima ora’” in *I Fondatori e Dirigenti De ‘Il Giornale Italiano’*, p. 29.

⁵⁰ G. Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1980, pp. 58-9.

⁵¹ NAA, series A6126, item 57, Battistessa to CIB Inspector Ronald Browne, 14 August 1939 quoted in Cresciani, 'A Not So Brutal Friendship. Italian Responses to National Socialism in Australia', p. 7.

⁵² P. Bosi, 'The Fatal Years of Irrevocable Destinies (Part 2) – Italian Politics and Italian-Australians (Between Two Wars)', in *Italy Down Under* 13, Winter 2004, p. 55.



Fig. 4. *The founders and directors of Il Giornale Italiano, in Vade Mecum degli Italiani in Australia, 1937, p.29.*





Fig. 5. The founders and directors of the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company, in *Vade Mecum degli Italiani in Australia*, 1937, pp. 31f.

Untangling the exact political beliefs of these men is beyond the scope of this paper, but what is clear from the newspaper, the publishing company and the *Vade Mecum*, is that these migrants were proud of their Italian heritage and largely concerned with furthering the interests of Italians in Australia, while building a bridge between themselves and their new country. Under the title “Viva L’Australia! Viva L’Italia! Our Appeal to the Australian Press For a Better Understanding and the Promotion of the Italo-Australian Friendship”, Battistessa writes *Il Giornale Italiano* “has clearly defined its aim by the following, unmistakable caption, spread across its heading ‘In forefront of our policy: the promotion and maintenance of friendly relations between the Italian and Australian peoples’.”⁵³ In support of this, the paper also published a section in English, a move which was praised by various politicians including NSW Premier Sir Bertram Stevens⁵⁴, and encour-

⁵³ F. Battistessa, ‘Viva L’Australia! Viva L’Italia! Our Appeal to the Australian Press For a Better Understanding and the Promotion of the Italo-Australian Friendship’, *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, August 27, 1932, p. 1.

⁵⁴ ‘N.S.W. Premier’s Message to Our Journal’, *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, June 22, 1938, p. 1.

aged both Italians to learn English and “British-Australian readers” to learn Italian in the belief that “the good work of assimilation would be immensely expedited” if they did so.⁵⁵



Fig. 6. Double spread advertisement for *Il Giornale Italiano* and the *Cosmopolitan Publishing Company*, published in *Vade Mecum degli Italiani in Australia*, 1937, pp. 26f.

While the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company printed everything from baptism announcements to *Fascio* newsletters for the Italian community, many of their publications were focused on helping Australians understand Italians and the works discuss different facets of Italian culture seemingly for those less familiar with it. These works, more often than not, were published in English or in both Italian and English. Publications included the *Newest Italian-English Reader/Nuovissimo Libro di Lettura Italiano-Inglese* (1936) by Gino Nibbi, intended to help those learning Italian; *What for? Abyssinia, the League: The point of View of a Naturalized Australian on the Italo-Abyssinian Dispute* (1936) by A. Baccarini, an explanation of Italy’s decision to go to war in Ethiopia; and *Il Canzoniere Italiano in Australia* (1937), a collection of “48 of the most popular patriotic and Neapolitan songs”.⁵⁶ A

⁵⁵ ‘Still Forward’, *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, September 28, 1938, p. 34.

⁵⁶ Gino Nibbi’s book was printed by the Cosmopolitan Publishing Company on behalf of his well-known Leonardo Art Shop. G. Nibbi, *Newest Italian-English Reader/Nuovissimo Libro Di Lettura Italiano-Inglese*, Leonardo Art Shop: Cosmopolitan Publishing Co. Limited, Melbourne, 1936; A. Baccarini, *What for? Abyssinia, The League: The Point of View of a Naturalized Australian on the Italo-Abyssinian Dispute*, Cosmopolitan Publishing Co. Limited, Melbourne, 1936; Author’s translation of ‘48 Canzonette Patriottiche e Napoletane piu’ Popolari’ in *Il Canzoniere Italiano in Australia*, Cosmopolitan Publishing Co. Limited, Melbourne, 1937. The latter

cookbook on Italian food written in English fits very much within this mould – it was another aspect of Italian culture that the publishers wanted to communicate to an Australian audience. It also fits with the character of the company's founder, according to Pino Bosi, who knew Filippo Maria Bianchi in a professional capacity. Bosi maintains that Bianchi was "highly intelligent and a smooth business operator" as well as a master of public relations.⁵⁷ According to Bosi, Bianchi understood that the way to make people sympathetic to your cause, which in this case, was Italians and Italian culture, was to "seduce rather than frontally attack". He believes Bianchi could very well have been the brains behind the cookbook because he knew that the way to show Italians' worth, in the face of an often ambivalent Anglo-Australian attitude, was by "seduction". As Bosi tells it, Bianchi understood that if you can't win a duel, you invite them to lunch, and the cookbook, as we shall see, can be regarded as an invitation to dine.⁵⁸

The most definitive evidence of the 'Italian' genesis of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* comes in the form of an Italian language version.⁵⁹ Titled "*La Cucina Continentale*" ("The Continental Cookery Book") and published about four months after the English edition, the book is an almost identical translation from the original with a few notable differences.⁶⁰ Some of the advertisements

for *La Cucina Continentale* call it the "Libro di Cucina Italiana e Continentale" ("Book of Italian and Continental Cuisine") and refer to the English version in Italian as "the first Italian cookbook printed in Australia."⁶¹ Interestingly the explicit labelling of the book as "Italian" does not occur in any of the English-language advertising for the English edition. Also, while the English version is concerned with explaining the geographic origins of many of the Italian dishes, much of this content has been removed, as have most introductory sections, many literary references and pronunciation instructions. In the Italian version there also appears to be an assumption that the intended (Italian) audience can cope with the full titles of some of the dishes, which the author had apparently deemed too difficult to pronounce in the English version.⁶² What is left is a stripped back book of recipes, where educating the reader on various facets of Italian and continental food is not the priority that it was in the English version, perhaps because: "The Italian housewife is already instinctively a good cook and this book more than having the pretence of teaching her, rather is intended to make complete her knowledge of the art of cooking."⁶³

Less care appears to have been taken with the Italian version. For example the order of recipes has been changed with the result that methods are sometimes referred to as if they have appeared in a previous recipe when in fact they are only included later on in the

was not published in English, as it contains song lyrics which are in either Neapolitan dialect or Italian.

⁵⁷ Bosi, 'The Fatal Years of Irrevocable Destinies (Part 2) – Italian Politics and Italian-Australians Between Two Wars', pp. 57–58.

⁵⁸ Personal communication, Pino Bosi, 27th August 2012.

⁵⁹ There is one known copy in Australian libraries of the Italian edition. It is at the NLA and is bound together with the English version. There is no evidence to suggest the book was ever sold this way, and therefore it is logical to assume that this binding was done independently of the publishing company.

⁶⁰ These differences include dropping "First Australian" from the title, use of the metric system, often with the imperial system given in brackets, and the addition of 10 recipes, primarily in the "Game" section. Also, the Italian version does not have four recipes which are in the English edition, including "Curried Spaghetti", which perhaps was thought to be inappropriate for Italian palates. It is also notable that the "About Wines" chapter is excluded from the Italian version.

⁶¹ 'Sfogliando...', *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, June 15, 1938, p. 6; Author's translation of 'il primo libro di cucina italiana stampato in Australia' from 'Un Regalo Natalizio Di Grande Utilità', *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, November 24, 1937, p. 3.

⁶² For example, "Potatoes in the Russian Way", which was described as easier to make than pronounce in the English version is given the same title in the Italian, "Patate alla Russa", but the introduction includes the actual name of the dish: "Volete sapere come si chiama questo piatto in Russia? Eccovi accontentati: Pekenaiio Kartofeliv Smetane." (Author's translation: "Do you want to know what this dish is called in Russia? Here you are: Pekenaiio Kartofeliv Smetane.") *La Cucina Continentale*, Cosmopolitan Publishing Co. Limited, Melbourne, 1937, p. 201.

⁶³ Author's translation of "La massaia italiana e' gia' istintivamente una buona cuoca e questo libro piu' che avere la pretesa d'insegnarle, ha lo scopo invece d'integrare la sua conoscenza in fatto di arte culinaria", *Ibid.*, A.

text.⁶⁴ There also are a number of inconsistencies with the translation: for example the “ham” from “Whiting in the German Way” in the English edition is translated as “prosciutto (‘bacon’),” even though bacon is also translated as “carne secca (‘bacon’),” “carnesecca (‘bacon’),” “lardo” and sometimes just “bacon”, and ham is usually translated as simply “prosciutto”.⁶⁵ This could suggest that more than one person translated it, or it was simply not proofread, which the proliferation of several errors also supports.⁶⁶ All of this implies that the priority of the company was publishing the English version – the Italian edition appears to have been an afterthought or the move of a smart businessman, which Bianchi reportedly was, capitalising on work that had already been done. The other major difference is the preface: while the English “Foreword” is a call for Australians to consider continental, and more specifically Italian and Mediterranean recipes, as worthy because they have stood the test of time and are consistent with nutritional advice of the day, the Italian “Prefazione” more directly targets Italian housewives and their egos. As noted, the author already believes they know how to cook but has “[i]ncluded many tips and suggestions on the preparation and preservation of various foods, much more useful if we consider that as a result of climate, water and raw materials available in Australia, even the most

expert Italian cook might be faced with difficulties compromising the success of her delicacies.”⁶⁷

A cultural product of Australia

While the pro-Italian sentiment expressed in the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is probably what one would expect from a group of Italians linked with fascism, perhaps more surprising is the author’s enthusiasm for Australia and in particular Australian produce. The country is, according to the author, blessed with an abundance from nature: “No country in the world is better qualified than Australia to win lucrative and healthful results from fish” and “[i]n Australian waters there are many and good varieties of rays with delicate and tasty flesh”; its climate is also enviable: “[T]he materials for salad-making are so abundant, especially in sunny Australia” and “[n]o climate in the world is better suited for poultry-raising”.⁶⁸ The book also includes recipes of no discernible ethnicity that we could call Australian because they make a feature of Australian produce, like “Schnapper a’ la Sydney” which is a variation on “Sole a’ la Francaise” but requires the addition of a dozen oysters, which are described as being more common in Australia than they are in France or Italy.⁶⁹ Perhaps the author’s greatest enthusiasm is reserved for the wine industry: “In Australia, if it [the wine industry] did not start so soon, it will certainly live as long. We claim this, in fact, for one of the chief merits of our book, that it should bring into something like its right perspective a healthful, remunerative, open-air industry destined to grow so vigorously during the coming years.”⁷⁰ The author was, of course, correct and very far-sighted.

⁶⁴ For example, “Cozze alla Marinara” (the corresponding recipe in the English edition is titled “Marinated Mussels”) states “Fate cuocere cinque o sei dozzine di cozze in acqua come e’ detto sopra.” (Author’s translation: “Cook five or six dozen mussels in water as described above.”) The recipe it refers to, unlike the English edition, is not above, it is three recipes after it. Ibid., p. 78.

⁶⁵ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 52; *La Cucina Continentale*, pp. 54, 58, 105, 106, 124, 147.

⁶⁶ Errors include “covolfiore” instead of “cavolfiore” (“cauliflower”) and “Sherry” written as “Cherry” throughout, Ibid, pp. 191, 219; This is not to say there are not errors in the English version, and sometimes these errors are corrected, or an attempt is made at correction, in the Italian version. For example “Eel soup in the Polish Style” in the English edition is described as a Polish national soup, however the method corresponds to the Dutch soup Aalsoep. In the Italian, the recipe is titled “Zuppa di Anguilla alla Polacca (Aalsoep)” (“Eel soup in the Polish Style (Aalsoep)”) and is described as a national dish of Holland. *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 61; *La Cucina Continentale*, p. 95.

⁶⁷ Author’s translation of “Vi sono inclusi numerosi consigli e suggerimenti sulla preparazione e conservazione delle varie vivande, tanto piu’ utili se si considera, come a causa del clima, dell’acqua e delle materie prime disponibili in Australia, anche la cucina italiana piu’ esperta potrebbe trovarsi di fronte a difficoltà compromettenti la buona riuscita dei suoi manicaretti”, Ibid., A.

⁶⁸ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, pp. 31, 69, 142, 204.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 63, 82.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 293.

To further dilute any sense of Italian parochialism, the multi-ethnic nature of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* can be argued to be reflective of a 'new' country's mindset free of the 'oppression' of culinary tradition.⁷¹ In addition to the cuisines already mentioned as being represented in the book, there are recipes from America, Austria, Portugal, Poland, Holland, Denmark, England, Wales, Scotland, Belgium, India, Greece, Tunisia and Hungary. The list may appear to stretch the definition of "continental" but it was not uncommon in this period for "continental food" to be used as a synonym of "foreign food".⁷² It is hard to imagine a similarly broadminded book of foreign recipes being published in Italy under Mussolini's fascist regime in the 1930s.⁷³

Accessibility

That the book includes recipes from Britain and Scotland, both with and without a continental twist⁷⁴, does seem strange, unless we consider their use as part of an overall strat-

egy on the part of the author to make the book acceptable and accessible to a mainstream Australian audience. In the recipe for "Scotch Shortbread", the author even admits "[s]trictly speaking, we are deserting the Continental kitchen for the moment to enter the sacred precincts of the Scottish kitchen, but it has struck us that even a Continental cooking-book cannot do less than include this sweet with its wide Christmas popularity."⁷⁵ Perhaps the author felt to include popular and familiar recipes such as shortbread, amongst others, would make readers feel comfortable and more likely to try some of the less familiar and more exotic recipes. Evidence of this desire not to alienate can also be found in the way the author is careful not to dismiss British food outright, the culinary tradition at the heart of the Australian diet: "Not, for a moment, that the latter [British cookery] has no merits, but that so many of its good points are unsuitable, or only half-suited, to Australian conditions." Two paragraphs later, the author underlines that British cookery is not without worth, however "with all its merits," it just does not have the same "illustrious pedigree [as French cookery which is derived from Italian cookery]".⁷⁶

Calling the English version of the book a "Continental" cookery book rather than an "Italian and Continental cookery book", and not crediting an author who likely had an Italian name could also have been an attempt to make it less threatening. The concept of "continental cookery" would have been familiar to a middle-class Australian housewife in the 1930s, whereas "Italian cookery" was much less well known.⁷⁷ Also, it could be argued that the term "Italian" was likely to have had some negative connotations in this period. While the Italian migrant community in Australia was relatively small, especially considering the size it would swell to after the Second World War, there was fear especially in the sugarcane plantations of Queensland that Italian labour would take Australian jobs, and many

⁷¹ For a discussion of the inventiveness of Australian cooks, see B. Santich, *Bold Palates*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, SA, 2012.

⁷² For example, a feature on "Continental Cookery" in a 1934 issue of *Everylady's Journal* includes recipes labelled as South African and Chinese amongst the more expected ones from Europe. See 'Continental Cookery. Unusual Recipes Gathered from Many Countries', *Everylady's Journal*, Melbourne, January 1, 1934, p. 32.

⁷³ Italian cookbooks in the fascist era borrowed from "regional specialities adapted for national use" but were mostly about teaching housewives how to get by "under the increasing restrictions caused by Mussolini's drive for self-sufficiency", C. Helstosky, 'Recipe for the Nation: Reading Italian History Through La Scienza in Cucina and La Cucina Futurista', in *Food and Foodways* 11, no. 2–3, 2003, pp. 126–7; The spectacular exception was F.T. Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932), which communicated the ideals of futurism, a movement which, at least initially, was strongly linked to Italian fascism. Both fascists and futurists were against the use of foreign language and what they saw as foreign culture in Italy, so it is unlikely that they would accept a cookbook made up of foreign and Italian recipes. For more on the fascist attitude to foreign culture in Italy, see Cannistraro, 'Mussolini's Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?'

⁷⁴ The observation that the recipes are both with and without a continental twist was made by Bannerman, *Acquired Tastes: Celebrating Australia's Culinary History*, p. 56.

⁷⁵ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 264.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁷ A 1935 article by Enid Lyons, wife of Australian PM Joseph Lyons, about her impressions of Italy records that she was completely unfamiliar with Italian food. See E. Lyons, 'Mrs. Lyons's Impressions of Italy', *The Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, April 22, 1935, p. 14.

examples of racism against Italians were evident.⁷⁸ Anti-Italian sentiment may have been further exacerbated by the Second Italo-Abyssinian War.

In keeping with the general accessibility of the book, the author makes allowances for culturally-conditioned tastes and this can be seen in regards to garlic, an item to which Australians have traditionally been averse. The author is aware of this and allows for it: in the recipe for “Chine of Pork”, for example, the advice is to “[a]dd a dash of garlic if you like”.⁷⁹ In the case of olive oil, however, the author is less permissive: “As regards the oil, the advice is not only pithy, but healthful. If you are, or think you are, deficient in a taste for good olive oil, correct your error as fast as you can.”⁸⁰ However, this edict on olive oil is something of an exception, with the author generally allowing for substitutions where necessary: in “Schnapper with Cheese”, for example, the author says use “Kraft cheese, for instance, if you have not got any Gruyere”.⁸¹ Although it should also be noted that Kraft is an advertiser in the book, which could have influenced its inclusion here, there is a general tone of not being too prescriptive, especially with things that may be unfamiliar.

The decision of the author to use English when giving the titles of foreign recipes also adds to the book’s approachability. While there is some use of Italian and other foreign words, these are usually provided in brackets or inverted commas, or, more commonly, not given at all. For example, a recipe describing a disc of dough topped with cheese and tomato is not called pizza, but is simply “A Neapolitan Recipe.”⁸² Comparing the titles of the same recipes in the English edition to the Italian version reveals words which the author must have thought were just too foreign. The “Genoese Ribbon-Macaroni” in the English edition, for example, becomes “Lasagne col Pesto

alla Genovese” in the Italian version.⁸³ Using the term “ribbon-macaroni” instead of lasagne is an example of the author speaking to the audience in terms they might better understand – macaroni was a generic term to describe all kinds of pasta in Australia in the early half of the previous century, whereas few people would have understood what was meant by lasagne. The same could be said of pizza and pesto. Of course, all of these words have since entered everyday food language in Australia.

The use of English in recipe titles seems to have been a conscious decision especially when we consider the way recipes were named in a book which served as source material for the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book: Countess Morphy’s Recipes of All Nations*.⁸⁴ This book, published in 1935 in London and New York, and also available in Australia, contains so many similar recipes that it is highly likely that the author, in some places, copied from it though quantities and ingredients were frequently altered.⁸⁵ One major difference, however, is the approach to naming recipes: Morphy generally uses the native language followed by an English translation in brackets, for example, “Streichkäse mit Käseresten (A cheese savory)” whereas a very similar recipe in the *First Australian Con-*

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 96; *La Cucina Continentale*, p. 101.

⁸⁴ Countess Morphy was the pseudonym of Marcelle Azra Forbes née Hincks, a New Orleans native who found success as a cookbook writer in London in the 1930s and 1940s. F. Kelso, *For the Love of Fungus: A One Hundred Year Bibliography of Mushroom Cookery, 1899-1999*, Hengwrt Pub, Oxford, Pa, 2009, pp. 4–5.

⁸⁵ The altering of times, ingredients and methods make it difficult to prove plagiarism. However, by concentrating on errors, there is strong evidence. For example, the recipe for “French Vegetable Soup” in the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* (titled “Zuppa di Legumi alla Francese (Brunoise)” in the Italian version) has the same introductory sentence, though paraphrased, as *Recipes of All Nations*’ “Brunoise (Vegetable Soup)”, however the ingredients and method are nothing alike. Instead the ingredients and method, again paraphrased and with some minor timing alterations, match the recipe listed below in *Recipes of All Nations* – “Potage aux Herbes (Sorrel, Lettuce, and Chervil Soup)”. *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 26; *La Cucina Continentale*, p. 24; Countess M. Morphy, *Recipes of All Nations*, WM. H. Wise & Company, New York, 1935), p. 29.

⁷⁸ See, as an example of racism against Italians, Brisbane’s Truth Cartoon Against Italians in G. Cresciani, *Migrants or Mates: Italian Life in Australia*, Knockmore Enterprises, Sydney, 1988, pp. 164–5.

⁷⁹ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 138.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 204.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 64.

⁸² Ibid., p. 269.

tinental Cookery Book is simply “German Cheese Savouries”.⁸⁶ Other differences between the two books highlight some of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* author’s intentions. Unlike *Recipes of All Nations*, the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is not divided into chapters according to nationality; instead “Meat Soup in Barcelona Style” is followed by “Romagna Christmas Soup” in the “Soups” chapter, and as a result, the book, like the publisher’s name, does have a cosmopolitan air.⁸⁷ Also, while *Recipes of All Nations* contains recipes from countries like Japan, China and the continent of South America, the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* completely ignores these. The author’s decision not to include Asian or South American recipes suggests that he or she believes Australia’s food culture should be primarily European, perhaps because it is the food culture that the author most understood.⁸⁸ That *Recipes of All Nations* provides source material for the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* proves that it is indeed alive with “hybrid vigour”. In fact we see globalisation at work: recipes by an American-born woman who lived in England and wrote for both English and American housewives, with help from a variety of French, Italian and German chefs working in London and New York, amongst others, are used as either inspiration or more directly copied by what was almost certainly an Italian migrant writing for an Australian audience.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 401; *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 275.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁸⁸ India is the only Asian cuisine represented in the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*. It could be argued that this is because Indian food, or perhaps more correctly Anglo-Indian food, was already part of the English culinary tradition by the 19th century, as described by A. Bullock, ‘The Cosmopolitan Cookbook: Class, Taste, and Foreign Foods in Victorian Cookery Books’, in *Food, Culture & Society* 15, no. 3, 2012, p. 440. Also, notably, Battistessa and Bianchi both lived in India before migrating to Australia, and there is a curious addition to the recipe “Sformato di Bracioline e Verdure” in *La Cucina Continentale*, p. 106, which is not present in the corresponding recipe “Cutlets and Vegetables” in the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 102: “Gl’Indiani sono molto golosi di questa pietanza.” (“The Indians just love this dish.”) Perhaps this line was added by Bianchi or Battistessa, writing from personal experience?

Using some familiar recipes, allowing for personal taste and substitutions, explaining recipes in terms which the audience would understand and minimising the use of foreign language appear to have indeed made the book accessible to an Australian mainstream audience, at least according to an *Argus* book reviewer who, in August 1937, stated that most of the dishes from the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* “seem to be appetising enough to tempt even conservative cooks to experiment”.⁸⁹

Fidelity to origins

Making recipes accessible did not necessarily mean that the author was compromising or dumbing them down. Throughout the book there is a tension between the author’s desire to be correct and true to the origins of particular dishes, especially Italian ones, and the need to publish a book which an Australian audience would accept and use. While it has been noted that Italian and foreign words are generally avoided, in some cases they are used, perhaps because the author believes no acceptable English equivalent exists. Where these words are used, they are generally followed by an explanation: “Risotto” is “(a mixture of rice, butter, and grated cheese)”; “Foccacia” is followed by “(a kind of cake or bun)”; and after the method explaining “Artichokes in Pinzimonio” the author adds “[p]inzimonio’ is the Italian name of the sauce. Into it they dip, too, the raw celery, etc.”⁹⁰

The author was also clearly interested in challenging what his or her audience might believe they knew about Italian food. Nowhere is this more evident than in the entry for “Broth”:

*Spaghetti, by its shape, its colour,
its knack of giving relish to other food,*

⁸⁹ ‘Two Cookery Books’, *The Argus*, Melbourne, August 18, 1937, p. 18.

⁹⁰ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, pp. 130, 172, 227. Regarding focaccia, while Australians have come to know it as a flat bread with garlic and herbs, filled like a sandwich, the author is also correct as there are sweet as well as savoury versions according to J. Irving and P. Gho, eds., *The Slow Food Dictionary to Italian Regional Cooking*, Slow Food Editore, Bra, Italy, 2010, pp. 232–33.

*the way of eating it, its own taste,
and the dash of local colour
traditionally associated with it,
assumes in the mind and imagination
of the tourist in Italy such an
importance that for him Italian
cookery and spaghetti have become
almost synonymous ... Any candid
examination, in fact, would show that
the one of all Italian national dishes
most widely and persistently [sic]
consumed is the well known thick
soup (minestra) of which a
fundamental ingredient is broth
(brodo).⁹¹*

Intelligent & witty

The *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is written with intelligence and wit which is not always evident in other Australian cookbooks of the 1930s.⁹² There are many literary references, and these are not restricted to Italian authors, for example, of the belief that spaghetti is Italy's national dish: "This impression, like the report of Mark Twain's death, is slightly exaggerated"; of a sweet biscuit called "Cenci ... [t]his name has nothing to do with Shelley's tragedy"; and of "Trout in the Moorish Way ... Othello himself may have enjoyed it, who knows?"⁹³ Expert opinion is cited on diet and nutrition, including Sir Robert McCarrison, a Northern Irish expert on nutrition, and, significantly, Australian doctor Philip E. Muskett, who is referenced in relation to Australians' inability to cook vegetables:

*... a state of things all the less
excusable seeing that it is now many
years since the late Dr. Muskett not
only urged their use, but in his*

*"Australian Book of Diet" described
how it should be done.⁹⁴*

Muskett believed that Australians ate too much meat, not enough vegetables and fish, and would benefit from eating more like those in Mediterranean countries.⁹⁵ His thoughts are echoed throughout the book and are clearly shared by the author with recipes for fish and vegetables numbering in the hundreds, while there are only 21 recipes in the "Meat" chapter.

The wit of the author is on display in recipes like "Lamb in a Hurry": "To start with, it must be real lamb, not mutton rejuvenated like ambitious ladies on the wrong side of forty"; in the recipe for "Hare Loaf", which references the famous alleged quote of 18th century English cookery book writer Hannah Glasse, "First, catch your hare": "We assume, in fact, that the hare has been caught by someone else, and merely request our readers, in the traditional language of the kitchen oracles, to 'take' it"; and in the recipe for "Baba", a pastry with a hole in the middle, which means woman in Polish: "'Baba' is a Polish word of which a definition may be constructed from this recipe."⁹⁶

This demonstrates that our author was not only highly educated and somewhat playful but regarded food as a subject of cultural significance without a hint of being patronising. The *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is not simply a book of recipes, it is also a celebration of the civilizational importance of cooking, which the author says "can proudly claim to be at once the oldest of arts and the youngest of sciences", "[t]he oldest of arts, because one cannot picture a humanity in possession of any art at all, and yet so undeveloped as not to have already rebelled against the repulsiveness of raw meat, and invented Cookery as the corrective" and "[t]he youngest of sciences, inasmuch as it is only of recent years that the Dietist has been taken

⁹¹ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 12.

⁹² Some examples of 1930s cookbooks, which do not, by and large, share the wit evident in the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* include: A. A. Drummond, *The Blossoms Cookery Book*, Hunkin, Ellis & King, Adelaide, 1931; A. M. Campbell and Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union of Victoria, *The New P.W.M.U. Cookery Book*, 3rd impres., Brown, Prior, Anderson, Melbourne, 1936; *The Leader Spare Corner Book: A Unique Collection of Home and Household Hints and Kitchen Recipes - Part X*, The Age, Melbourne, 1938.

⁹³ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, pp. 12, 47, 267.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁹⁵ For Muskett's opinion on the Australian diet see P. E. Muskett, *The Art of Living in Australia*, The University of Adelaide Library, Adelaide, 2004, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/muskett/philip/art/>

⁹⁶ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, pp. 113, 221, 305.

seriously enough to impart weight to his learned confirmation of what mere ordinary Cooks had discovered themselves thousands of years ago ... that some foods are of much greater value than some others..."⁹⁷

Audience

Another key difference between this book and others typical of this time is that the author does not appear to be speaking primarily or solely to women: "Nothing is too fantastic, nothing too ambitious, for *his* [author's emphasis] genial imagination to suggest as a means of tickling the diner's palate."⁹⁸ While at other times the author addresses both sexes: "By his or her meat, you'll know your cook."⁹⁹ This is not to say that women are never directly addressed; they are, especially in regards to domestic economy: "A good cook will save her household a vast amount of expense by making an attractive and nutritious dish out of cuts that will cost, with luck, not more than a half, or even a quarter, of what must be paid for their expensive rivals"¹⁰⁰ and the "housewife" is frequently invoked, often in a way that expresses a sexism characteristic of its time: "The following recipes [from famous continental chefs] ... state the methods so plainly that the average housewife will find no difficulty in following such illustrious examples ... [a]nyhow, we have done our best".¹⁰¹ Overall, however, the book is not explicitly aimed at women – being a good wife or mother or even hostess are never mentioned – and this supports the idea that the book is written for all Australians.¹⁰² The title reinforces this, as does the first sentence of the book: "This volume is the First

Continental Cookery Book printed in Australia for Australians".¹⁰³

However, the book was advertised in distinctly different ways, which were not always reflective of the actual contents. Classified advertisements in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Courier-Mail* addressed the housewife, saying the book is "a boon to the housewife" and "teaches you to cook well and eat better."¹⁰⁴ In *Il Giornale Italiano*, however, display advertisements market the book as the perfect gift to buy your Australian friends for Christmas, yet more evidence of the publishing company wanting their migrant readers to reach out and connect with mainstream Australians.¹⁰⁵ It also is advertised on the English pages of *Il Giornale Italiano*, and these are the only ads that market the book as ideal for entertaining and dinner parties, something to which the book does not make reference.¹⁰⁶ Possibly, the publisher believes Australians regard continental cookery as food for entertaining, and will market it as such, even if that was not the main stated intention of the author. Once the Italian version was published, *Il Giornale Italiano* ads continue to suggest Italians buy the English version for Australian

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁰² As opposed to the Italian version which says it is actually for Italian housewives; there is one exception in the English version, the "Sweets" chapter is explicitly aimed at women: "Here is, sure enough, if anywhere, the peculiarly and appropriately feminine department of the noble art of Cookery. Not that the she-cook fails to shine in all branches – perish the thought! – but that here the eternal feminine is wont to revel in results that mere man, unless a culinary genius, can only contemplate and enjoy with respectful admiration." Ibid., p. 214.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 1; Despite this claim from the author, evidence suggests it was not the first continental cookery book published in Australia – gas companies in Sydney and Adelaide published booklets of continental recipes by Madame Leo Cherniavsky in the late 1920s and 1930s; Anne Dyason's *A Cook's Tour for Cooks*, published in 1931, featured dishes from around the world; and *Nu-kooka, A Modern Cookery Book* which contained Jewish and continental dishes appeared in the 1930s. See M.me L. Cherniavsky, *Continental Recipes*, Australian Gas Light Company, Sydney, n.d.; M.me L. Cherniavsky, *Continental Recipes*, Adelaide, The South Australian Gas Company, n.d.; A. Dyason, *A Cook's Tour for Cooks: National Dishes of Nineteen Nations*, Ramsay Publishing Pty. Ltd, Melbourne, 1931; *Nu-kooka, A Modern Cookery Book: Containing Best Jewish and Continental Dishes, Cocktails, Savouries, Confectionery*, Sydney, n.p., n.d.

¹⁰⁴ 'For the Housewife', pp. 2–5; 'A Boon to the Housewife', p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ 'Ecco un'ottima occasione per offrire ai vostri amici Australiani un qualcosa di totalmente diverso che non potranno non apprezzare appieno' (Author's translation: 'This [Christmas] is an excellent opportunity to offer your Australian friends something totally different that they can't fail to fully appreciate'). 'Attenzione!', *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, December 1, 1937, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ 'It's Smart to Entertain Continentally', p. 1.

friends and the Italian version for themselves. It addresses its ads “to gourmet friends” and to connoisseurs, not to housewives or dinner party hostesses, perhaps revealing what it saw as the key difference between the two food cultures.¹⁰⁷ The multitude of marketing messages showed a level of sophistication in differentiating according to the likely medium’s audience while trying to appeal to as wide a readership as possible.

Why was it written?

As we have seen, the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* was written in an accessible but intelligent way, aimed at attracting a large mainstream Australian audience. Why it was written is difficult to answer, especially when the author remains unknown. However if we consider the evidence provided in the book itself and the publishing company behind the book, we can conclude that it was written to persuade Australians that there is a better, more suitable way for them to cook and eat, and that way is based largely upon the history and experience of Italians. This is illustrated in the following quote, which is ostensibly about the inability of Australians to cook vegetables:

*One opposing factor still at work is the prejudice against everything “foreign,” and one forgets or overlooks that the use of certain vegetables in certain “foreign” countries has been the result of centuries and centuries of experience and civilisation.*¹⁰⁸

If we substitute the word “Italian” for foreign and think beyond vegetable cooking advice, the author appears to be urging the audience to embrace Italians because they come from a civilisation that Australians can learn from. This is not to say that the author believes Australia has nothing to offer. As we have seen, he or she readily and enthusiastically acknowledges that Australia has an abundance of natural bounty and is a land of great opportunity – its waters are teeming with fish, its climate is perfect for poultry rearing, and “no

other country in the world offers better opportunities for vegetable-production and appreciation, whether as regards quality, quantity, or variety, than does this Commonwealth” – but Australians don’t always know how to take advantage of this nature because they lack a sophisticated food culture, either because there has not been time to develop one or because “[t]oo many Australians of British stock” have been “over-faithful to the footsteps of their fathers” in following a food tradition that does not suit their climate.¹⁰⁹

That is where the author believes Italy, and Italians, can help, for they have had centuries to develop a food culture that is not just excellent in its own right, but is suitable for Australia because of the similarity to the Mediterranean climate, something Dr Muskett pointed out in the late 19th century.¹¹⁰ In order for Australians to access this culture, they need education, hence the mission of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*.

The author of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* may have been taking the advice given to Italian migrants by the Archbishop of Brisbane James Duhig in the 1934 *Vade Mecum*: “Be proud of your ancestry: never forget “Our Italy” and by your exemplary lives and industrious habits maintain the traditions of your nation and promote the welfare of Australia, your adopted country.”¹¹¹ The *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* author believes his or her heritage can help usher in, if not a culinary revolution than at least a rapid-fire evolution:

*Let us try, here, to do our modest best towards encouraging the opening of a new and better chapter in the history of Australian cookery. Surely the time is ripe for such a move!*¹¹²

This injunction reads like a political manifesto, which, given the fascist heritage of the book, is not incongruous. While the book doesn’t

¹⁰⁷ ‘Agli Amici Buongustai’, *Il Giornale Italiano*, Sydney, February 16, 1938, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

¹¹⁰ P. E. Muskett, *The Book of Diet: With, Also, A Collection of Savoury, Choice, Delicious and Selected Recipes*, George Robertson & Co, Melbourne, 1898.

¹¹¹ J. Duhig, ‘Message To the Sons and Daughters of Italy and Their Children in Australia’, *Vade Mecum*, Sydney, July 25, 1934, p. 5.

¹¹² *First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, p. 165.

seemingly push a fascist agenda, it does express nationalistic sentiments about both Italy and Australia.

The migrants behind the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* wanted, in the words of Battistessa, to forge a strong relationship between “ancient, noble Italy that gave us birth and the new great Australia that is to-day our adopted country and will to-morrow be the fatherland of our children’s children”.¹¹³ This desire to create a relationship between Italy and Australia is evident in the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* and has resulted in the creation of Australia’s first Italo-Australian cookbook. At the same time, the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is not just a marriage of Italian culture and Australian nature; the inclusion of recipes from other cuisines and the use of Countess Morphy’s *Recipes of All Nations* as source material means the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* has been influenced by a wide variety of cultures and, as such, is a truly hybridised product.

Ultimately, the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* challenges the ideas that all Italian migrants were uneducated, had a ghetto mentality and maintained their food traditions as a way to connect with their past. For here were a group of educated Italian migrants who not only wanted to participate and engage with mainstream Australian society, they wanted to actively change it. The *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* is unusual as a migrant-produced cookbook in that it does not sentimentally reference nostalgia and romanticism, instead it appeals to logic and reason – Australians should change the way they eat because it does not suit their climate and it does not make the most of what they naturally have available to them. It is an enterprising and assured work, and in the way it manages to deliver its revolutionary message while attempting not to alienate its audience, it is clever and somewhat subversive. However, clever as it might have been, it did not work. Australians were not ready to

heed the message of the *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* in the 1930s and the onset of World War II would not have encouraged the adoption of foreign food traditions. However, it could be argued, that the future the book envisaged for Australian cooks and eaters, one where Australians embraced foods from many cultures and looked beyond Britain as the main source of their culinary and dietary habits, has in many respects, come true.

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¹¹³ F. Battistessa, ‘Viva L’Australia! Viva L’Italia! Our Appeal to the Australian Press For a Better Understanding and the Promotion of the Italo-Australian Friendship’, p. 1.

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- PWQ7283 Prisoner of War/Internee; Signorini, Oreste; Year of birth – 1890; Nationality – Italian naturalised, 1939 – 1945.
- Q7369 Prisoner of War/Internee; Capra, Celestino Natale Enrico; Year of birth – 1893; Nationality – Italian naturalised, 1939 – 1945.
- PWN9001 Prisoner of War/Internee; Agostini, Antonio; Year of birth – 1903; Nationality – Italian, 1939–1945.
- PWN9011 Prisoner of War/Internee; Battistessa, Franco; Year of birth – 1885; Nationality – Italian, 1939 – 1945.
- National Archives of Australia: Department of the Interior [II], Central Office; A659, Correspondence files, class 1 (general, passports), 01 Jan 1892 – 31 Jul 1970; 1939/1/11297, Massoni, Rinaldo – Naturalisation, 1922 – 1939.
- National Archives of Australia: Investigation Branch, Victoria; B741, Correspondence files, single number series with "V" (Victoria) prefix, 01 Jan 1914 – 31 Dec 1964; BIANCHI, Filippo Mario (sic), 1936 – 1947.
- Mitchell Library. Franco Battistessa – Papers, 1912–1982, MLMSS 5288 Add-on 1917. Mitchell Library, Sydney.

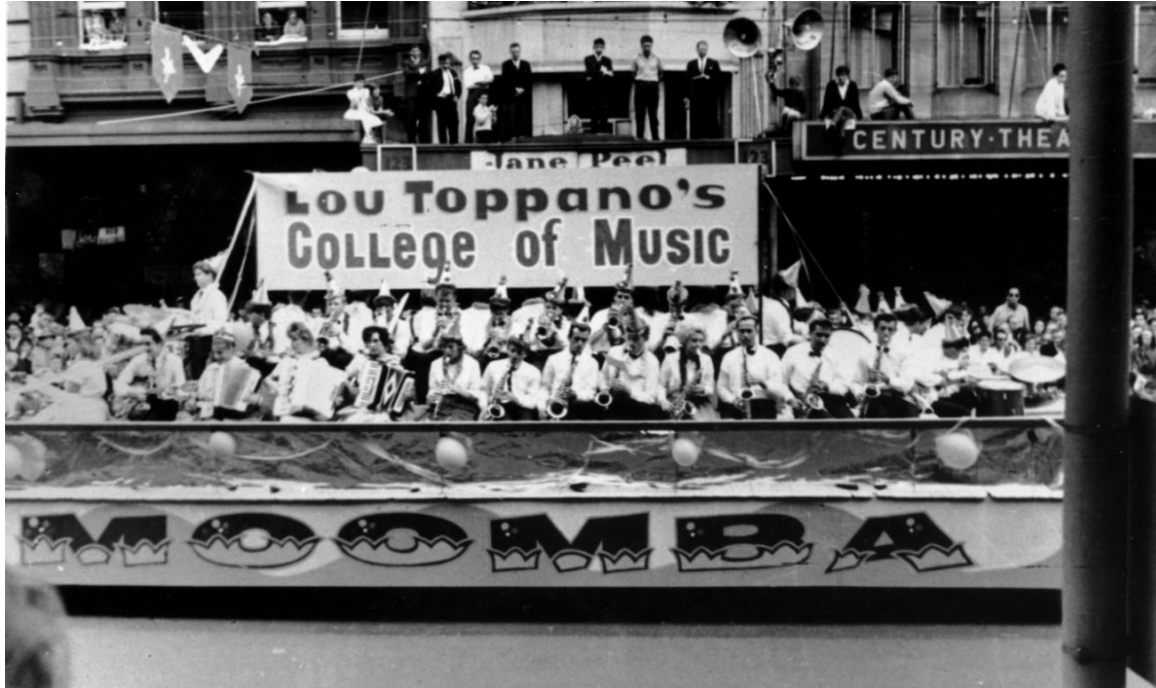


Fig. 1. Lou Toppano's College of Music float in the Moomba parade. This was one of a number of floats with an Italian theme in the parade. Melbourne, Victoria, c1963.

the toppano brothers

by john whiteoak

Dr. John Whiteoak is an adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Sir Zelman Cohen School of Music, Monash University. He has authored a history of improvised music in 19th and 20th century Australia (Currency Press, 1999) and was co-editor for the Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia (2003). He writes on a wide range of music and dance topics and his current book project, The Tango Touch, among other things, documents the role of Italian-Australians in popular music.

Brothers Lou and Enzo Toppano were among Australia's finest virtuoso accordionists. Following Lou's death at the age of 93 in 2012, the passing of Enzo in 2013 marked the end of an era. Enzo, who was born in 1928, was a truly remarkable indi-

vidual and musician. He performed at the highest artistic level to the end of his life and even in his eighties he seemed no more than sixty-five and played with the vitality and intensity of a young man.

A few years back I interviewed Lou Toppano's younger accordionist brother, Enzo Toppano, at his palatial New South Wales coastal home. Lou was unwell and unable to be interviewed at that time but, in addition to meeting Enzo and his gifted children, bassist Dean and renowned Australian actress Peta, I was treated to a private accordion and bass recital in Enzo's home studio. During this recital I felt I was experiencing, first hand, something of the accordion *magia* that mesmerized audiences when his brother Lou first appeared on the Australian entertainment scene. Melbourne audiences experienced this *magia* again in December 2009, when Enzo and Dean broadcast a program of 'Gypsy', Hispanic, Italian and light classical works from the ABC's Melbourne studios in a special instalment of Paul Petran's *Music Deli* dedicated to 'master accordionist' Enzo Toppano.¹ Overall, the brothers' achievements and contributions to Australian musical history are comparable, but Lou's career began earlier and Enzo's was sustained for much longer. Enzo's achievements are documented in (among other things) a comprehensive scrap-book whereas, for whatever reason, Lou retained almost no documentation of his remarkable career.

Lou and Enzo's parents initially immigrated from Italy to Canada and from there to Australia. Lou was born in Winnipeg, Canada, and Enzo was born in the outback New South Wales mining town, Broken Hill, where the Toppano family settled on arrival in Australia. Their mother, Catherine, was a church organist and their father, Leonardo, was a self-taught accordionist of twenty years' experience. He strongly encouraged Lou and, later, Enzo to become accordionists and passed on all of his knowledge to them.

Lou began appearing as a concert artist from around eleven years of age² and performed for the Governor of New South Wales during

his 1933 visit to Broken Hill.³ In 1934 he was in Sydney and hoping to establish himself as a radio and theatre artist. By February 1935 he was appearing four times a day in a cinema stage 'divertissement' at the Prince Edward Theatre with radio stars, Jack Davey, Jack Lumsdaine and others.⁴ It was during this season at the Prince Edward that he came to the attention of Harry Bloom, who needed a replacement for the already legendary accordionist, Peter Piccini, in Bloom's Gypsy-tango band. Lou, although still a teenager, was perfect with his exceptional musical talent, versatility, and stunning 'Latin' looks.⁵



Fig. 2. The Harry Bloom Tango Band. [Image courtesy John Whiteoak.]

The well established popularity of the Bloom tango band ABC broadcasts quickly brought its youthful new accordionist to national music industry and public attention and his image began to appear in illustrated advertisements for Wurlitzer accordions.⁶ After the Hillier's tango band broke up in 1937, Lou appeared at the Prince Edward Theatre and with Jim Davidson's ABC Dance Orchestra on the national network before embarking on an Australian tour for the ABC with a young Finnish saxophone virtuoso, Joseph Kaartinen. This further raised Lou's national profile and also that of the accordion as a light classical music instrument. Lou's own

¹ 18 December 2009. See <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/musicdeli/stories/2009/2770879.htm> (last accessed 3 June 2014). The show also included some trios with accordionists John Kalkbrenner and George Butrumlis.

² 'Sunny Club Concert', *Barrier Miner*, 22 October 1931, p. 4.

³ 'Governor Attends Smoke Social', *Barrier Miner*, 5 July 1933, p. 4.

⁴ 'Prince Edward', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 February 1935, p. 2.

⁵ 'Private Lives: Lou Toppano', *Tempo*, February-March 1942, p. 12.

⁶ See, for example, *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 1 July 1935.

solo repertoire included Russian dances (unspecified), *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* (Liszt), *Liebesfreud* and *Caprice Viennois* (Kreiser), *Prelude* (Rachmaninoff), *Spanish Dance* (Moskowski) and *La Gioconda* (Ponchielli).⁷



Fig. 3. Lou Toppiano in an advertisement for Wurlitzer accordions in the *Australasian Dance and Brass Band News*, 26 July 1937. [Image courtesy John Whiteoak.]

By the end of this tour, Harry Bloom had been invited to form an expanded tango band as the ABC Tango Band and he included Lou, fresh from his very successful ABC tour. The band began broadcasting from the 3LO Melbourne studio in June, and Lou and the band's other accordionist, Eddie Corderoy, grace the cover of a following issue of *The Australian Dance and Brass Band News*.⁸ The remarkable popularity of the expanded tango band – which was expanded yet again in 1938 to become the ABC Dance Orchestra – raised Lou's public profile even further and, with a Spanish guitarist and fiddler from the band, he formed the costumed Gaucho Trio, which broadcast 'Gypsy music of the fiery and spectacularly melodious type' arranged by Lou.⁹ In December 1939 an ABC All-Star concert was held at Sydney Town Hall, which included Lou and the world famous Comedy Harmonists who were

then touring Australia for the ABC. Lou was described beforehand as 'the most brilliant of all Australian accordeonists'.¹⁰ He remained with the ABC Dance orchestra for two more years before enlisting. By early 1942 he was reported as 'in a military camp' conducting the Southern Command Concert Orchestra, which, along with a ballet troupe, entertained troops and raised comfort funds money. He had recently performed his own arrangement of *Rhapsody in Blue* over 3LO as the first accordion performance of this work in Australia.¹¹ In mid-1945 Lou and Enzo recorded a duo version of *Carioca* for the Regal Zonophone label.¹²



Fig. 4. Eddie Corderoy and Lou Toppiano on the cover of *The Australasian Dance and Brass Band News*, 27 September 1937. [Image courtesy John Whiteoak.]

After discharge from the services in 1946, Lou returned to the ABC as a member of the McDuff Williams Variety Orchestra and also led his own quartet in radio engagements¹³. At the end of 1948 he sailed for Canada where he found immediate success in the

⁷ 'News and Notes' *The Queenslander*, 4 March 1937, p. 11.

⁸ 27 September 1937.

⁹ 'The Blossoming of Bloom', *Australasian Dance and Brass Band News*, 1 June 1938, p. 5.

¹⁰ 'A.B.C.'s All-Star Galaxy for Town Hall Concert!', *Australasian Dance and Brass Bands News* (Melbourne), 27 November 1939, p. 3.

¹¹ *Music Maker*, 21 May 1945, p. 24. RZCT2215.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24. Toppiano's record *Carioca* for RZCT2215.

¹³ 'Brighter Test Service From 5AD', *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 9 June 1948, p. 5.

leading theatres, clubs and radio and television stations. He was, for example, one of only two out of a thousand performers to successfully audition for Columbia Broadcasting Services in New York¹⁴. success resulted in four long term contracts, but he was unable to get the immigration clearance needed to fulfil these and was back in Australia by mid-1949, brimming with invaluable media and musical experience from his whirlwind of North American engagements.

Lou broadcast as a soloist, accompanist and accordionist combo leader throughout the following year. In early 1951 he re-engaged with his radio tango band background, starting his own weekly radio show on 2UE Sydney called *Lou Toppino and His Gaucho Quartet*, which continued into 1952. He also formed the Lou Toppino Samba Band, which released a 1952 LP of Latin standards, and also a jazz octet for the June 1952 Australian Rhythm Festival at Melbourne Town Hall.¹⁵

From then onwards Lou's career became centred more upon leading his own orchestras from the accordion than on virtuoso soloing. This shift was enhanced by the participation of wife, Maria, and sister-in-law Eula (a component of the famous radio and recording trio, the Parker Sisters (Pat, Marie and Eula)).

Melbourne television broadcasting commenced in 1956. Television was the perfect medium for this still extremely handsome and photogenic Italian-Australian virtuoso and orchestra leader. From 1957 his weekly appearances with the fast-paced, high-ratings Channel 7 variety show *Sunny Side Up* (adapted for TV from *The Happy Gang*), as musical director leading his orchestra from the accordion, recast him as a widely known television personality.

However, his greatest and most lasting contribution to Melbourne cultural life was the Lou Toppino Music School. He had always

been a sought after and influential teacher,¹⁶ and at the end of the 1950s he embarked upon an ambitious music retail and school enterprise situated in St Kilda, which he relocated to the Melbourne central business district in the early 1960s. The school was a remarkable success. Countless Melbourne musicians began their musical journey in the Toppino teaching studios and with the school's celebrated Lou Toppino Orchestra, which performed at public functions such as the annual Melbourne Moomba Festival. The Toppino school trophies for achievement have become avidly sought after collectables.

By 1943, Lou's fifteen year old brother Enzo had already been performing professionally for eight years and had appeared in radio shows such as *The Youth Show*, *Out of the Bag* and *The Sunny Side of Music Street*. He had also produced the first of a series of technical articles on the accordion for *Tempo*,¹⁷ and would soon appear at the Regent Theatre, as well as performing with Jim Gussey's ABC Dance Band and other radio orchestras. In 1946 he toured occupied Japan for six months with a troupe of well-known Australian entertainers and six tracks of Australian compositions were released under the title *Enzo Toppino and his Rhythm*. The same year he led a cabaret band at Sydney's Manhattan Restaurant and resumed solo work; in July he was reported as featuring his arrangement of *Tico Tico* in a Regent Theatre show called *Spanish Main*. He later joined the State Theatre Orchestra as a member and feature soloist.¹⁸ All of this, however, was just the initial phase of what would be a very long and remarkable career. In March 1949 he boarded the 'Orcares' for England and a three year whirlwind of exciting British and Continental European engagements.

Enzo, like Lou, was gifted with striking Mediterranean handsomeness; there was a certain unpretentious, relaxed but confident manner about him that would have appealed very

¹⁴ 'Australian Piano Accordion Virtuosi', *Tempo*, April 1949, p. 7; 'Letter from Lou Toppino', *Tempo*, April 1949, p. 2.

¹⁵ Spotlight Varieties (Melbourne) SV6.

¹⁶ As early as January 1938, one of his students, Mary Zammit, was advertising as an accordion teacher and 'formerly a pupil of the Australian Champion, Lou Toppino', *Cairns Post*, 20 January 1938, p. 3.

¹⁷ Enzo Toppino, 'The True Place of the Accordion', *Tempo*, November 1943, p. 5.

¹⁸ 'In the News', *Music Maker* 2 July 1946, p. 8.

much to his British employers and professional colleagues. *The Australian Accordionist* described him at that time as having ‘fantastic technique’ but also as ‘one of those gifted people who learn in an easy, almost subconscious way, whatever he makes up his mind to learn.’¹⁹

Within weeks of his 1949 arrival in London he was contracted to do six radio broadcasts on the BBC program, *Without a Word*, followed by the BBC television show *Rooftop Rendezvous*. He then appeared as a soloist with the famous bandleaders Geraldo, Stanley Black, Edmundo Ros, Ambrose and others. He was engaged for forty weeks on the Moss and Stoll vaudeville circuit and other theatre work, including an hour on stage with Gracie Fields. He featured in the *Music for Millions* concert on equal billing with Petula Clarke, Max Bygraves, Julie Andrews, Winifred Atwell and other luminaries, and gave a very successful concert recital at Porchester Hall, London.

He also acquitted himself well in a supporting role for the film *Prelude to Fame*. He had many engagements in Italy and other parts of Europe. In Vienna he came into contact with the brilliant Australian musician and actress Peggy Mortimer, whom he married on returning to London. From then onwards Peggy remained his show business partner. More European touring followed. During that time he also recorded titles like *Tico Tico*, *Tea For Two* and *Hora Staccato* for E.M.I., Nixa and Melodisc.

The Toppanos, who now included daughter Peta, returned to Australia in 1952 to a ten week ABC show called *Meet the Toppanos*. Enzo subsequently took up a role as musical director for Harry Wren Productions, a role he maintained for around five years and which took the Toppanos around Australasia with many theatre productions, beginning with *The Ice Parade*. Over this period, Enzo and Peggy Toppano continued to do radio and other appearances. Soon after their return, Enzo gave a recital at Sydney Conservatorium billed as ‘The World’s Most Brilliant Accordionist’ with

Peggy as ‘guest artist.’²⁰

With the advent of television in New South Wales, Enzo and Peggy were given the Channel 7 breakfast session, also called *Meet the Toppanos*. Enzo also became musical director for Channel 2’s *Continental Café*, and by the 1960s he was musical director for several other shows, doing ‘Command Performance’ concerts across New South Wales and, with Peggy and ten other distinguished music and stage-craft teaching staff, running the Television Music Studios at Fivedock, Sydney with over 300 students.²¹

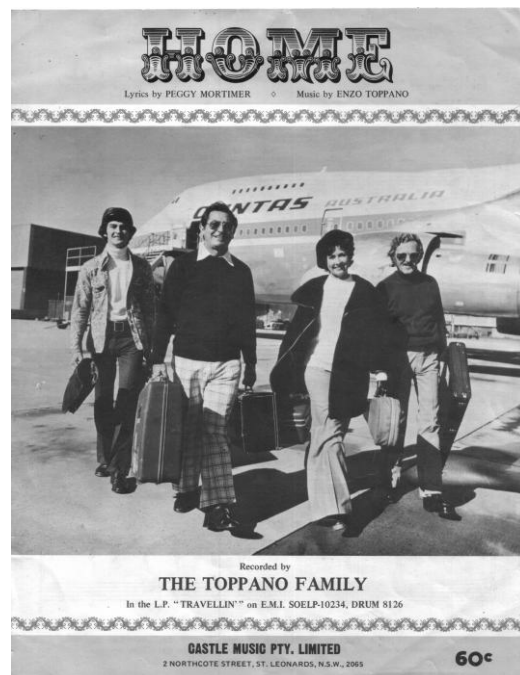


Fig. 5. Cover of the album *Home*, recorded by the Toppano family. [Image courtesy John Whiteoak.]

Enzo says that his Italian ethnicity was never a significant issue for him and did not influence his career. But this heritage is, in fact, expressed in some of his works such as his LPs *Picnic Italiano* (with cover notes in Italian and English) and *Memories of Capri*, recordings that further demonstrate the type of accordion *magia* that carried him and brother Lou so far in Australian entertainment and gained them the deep admiration of the Australian musical community.²²

¹⁹ ‘Famous Accordionists: Enzo Toppano’, *The Australian Accordionist*, March 1954, p. 5.

²⁰ *The Sydney Morning Herald* (advertisement), 23 July 1952, p. 12.

²¹ *The Australian Accordionist*, December 1960.

²² Drum 8088 Sydney 197?, Drum 8158 Sydney 1975. Both distributed by EMI (Whiteoak Collection).



Fig. 6. Enzo Toppano's LP Picnic Italiano. [Image courtesy John Whiteoak.]

During the 1930s, an article called 'Clever Musician – Not a Nuisance' was published in the Toppanos home town of Broken Hill. It describes how a neighbour who disliked young Lou's 'diligent practise' lodged a complaint with the police. Two officers were dispatched to the Toppano residence forthwith to suppress this "nuisance".²³ The Sergeant in charge, however, was utterly charmed by the *magia* of Lou's *fisarmonica*. The Toppano family was then left in peace and the Toppano Brothers proceeded to deeply enrich Australian entertainment and musical culture and history.

We are all very grateful to that Sergeant.



Fig. 7. Lou and Enzo Toppano, 1939. The caption reads: 'Lew [sic] says young brother Enzo will become world famous on the piano accordion.' [Image courtesy John Whiteoak.]

²³ *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill), 17 May 1937, p.12.

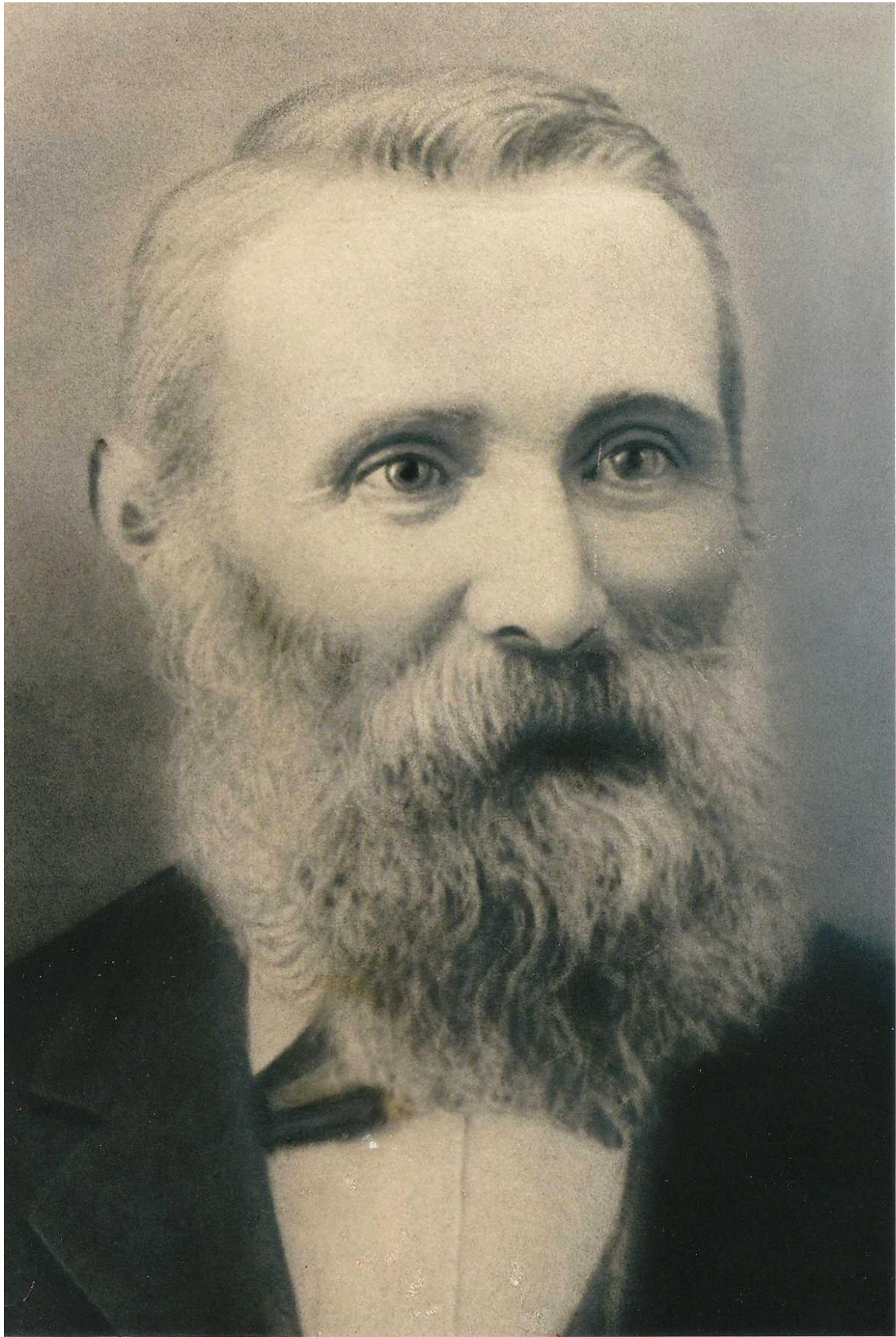


Fig. 1. Alessandro Mattei (Cevio, Ticino, Switzerland, 1838 – Toolangi, Victoria, Australia, 1905). [Image courtesy Barbara Mullen.]

alessandro mattei: a 19th century migrant story from ticino. a researcher's journey of discovery by barbara mullen

Barb Mullen, great granddaughter to Alessandro Mattei, began serious family research in 1992 while working as a teacher of English and History. This was in preparation for a year in Europe where she undertook significant field research on her family in Ireland and Cevio, Switzerland and on her husband's family in Spain. She had trained as a social scientist and worked in a variety of occupations before settling on teaching, subsequently completing a M Ed. Since retirement she has indulged in her family history passion and with cousin Mick Livy (also a Mattei) has been thoroughly immersed in finding the story of their Mattei family. Her academic training in research has proved helpful in the onerous task of documenting sources of information. Barb is interested in exploring the social and cultural changes that have taken place in her family over the generations; she believes that this exploration can provide valuable insight into understanding the way things are today.

Alessandro Mattei stood back a little from the main group, but edged in close enough to hear. In the piazza of Cevio, a village in the middle of the remote Valle Maggia in the Italian speaking Swiss canton of Ticino, the men had drifted into groups to chat. Mass had finished and the women returned to their homes to prepare the family lunch, the main meal of the day.¹ Over a large assembly of mainly Mattei men there settled an air of intensity. In Cevio in 1850 background tension was a frequent accompaniment to such gatherings. On this occasion Alessandro's uncle, Dr Pietro Mattei² had re-

cently returned from visiting outlying villages and the men wanted to hear what he had to say first hand.

Earlier that morning, the church had been pleasantly cool³ and the long sermon meant that there was time to study the faces in the pews. Alessandro's family attended the church of the Beata Vergine del Ponte alla Rovana⁴ while other Mattei families attended the big church of Santa Maria Assunta e San Giovanni Battista. The population had grown so much in the last generation⁵ that both churches were crowded. Not everyone followed the priest diligently however; there were some who resisted the control the church had over the

¹ In the culturally homogeneous communities of Alpine villages, the Catholic Church was at the centre of social life. Unlike today, Sundays were special days, marked by rest and by attendance at church. The villagers also followed tradition in the strict separation of the roles of men and women.

² Dr Pietro Mattei was an important documenter of the effects of the famine in this area; see G. Cheda, *L'emigrazione ticinese in Australia, Vol 1*, Armando Dadò Editore, Locarno, 1976. Dr Mattei married in 1850 (MATTEI, Dr Pietro. Chiesa cattolica, Parrocchia di Cevio (Ticino), Registri ecclesiastici, 1617-1899,

Marriages 1850; INTL Film 1751156 Items 5-18. Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah).

³ The buildings of Cevio were made of stone: solid blocks for the walls, stone floors and even stone roofing. The interiors are cool in summer and can hold warmth in winter.

⁴ Oral tradition has the family home close to the Rovana church.

⁵ In 1801 the population of Cevio was 491, in 1850 it was 927 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cevio>).

villagers.⁶ There were very few who did not attend church though.

Unlike his older brother Pietro who had an eye for the pretty Marietta Respini,⁷ Alessandro was a little too young at 11⁸ to feel much interest in the girls. Pietro at 14 years of age would soon enough be a man⁹ and just now he, like his younger brother, was keen to hear the discussion amongst the men that was occurring this Sunday: he knew it was important.

The sun brightly filled the small valley; the shadows were sharp and the faces sculpted by the light were clearly worried. 1850 was the year of the second blockade of Ticino by the Austrians, who ruled neighbouring Lombardy in the north of Italy. The blockades were part of Austria's attempt to suppress the Risorgimento, the movement for the unification of Italy. The Ticinese, proud to be Swiss and independent of the rule of kings, were sympathetic to their neighbours' struggle for political freedom. Ticinese and Lombards had much in common: they shared the same culture, their language was very similar; and every year thousands of Ticinese left their villages to work in Lombardy.¹⁰

The blockade meant hardship for the villagers.

⁶ Many Ticinese men took an active interest in politics; implied criticism of the clergy can be found in the historical records, such as letters home from immigrants in Australia.

⁷ Pietro and Marietta were to be married on 12 April 1871 (MATTEI, Pietro – RESPINI Marietta Luigia, Civil Records Office, Family Registration, Cevio, Ticino, Switzerland. Folio 127). In Cevio at the time what we would consider arranged marriages were the norm. These marriages consolidated family wealth and were common practice. This did not mean that men and women married people they didn't know; rather, the possible marriage partners were known from a young age and were selected and encouraged as suitable by the families. People from Cevio tended to marry from within Cevio.

⁸ Alessandro Mattei was born in September 1838 (MATTEI, Antonio Maria Alessandro. Chiesa Cattolica, Parrocchia di Cevio (Ticino), Baptisms 1838, Folio 50).

⁹ At that time the transition from childhood to adulthood was rather direct: adolescence had not yet been invented.

¹⁰ Interview with G. Cheda, *Economic crisis and fools gold*, 1 December 2009, pp. 15 – 28.
http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/specials/swissitalian_migrations/journey_into_the_unknown/Economic_crisis_and_fools_gold_interview.html?cid=994310.

Unbeknownst to Alessandro on this bright summer day, in 1853 the final blockade and the return of some 5,000 Ticinese seasonal workers expelled from Lombardy would trigger widespread hardship and famine.

The mass migration that followed, and of which Alessandro Mattei was to be a part, had a devastating effect on the local communities.

*

Those few paragraphs about my great grandfather are the result of many years of research. During my research I uncovered much about the lives of my forebears and about the way the history of Ticino directly influenced the migration fluxes that had such a momentous impact on my family's destiny.

The first phase of my quest began when my mother gave me Alessandro Mattei's name and place of birth along with other family names. Then I began researching seriously and in 1992 I found out what I could of Alessandro and the Mattei family in Australia based on the microfiche records I was able to source.

The following year I travelled to Switzerland where I spent many hours looking up the family records in the local church in Cevio; I found much information which I recorded and photographed. The priest, however, was extremely protective of the privacy of anyone not directly related to me. The Civic Registry in Cevio was most helpful and there I found some information which I was allowed to photocopy.

It wasn't until 2010 that I resumed my investigation with a strong sense of commitment. The journey has been a roller coaster ride ever since.

I started researching the reasons for my family's migration and soon I discovered that what I was studying was a massive relocation of historical significance. I had met Giorgio Cheda in 1993, but it was in late 2010 that I studied his book *L'emigrazione ticinese in Australia* – which wasn't that easy to do given that it is in Italian!

I also began to piece together more family information on cousins, aunts and uncles who migrated to Australia. In doing this I was aided by Joseph Gentilli's book *The Settlement of Swiss Ticino Immigrants in Australia* and Clare Gervasoni's *Research Directory & Bibliography of Swiss and Italian Pioneers in Australasia*.

At this stage I had made contact with cousins who had also been researching the family tree. By then I had gathered most of the data available from the internet (no need for microfiche any more!), as well as lots of information of an historical nature about the Ticinese migration and the family in Cevio. Subsequently I read Bridget Carlson's doctoral thesis, *Immigrant Placemaking in Colonial Australia: The Italian-speaking Settlers of Daylesford*.

I gradually began to understand that Alessandro Mattei, when he decided to stay in Australia, had the idea of continuing with the village way of life of Cevio but in an Australian setting. He wanted to create a family in Australia to be proud of just as the Matteis in Cevio had a family to be proud of, a family that would be well respected and of standing within their community. It dawned on me that Alessandro had consciously set about building a family, and that in doing so he was following a time-honoured blueprint, while adapting it to new circumstances.

My cousins and I began to delve deeper into the available records.

*

Alessandro Mattei landed at Melbourne in September 1855. Ten years later, in November 1865, he appears to have married Catherine Mulcahy. No record of the marriage has been found yet: no civil record, no church record. It is highly unlikely however that they didn't marry. They had 12 children who all survived to adulthood¹¹ – a very remarkable achievement at the time, especially given that this was not a family with money.

We traced the whereabouts of the couple and Alessandro's occupations through the birth records of their children. They met in the

Daylesford area where Alessandro had been engaged in various types of work, including gold digging at Champagne Gully.¹² Then they moved to Monkey Gully near Smythesdale, a two day horse ride away, where their first child was born in 1868. Here Alessandro began his work as a wood splitter.¹³

Over the next 20 years they lived in at least eight different places within the State Forest in the Shire of Ballan, where Alessandro continued to work with timber, sometimes as a labourer in a timber mill, sometimes contracting as a splitter. Baptism certificates gave us information on the godparents for the children, including Alessandro's brother Pietro Mattei who had returned to Cevio and come back to Australia for the baptism, perhaps before he left for California.¹⁴

All the while, the question at the back of our minds was: What was Alessandro experiencing, what was he thinking?

When Alessandro arrived in Australia as a 17 year old, he had experienced a traumatic journey by ship;¹⁵ he was then exposed to violence in the goldfields when, only a few weeks after his arrival, one of his extended family murdered another at Blackwood.¹⁶

The goldfields were rough and ready places. Within three months of his arrival, a violent fight – 'a battle' in the words of contemporary

¹¹ All records are available, sometimes misspelt, at the Victorian Public Records Office, Births Register.

¹² *Daylesford Express and Hepburn Advertiser*, 7 September 1862. Also in C. Gervasoni, *Italian Speakers in the News 1855-1872. Selected newspaper articles relating to Italian speakers*, Studio Argento Publications, 1997, p. 25.

¹³ MATTEI, Maria Addolorata. Victorian Public Records Office, Birth Registry No. 12365, 22 February 1868.

¹⁴ G. Gentilli, *The Settlement of Swiss Italian Ticino Immigrants in Australia*, Occasional Papers of the Dept of Geography, University of Western Australia, Geowest no 23, Third Edition, August 1988, p. 67; and MATTEI, Peter, St Patrick's Church Gordon Baptismal Registry 31/01/1875 – 20/01/1957, p. 101.

¹⁵ L. Pozzi, 'We were transported to shore by the lice'. The Pozzi correspondence, published in G. Cheda, *L'emigrazione ticinese in Australia*, is translated and published with the author's permission on www.swissinfo.ch, 7 January 2009. Accessed 21 September 2010.

¹⁶ *The Argus*, 6 November 1855, p. 6.

accounts¹⁷ – took place between the English and the Italians at Daylesford. In a letter home, G. Respini, a family friend of the Matteis, described how the English were afraid of the Swiss Italians' knives.¹⁸

In 1859, when Alessandro's brother Pietro applied to the court for a refreshment licence for a tent at Stony Creek, it was claimed that "[r]ows might take place, and Italians were not like Englishmen, but used knives, and the government had sent special instructions regarding these applications from Italians."

The licence was granted hurriedly to stop the lawyer representing Pietro from talking about recent events in which Italians were unfairly charged.¹⁹

Alessandro further experienced the difficulties of not speaking English in an English speaking environment, and the disadvantage of not being British and therefore lacking the same rights to own land.

The peaceful communal life of Cevio had been replaced by an uncertain context in which one had to vigorously assert oneself and one's rights.

One day at the State Library my co-researcher cousin and I were reading the Daylesford newspaper of 1868. At the time, the non English in the area outnumbered the English but the paper only reported on events relevant to those of English background. The only Swiss Italian reference was an advertisement for a local hotel owned by a Swiss Italian. We left the library early; I was angry at the exclusion by omission of my people. In my research I had come across incidents of prejudice reported openly in the paper, but this was the first time I recognised that the community life of my people was not seen as relevant.

*

¹⁷ See T. Pagliaro, 'Letters from Swiss Italian immigrants to Victoria in the 19th Century' in *Newsletter of the Italian Historical Society*, Co.As.it., Victoria. Jan–Feb–Mar 1991, Vol. 2 No. 1; and R. Broome, *The Victorians Arriving*, Farifax, Syme and Weldon, 1984.

¹⁸ T. Pagliaro, 'Letters from Swiss Italian immigrants to Victoria in the 19th Century'.

¹⁹ *The Daylesford Advocate*, 7 May 1859.

Nothing is ever linear in this research. At one stage, I decided I needed to build a better picture of Alessandro Mattei's family: I believed I had all his brothers and sisters but I was lacking information about his extended family. Alessandro was 16 when he left with about 50 men from his village and one young woman;²⁰ further, there were already many men from the village here in Australia, including his brother Pietro, so I knew he had to be with family. I had the names of the people he travelled with and lived with but was unsure how they were related. I decided I would try to identify his uncles by marriage. I ordered the film of the church records in Cevio from the Library of the Church of Latter Day Saints.²¹ With greater freedom to explore other Matteis than I had when in Cevio, I was able to identify another aunt and the husbands of all the aunts. This was very helpful as it put Alessandro in the company of his family members out here and identified many cousins too.

I also found out that Alessandro's uncle Pietro was indeed the important doctor who documented the story of the famine in Cevio and the consequences of the loss of the men to the village.²² I began to reread Cheda's book with this new information and this led to the discovery that Alessandro's grandfather himself was also a doctor.

*

Alessandro and the family later moved to Green Hills near Blackwood, where they experienced a few golden years before the depression of the 1890s and his own gold lust caught up with him. That last sentence alone required extensive research – into Wills and Probate records, newspapers (now fully searchable through the National Library of Australia's search engine Trove),²³ school re-

²⁰ G. Cheda, *L'emigrazione ticinese in Australia*.

²¹ Registri ecclesiastici, 1617-1899 Chiesa cattolica. Parrocchia di Cevio (Ticino) INTL Film 1751156 Items 5-18. Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²² Dr Pietro, the son of Antonio Maria MATTEI married Addolorata SOLDATI, daughter of Antonio Maria and Addolorata. Marriages, 1850: Registri ecclesiastici, 1617-1899. Chiesa cattolica. Parrocchia di Cevio (Ticino) INTL Film 1751156 Items 5-18. Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²³ <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>

cords, local history books, field visits and more.



Fig. 2. *The Rovana photograph: Alessandro Mattei and his wife Catherine with some of their children and grandchildren in front of their house in Green Hills. [Image courtesy Barbara Mullen.]*

In the family there is an important photo of Alessandro and Catherine with some of their children and their first grandchildren; it is known as the Rovana photo, Rovana being the name they tellingly gave to their house in Green Hills. It was the first and only house the couple owned. When we visited Rovana in 2011, the chestnut trees that would have been there in that time were still thriving. Chestnuts were important in Cevio: the people used to grind them and use their flour to make bread or polenta when wheat or corn was not available.

At the turn of the century, Alessandro and Catherine, now in their late fifties, left Green Hills with the children who had not yet married and started out again at Toolangi, near Castella, in the Murrumbindi Forest. Here the family worked hard to establish itself, the sons taking up the heavier timber work. The couple wanted to see all their children well married and provided with a foothold on which to build and create their own families.

Alessandro Mattei died on 7 July 1905.²⁴ He had been sick for the last three months with chronic bronchitis and dilation of the heart. He was 67 years old. When he died, his family had begun to spread throughout Victoria; a core of six of his children, however, remained

in Toolangi, where they maintained the idea of a family home.



Fig. 3. *Studio photograph of Alessandro Mattei and his wife surrounded by their children and grandchildren. [Image courtesy Barbara Mullen.]*

It is questionable how successful Alessandro was in fulfilling his desire of establishing a strong family name, a family that could be proud of its heritage and its social standing. Toolangi was a lifetime and a world away from Cevio and family life such as it was in Cevio in 1850 was not possible for the Matteis of Australia.

By World War Two, no-one was left at Toolangi.

In its small way, the journey of this research mirrors the journey that this family experienced – full of ups and downs: drama, success, loss and frustration.

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Appendix: Alessandro Mattei's letter

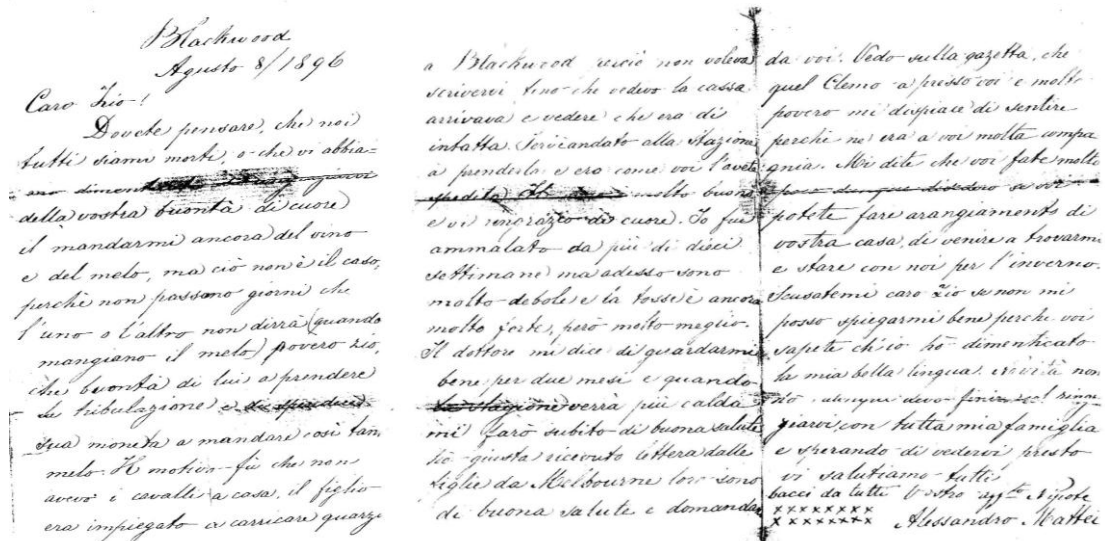


Fig. 4. Alessandro Mattei's 1896 letter from Blackwood. [Image courtesy Barbara Mullen].

Blackwood
August 8th 1896

Dear Uncle!

You must think, that we are all dead, or that we have forgotten to thank you for your kindness of heart for sending me some more wine and some honey, but that is not the case, for a day does not pass without one or the other saying (when they eat the honey): poor uncle, how good of him to take the trouble and to spend his money to send so much honey. The reason was that I did not have my horses at home, my son was busy loading quartz

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at Blackwood, and therefore he did not want to write to you until I had seen that the chest had arrived and that it was intact. So he went to the station to collect it and it was as you had sent it. The honey is very good and I thank you warmly. I was ill for more than ten weeks but now I am very weak and my cough is still very strong, but [I am] much better. The doctor tells me to look after myself carefully for two months and when

the season will become warmer I will quickly recover. I have just received a letter from my daughters from Melbourne: they are in good health and they ask

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about you. I see in the gazette that that Clema [?] with you is very poor I am sorry to hear that because [s]he kept you a lot of company. You tell me that you do very little so I would like it, if you could arrange for your house, if you came to see me and stay with us over the winter. Excuse me, dear uncle, if I am unable to explain myself well, for you know that I have forgotten my beautiful language. I have no news, so I must finish by thanking you, with all my family and hoping to see you soon we all send our regards,

Your very affectionate nephew,
Alessandro Mattei

kisses from all
xxxxxxx
xxxxxxx

Line by line translation care of Italian Historical Society, Co.As.It.



Fig. 1. *Angelo Catalano in 1954 at Mount Hotham during the Beechworth to Omeo leg of the Sun Tour. [Image courtesy Angelo Catalano].*

angelo catalano: an unsung italian australian hero

by lee anderson

Lee Anderson is a qualified journalist currently studying his Masters in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne. He has written news and sports articles for several student and community publications.

“I do not want to be destroyed,” Angelo Catalano declares as he ushers me into the museum of his Thornbury home. “That’s why I like to keep all this.” I call it a museum, because that’s what it is – a veritable timeline of one man’s life, spanning several decades and two continents. Angelo gives me the tour, enthusiastically pointing to his most prized memories: an ancient anorak; a rack of tools; a photo of an army tank; old car registration papers; the gabardine coat he

wore on the boat from Italy; stacks of albums protecting a thousand faded photographs.

His daughter Loretta points out a photograph of her father in cycling gear. It’s a black and white photo taken sometime in the 1950s. A much younger Angelo, broad-shouldered, with a determined expression on his face, is carrying his bicycle across a snow-topped mountain range. A raggle of other cyclists struggles behind him.

"The snow had blocked the road," Loretta explains, "So Dad just picked his bike up and walked to the finish line." Loretta says that the other cyclists cheated a little and got a lift. "Not my Dad though," she laughs, "There's something about that image that sticks with me. I look at it when I need inspiration, honestly. For me it just sums up his character."

Angelo Catalano was always passionate about cycling. Like many Italians, he grew up following the Giro d'Italia, Italy's answer to the Tour de France. Starting in 1908, The Giro has been a staple on the Italian sporting calendar, a gruelling, eight-stage 21-day event, spanning almost two and a half thousand kilometres. Passing through unforgiving terrain such as the Alps and the Dolomites, riders regularly climb to heights of over two thousand metres in pursuit of the coveted Pink Jersey, worn during the race by the athlete with the most points in the general classification. They even have a name for the highest peak reached during any one race, the Cima Coppi. The Cima Coppi par excellence is the Stelvio Pass, scaling 2758 metres, which has been reached on six occasions since 1972.

Until 1950 the race was never won by a non-Italian - Switzerland's Hugo Koplet was the first man to break the Italian monopoly, and in particular that of three men - Fausto Coppi, Gino Bartali and Fiorenzo Magni, all revered Italian athletes of their time. Angelo admits to Bartali being one of his early heroes. He has fond memories of lining the streets in his village of Beltiglia, in the province of Benevento in Campania, as a young boy when the Giro passed through.

"It's quite a spectacle," says Angelo's wife Anke, who is German-born but has obviously been infected with her husband's passion for cycling. "People line the streets, and it's all colours and flags. You see little children all dressed up for the occasion. And of course all the Italians think it superior to the Tour. They would never want the French to be better than them at anything!"

Perhaps Angelo was inspired by the physical achievements of the great cyclists of his era. Maybe there was an element of patriotism - the race was dominated by Italians during Angelo's time. Whatever it was, by the time Angelo arrived in Australia from Beltiglia in

1951, he had developed a passion for cycling that would become a lifelong obsession.

"There were two things I wanted and nothing else," he explains. "One, to be a mechanic, two, to be a cyclist. But my family was devastated!"

Angelo's father opposed his son's ambition. "He wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer, something like that. In Italy, everything was about the high class, the middle class, the lower class." Evidently, cycling was not considered a worthy pursuit for a boy from a nice middle-class family.

"But I suppose the feelings were mixed," Angelo adds. "After all, my mother, she bought me my first bike!"



Fig. 2. 1954. Angelo is greeted at the finish line of the Sydney to Melbourne race by his mother Antonietta and his sister Adiga. They had arrived in Australia from Italy on the very same day. [Image courtesy Angelo Catalano].

Cycling is ingrained in Italian popular culture, perhaps more so than any other country. Like in many old European nations, the culture of the bicycle predates the culture of the car by a long stretch. The roads of Italy are hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years old, and designed to give right of way to horses, carriages and bicycles. To this day, bicycles are a favoured form of transport amongst Italians,

sharing the status of public transport, scooters and small cars. On cycling blogs, travellers from the United States marvel at the respect afforded to cyclists by motorists. At various times, the humble bicycle has taken on symbolic status for broader artistic, social and cultural purposes: it has been a political tool for fascism, a political tool for communism, a sign of mobility for the working classes, and a symbol of glorious individual achievement for a handful of revered *campionissimi* (champions, and winners of at least one *Giro d'Italia*). They even made an award-winning movie about it, *The Bicycle Thief*, produced and directed by Vittorio De Sica in 1948. It depicts the story of one man's struggle to find work and the difficulties he encounters when his bicycle is stolen.

Perhaps the best illustration of cycling's ability to transcend itself from a mere sport to a noble metaphor can be seen in the heroic war efforts of the three-time *campionissimo* and Angelo's hero, Gino Bartali. During the German occupation of Italy, the devoutly Catholic Bartali collaborated with local Rabbis and Bishops to help Jewish Italians escape Nazi persecution. Bartali helped in a range of ways, including falsifying documents, hiding people in his own apartments, and sending vital packages to hiding Jews under the noses of the Nazis. It was in this latter role that the same bicycle that had won him three Pink Jerseys played its own sly role in shaping history; Bartali would hide the packages in his bicycle, so when stopped by German Officers, he would insist they not tamper with the bicycle, so as not to risk damaging the sensitive machinery. Maybe even the Nazis must have been touched by the reverence with which the Italians held their bicycles, because Bartali was not checked, and he was thus successful in helping many Jews escape the clutches of the Germans.

In 2010, Bartali was posthumously awarded the title 'Righteous Among The Nations' by the state of Israel, and given his own tree in the Garden of the Righteous in Jerusalem. The prestigious award recognises his efforts in saving hundreds of Jewish people from deportation in Umbria and his home region of Tuscany.

At the ceremony commemorating Bartali's achievement, the Italian Ambassador to Israel, Maria Talo, noted that "Gino Bartali ... has proven that it is possible to be a champion in sport and in life. The bicycle is the perfect tool in this mission because it teaches us to have balance; we must always look ahead and never stop pedalling."



Fig. 3. Italian cycling rivals: Gino Bartali and Fausto Coppi (1952).

When Italians started migrating to Australia en masse in the mid-twentieth century, they transposed their passion for cycling onto the Australian landscape. Cycling in Australia was already immensely popular, with its own flagship event, the Herald Sun Tour, or as it was called back then, the Sun Tour. The Tour, as far as distance was concerned, may have paled in comparison to the *Giro d'Italia* – 1850km for the 1954 Sun Tour, of which Angelo won the sixth stage, compared with 2448km for the *Giro d'Italia*. However, it was still a gruelling event in its own right, six days long, and mapping some of the harshest terrain in Australia. Originally dominated by Australians, the event has evolved into a key fixture on the international sporting calendar, with some of the most renowned cyclists in the world competing in the event. A recent notable winner was Great Britain's Bradley Wiggins, in 2009.

Angelo, along with many other Italian immigrants who arrived in Australia during the 1950s, found a social outlet in cycling. Having arrived from Italy in 1951, wearing the gabardine jacket he still keeps in his museum, Angelo set out pursuing his dream of becoming a competitive cyclist. But as Angelo admits, it wasn't an easy journey.

"Time and time again, they turned Angelo back," his wife Anke recalls, referring to his struggle to find a racing team "Repco, Malvern Star, Healings, Motorspares and many, many others."

"There was a lot of discrimination towards Dad and the other Italians," Loretta adds. "They weren't always treated very well." There is no doubt amongst the Catalano family that Angelo's early failures to find a cycling team were, at least in part, a result of entrenched racism in the Australian community.

During the 1950s, over two hundred thousand Italians migrated to Australia as part of a program of mass European immigration promoted in the late 1940s by the then Labour immigration minister Arthur Calwell. Calwell's imperative was for Australia, with its meagre post-war population, to 'populate or perish', the implication being that Australia could simply not survive economically without boosting its workforce.

42,000 Italians came to Australia under the Assisted Passage Agreement between 1951-1968, arriving on the condition that they took whatever work or accommodation was offered. Many were recruited for projects like the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. Others were sent to the steelworks in Newcastle and Wollongong, or employed in the engineering and textile factories that were springing up in major cities. The hostels in which mostly young men were forced to live were often in disrepair and isolated from the town centres. The locals were often hostile. If the men lost their jobs, they were forbidden to seek employment independently. This may have had something to do with pre-war fears of Italian immigrants flooding the local labour market and lowering wages.

But the discrimination was just as often based on cultural differences. When Italians came to Australia, they brought with them more than just a passion for cycling – they also brought with them pasta, coffee, sauce and wine, as well as their own strange customs and cultural practices. Particularly in Carlton, old Victorian houses were covered in stucco and painted in pastel colours. Italian immigrants planted fruit and vegetables in their gardens, as well as keeping chickens, bottling tomatoes and pressing wine. On Lygon Street, the men played cards and ate *al fresco*. Gelato counters, cafes and delis sprang up everywhere to meet the needs of the Italian migrant community. They were helping to transform the Australian cultural landscape.

The Catalano family recalls many of the locals being hostile to this transformation. "People thought that Dad was strange because he liked olive oil and pasta sauce and things like that," recalls Loretta. "Of course it's all very trendy now, to go and buy those things in Lygon Street. But not back then."

It was against this socio-cultural backdrop that Angelo's early Australian experiences were framed. He, like his contemporaries, experienced discrimination first-hand. He, like his contemporaries, struggled to gain acceptance in the broader Australian community. For many, it meant a struggle to find gainful employment. Angelo was luckier in this respect – he was not a part of the Assisted Passage Scheme, and his uncle helped him find a good job as a mechanic. But for a long time, local prejudices impinged on his desire to be a cyclist.

Finally, Angelo met Nino Borsari. Borsari was an Italian cycling legend who had won the Gold Medal in Cycling at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics. He had since moved to Australia, where he continued a rich and successful career, both as a competitor and trainer. And in an environment where new Italian immigrants were essentially left to fend for themselves, Borsari filled a gap, becoming a facilitator for his community and an inspiration to young sportsmen such as Angelo.

His achievements over many years were wide and varied: boxing promoter, businessman,

political candidate, youth club president, and the founder and president of several sporting organisations, such as The Juventus Soccer Club, the Basketball Team Club of Victoria, and, of course, the International Cycling Club. The Borsari Cycling Emporium was founded in 1942. Around 1952 Angelo Catalano found in Nino Borsari personal sponsorship and a life-long friendship with an Italian-Australian icon.



Fig. 4. Nino Borsari's Emporium at the corner of Lygon Street and Grattan Street in 1980.

The Catalanos all acknowledge the significance of Nino Borsari's contribution not just to Angelo's, but to the lives and sporting careers of so many Italian migrants.

"I think Nino's contribution to the lives of so many Italians was huge," says Loretta. "He was involved in so many things, and he also spoke English well, had been in the country for a while. He helped Dad a lot."

"And don't forget Mrs. Borsari," Angelo chimes in, grinning. "That woman, you put your hand up, she was there. She brought us food, anything we needed."



Fig. 5. Nino Borsari in the 1970s showcasing one of his signature bicycles.

In the 1950s, with no real access to welfare and social services, families like Angelo's had to rely very heavily on the support of family members, church groups and prominent community leaders such as the Borsaris, and of course on the sweat of their own toil. Nothing was handed to them. The Italian community in Australia had to band together and work hard simply because they had no other choice.

In this socio-historical context, then, it's easy to see why so many young migrants took to cycling. For Italian-Australian men, it was both a way of expressing cultural identity and of assimilating into the wider community. It was also a way to achieve success through hard work and dedication, qualities that the new immigrants knew a thing or two about. And, Angelo admits, it was also a way of winning over the locals.

"Yes, I think it helped me gain a little respect," he says. "But maybe it took a little while!"

Angelo made his professional cycling debut the same year he met Nino, at the Allbrook 45-miler. But it was a long way to the top, and yet more obstacles were about to be thrown in the budding cyclist's path. Angelo shows me an article of the time, which described the young man making his professional debut at Allbrook as a 'former amateur cycling star from Bologna, Italy,' before later saying that 'Catalano excelled on the hills in Italy, and the Allbrook course should suit him.'

"But I never rode in Italy! My family was against it, remember?" says Angelo. And he certainly was not from Bologna. Nevertheless, the myth was born that Angelo was already an accomplished professional cyclist, and he was soon starting races from scratch.

"I had to start twenty, thirty, fifty minutes behind the other riders to make up for my supposed advantage," Angelo recalls, his face creased with exasperation from the memory of it. To prove the point, his wife produces copies of old racing programs – another archive from the vast library of their house – that indicate Angelo was indeed starting in some cases an hour behind his competitors.

"It took me ten years to get off the scratch," he cries out, before admitting this wasn't the only obstacle in his path. Yet again, there was also the discrimination of the other riders, who would take advantage of Angelo's poor English skills and lack of experience on the roads.

"They used to try to knock me off the road, or interfere with me in other ways, you see," explains Angelo. Often, other riders would point Angelo in the wrong direction just to throw him off track. Once, they even tricked him into believing a race was over to stop him from finishing.

"But this made me a smarter rider. I learned to use my eyes a lot in those days. See?" says Angelo, referring to the fact that his lack of English meant he had to rely on his own powers of observation to decipher when and how his competitors were going to cheat him, or the tricks they would use to gain a competitive edge.

"I learned how these other riders used their gears, things like that," he elaborates. "I see these things with my own eyes, see, then I can do it to improve my own riding." And, Angelo admits with a mischievous grin, he wasn't above playing his rivals at their own dirty tricks. "I pushed a few of them off the road myself in the end!"

"Remember what the other riders called you," his wife interjects. "Bushy-tail!" Because, she explains, the other riders thought that Angelo was as sly as a fox. He even has a fox-tail in his museum as a testament to his nickname.

Success did not come easily. The rides were often long and gruelling – when Angelo finished second at the Victorian Cycling Championship in 1953, it was 201 kilometres. The Sun Tour, of which Angelo won the sixth stage in 1954, covered a total distance of 1,770 kilometres. The Australian terrain was harsh, the climate unforgiving. The riders, unlike the uber-athletes of today's cycling world, had no assistance. Everyone carried their own gear. Angelo's own skills as a mechanic were invaluable as, like all the other riders, he had to do his own repairs. The tools, which he still

keeps in his garage today, are all in pristine condition.

Slowly, Angelo's tenacity and determination began to pay off. He came second in the 1953 Victorian Championship, which was, according to *The Adelaide Mail* (September 26, 1953), his first ride in a major championship. More success followed, with the Sixth Stage of the Sun Tour in 1954, for which he was awarded the rather unusual prize of the certificate of ownership of the Puff & Pant gold mine at Omeo.



Fig. 6. Angelo and Nino Borsari in 1956, having a laugh will 'digging' at the Puff and Pant gold mine.

Of course, he still has the photograph to prove it. But Angelo never claimed his prize. Prizes never bothered him. More than anything, he confesses, he just wanted to be the best he could be in the thing he loved the most.

Angelo Catalano's professional career was short, spanning only six years. But he continued to ride long after retirement, in fact even briefly stepping out of retirement in 2002, when, at the sprightly age of 72, he competed in the Master Games. Angelo finished 14th out of 33 in the time trial, 17th out of 27 in the criterion and 18th out of 42 in the road race. After the race, he continued to ride in his spare time, until a couple of years ago when he was hit by a truck, sustaining minor brain injuries. Years before, Angelo had been an

early ambassador for road safety by becoming the first cyclist in Australia to wear a helmet, so it was perhaps fitting that in the end the helmet may have saved his life.

All those nights of riding from Melbourne to Geelong had finally paid off. And perhaps most satisfyingly of all, Angelo won the respect of his peers, Australian and Italian alike. The wog with the pointy shoes had made it in his new homeland.

“People these days, they take something, they throw it away if it gets too hard. Not me. This

is my life. I want to keep every part of it. Like I say, I do not want to be destroyed.” Angelo is showing me a piece of tile that he took from his old house in Italy. He’s looking at me with that ingratiating smile as he holds up the tile, as if he’s offering me a piece of himself.

Eventually he leaves the museum. I hang back a few moments, studying the photo Loretta showed me of Angelo carrying the bike. It’s at the Beechworth to Omeo, sometime in the early 1950s. They’re at Mount Hotham. The young Angelo marches on to the unseen flag in the distance. Climbing uphill.



Fig. 7. Angelo Catalano today, at 84, as he looks upon one of his bicycles kindly lent to the Museo Italiano for the Heroic Years of Italian-Australian Cycling exhibition.



Fig. 1. Giuseppe Finaldi in 1974 . [Image courtesy Giuseppe Finaldi.]

**growing up in the wrong country.
autobiography of a second generation
italian in london, 1968-1988
by giuseppe finaldi**

Born in the London in 1968 of Italian father and Polish mother, Giuseppe Finaldi is an Associate Professor of history at the University of Western Australia. He moved to Australia in 2004 and is married to fellow historian Daniela Baratieri, a Trentina D.O.C. They have three children.

After the London bombings in July 2005 I wondered if Britain had somehow got it wrong. Why were second generation Pakistanis who had been born and bred in Yorkshire trying to blow up innocent Londoners? This wasn't the same as the 11th September for the USA where the hijackers had been flown in from distant Arabia or wherever. And in the Madrid train bombings the explosives had not been planted by second-generation Spaniards. The guys in Britain had been born there, grew up there, went to school, played cricket and had known nothing but the pale sunlight and soft dampness of that part of the grey-green and pleasant land.

I don't pretend to be able to answer this question. The debates have all been, as is well known, about the nature of Britain's so-called multicultural society and the possible redundancy of the idea of parallel communities vis-à-vis melting pots. Even the head of the British Commission for Racial Equality at that time, Trevor Philips, said something like 'Britain is sleepwalking towards a ghetto society and the scenes familiar to us from the United States will soon be evident in Britain too.' As far back as the 1980s Hanif Kureishi admonished that the British should learn that being British is not what it used to be: 'Britain and Pakistan', he said, 'have been part of each other for

years, usually to the advantage of Britain. They cannot now be wrenched apart even if that were desirable. Their futures will be intermixed.¹ Well, more than 25 years have gone by since *My Beautiful Laundrette* but some of the hopes encapsulated in it have hardly materialised.

Now the reason why I bring this all up is because, attempting for the first time a biography of, yes, myself, therefore an autobiography, I am at a loss to think of something worthwhile to say. I know I am important to me but my life has seen no close at hand wars, no imprisonment for ideal beliefs or anything like that: my generation has on the whole been concerned with getting jobs, losing weight and sustaining a tolerable existence. I think when I was born life was much as it is today; for my parents' generation this is of course not the case. The way things changed, say, between 1945 and 1965 was not repeated again. I feel I will pass onto my children a world that is much like the one I came into.

But something that is meaningful for all of us independently of the years we grew up in, the events we witnessed, the reality that surrounded us, is the way in which our personal identity developed in relation to the outside of self. This may be of interest to all and I can, like anybody, talk about this.

I was born in 1968, the year that generation began to matter. The generation of 1968 (not those born then but those who were around 20 years old then, and of course not all of them, for example my mother who would have been about 22) imagined themselves as a generation and so became one. When I came into the world the Beatles were apparently enjoying living in a Yellow Submarine (not that that mattered much to me). From what I have read the 1968 generation felt that they had broken their vertical loyalties to family, to the career ladder and spread out horizontally to their fellow age group. As they got older this identity vacillated but I think survived and the bump of the '68 generation is moving along the age trajectory and now has

a membership of people in their 60s. The choice to see one's generation as a prime identity marker, for whatever reason, has shaped what these people are and believe. It has given them a lens through which to make sense of the world. The lens is of course often broken or clouded and discrepancies and idiosyncrasies crash in but there are also some basic principles that one holds to that make one part of that imagined community. It could be a peculiar attitude to the family as an institution, a general unease with things as they are no matter how well one may have done out of the system, or whatever.

So much for that generation. I am nothing to do with them except that that was the year I was born. But the point is that throughout our lives we are all called upon to make allegiances and to imagine ourselves part of one community and not part of another. This is an extremely variable process and depends on a whole set of factors including gender, age, skin colour, wealth, nationality, taste etc.

Looking back on my own life I can say that what marked it in my formative years was the sensation of not belonging to the society in which I had grown up and in which I was fully immersed. By this I am not suggesting that I am in any way original. I don't believe in so-called 'nomadism' or 'non-belonging' in the way that Homi Bhabha and the post-modernists intend it. Everybody feels differently towards his or her human environment and the way they are supposed to fit inside it. It is difficult to imagine somebody that can fully say 'I belong' without this, to a certain degree, being a lie or at least an act of faith and maybe hope. But the way in which the process works is that one fulfils the obligations of belonging at least from the exterior point of view (and one often does not quite know which point of view is more important) and this becomes the way in which people, including yourself, actually see you.

I want to dwell on how this imagined community was constructed in my life, what it consisted in and stood for and how it related to the broader society that it stood against but was immersed in.

¹ Hanif Kureishi, 'The Rainbow Sign', in *Collected Essays*, London, Faber and Faber 2011, p. 34.

So what is needed to make an 'outsider identity' like the one I am suggesting I had in my formative years? I always think about the myth of the understanding individual in the hateful society; like Winston Smith in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Here Winston Smith looks around him and for no reason that he can fathom says 'I do not belong.' I understand this world, I can remain outside it and see it from there. I also know that something different and better can exist; in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* this is the 'Golden Country' or the lost past that Winston Smith is attracted to and that sometimes is made real to him by such deemed useless objects as the glass paperweight with a pink coral buried inside it that he finds in a Prole second hand shop. There are many examples of this in film and literature, the film *Brazil* or Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World* spring to mind. I wonder why these stories are so attractive to me. How did it work in my case?

June, July 1982. You all remember it. Two major international wars were taking place directly involving England. One was in the South Atlantic and was about some insignificant islands that Argentina had occupied and that, we all found out, were actually one of the last remaining bits of the British Empire; the other was for the far more internationally coveted FIFA Soccer (there, I've said that horrible word) World Cup. I supported Argentina in the first conflict but saw the British paratroop regiments yomping to victory in the unlikely setting of Goose Green (population about twenty) or Port Stanley (population about 1,500); and I supported Italy in the second. The battlefields were locations such as the Bernabéu in Madrid (about 90,000 capacity) and the Nou Camp in Barcelona (about 110,000).

About both these conflicts we would have interminable discussions at home and at school. In the latter institution there was amongst some of the kids around me – the Irish, the Asians in particular – a sneaking desire for England to come off second best at least in the Falklands. But when the French made (that was always pointed out to us) Exocet missile fired from an Argentinian Super-Étandard fighter bomber (also French made I suppose) blew up HMS Sheffield, things got

really tense and supporting Argentina became sort of unacceptable. The only other time I really felt like that was in 1997 with the death of Princess Diana. I remember then making some disparaging comments about the madness that suddenly took over the country, with the same friend that at school had been on Argentina's side with me. The feeling was exactly the same. There was a kind of tension in the air that you had to keep quiet and pretend you were part of the consensus. In the case of Diana, it has been called Floral Fascism but something similar was in operation during the Falklands war too. In Britain, or London maybe, most of the time you just get on with your life and nobody gives a damn what you do, how you dress, what you believe or whatever. At times though there is a kind of drawing of the line and you are expected to express whether you are on this side or that.

But anyway, getting back to that other, for me at the time much more significant event in 1982 in which Italy, the 'Least of the Great Powers', came out on top, I remember it as a warm summer evening, the type that in Britain lasts forever. At 10pm there is still a faint orange glow on the setting horizon. But in that summer something happened that marked me for the rest of my life. Paolo Rossi smashed in a hat-trick, and the Brazil of Socrates, Junior, Paulo Roberto Falcão and of course Zico crumbled. They (Brazil) hadn't lost in more than four years. But the real reason Italy won that match, and had won before against Argentina and then went on to win the final of the World Cup itself against Germany was because, unbeknown to anybody except myself, God and the Madonna, I recited an entire rosary the night before each game. Since then I have been unable or unwilling to do so and Italy's fortunes have flagged. 2006 (won only on penalties, mind you) was not due to my nightly supplications.

Saying the rosary so that Italy would win the World Cup seems to sum up what was most important in my life then, and that victory was a chrism for everything I believed in. Wondering around London that evening with my brothers and a group of second generation Italians, I felt I knew the truth, I had understood everything and the wider world held no secrets for me. The England fans were locked

into their sad, grey, shattered and blinkered life. Jimmy Hill, the BBC football commentator (known for his generously proportioned chin) who always denigrated the *belpaese*, could say whatever he wanted about the *catenaccio*, diving and Gentile's fouls because the bitterness he had to swallow was honey to me.

I think the story really begins with my father. The family that I grew up in in London in the 1970s and 1980s was his creation. Although my mother sustained and ran it, my father had pretty much full control over its general features. He kind of made policy through speeches and it was left to my mother to work out the details. My mother is not Italian at all. She was born in London of recent immigrants from Poland. Having met an Italian waiter when she was 17, a few months later she told her parents that she wanted to marry him and to leave school. They naturally went berserk and threw her out of the house and she ended up living with my paternal grandparents and eventually marrying him. She learnt Italian very quickly and I think the shock of what had happened with her own parents made her adapt, almost unquestioningly, to my father's wishes. Not fully though. She always says as a kind of defence in this regard that he had wanted the sons (just the sons) in the household – we ended up being five boys and three girls – to do no housework, not to make the bed even, and that she stood up to him and insisted that us males do our beds and dry the plates and tidy our room. I was expected to admire her for this (and I suppose I do now).



Fig. 2. Family photo in London in 1978. [Image courtesy Giuseppe Finaldi.]

I don't really know that much about my father's past but the formative event of his life appears more and more to me to be his being

hurled into the starkness of austerity London from a small town, near Pompei, about 30 km from Naples in the south of Italy in 1952. He was 15 years old and could not speak a word of English. This was a pretty normal experience for many Italians at this time, an experience that in one way or another affected hundreds of thousands of Italians, emigrating particularly from southern Italy.

My grandfather, with whom my father came to Britain, had been something of a Fascist and I think always continued to regard the English as enemies. Although he worked frying eggs at a Lyons Corner House he always considered himself, as an Italian, to be a cut above the English population. He dressed better, ate better, sang better songs and importantly looked better. He would never go out of the house with a scuff on his shoes, and he always told me that a man without a handkerchief was worthless; I think he expected to meet people in the streets of Finchley like he used to in the square of his village in Italy, where on Sunday men would go to the barber, don a suit and hat and stand on the street corner engaged in deep conversation with other men in suits and hats as the womenfolk went to Mass and then prepared sauce for the Sunday pasta, something that could take five or six hours. He had one of those pencil-thin moustaches like David Niven or Clark Gable. He also had that Latin machismo which involved cutting a physical dash. He would challenge me to a running race when he was in his 70s and I remember him, as we looked down on a Northern line tube train roaring its way into London under a metal bridge we were on, saying that if he wanted to he could jump down onto it like some kind of secret agent. I believed him of course. He never mastered English.

My father, who had been doing very well at school in Italy, went to do a last year of secondary modern in Archway and hated every minute of it. He was suspended and even caned (something which apparently had been abolished in Italian schools in the nineteenth century) and from there thrust into the dark basements of London restaurants; a steam-filled Babel where all of Europe's languages cross-fired. When he talked about this, I could see the trays crashing and glasses breaking: he

told us about one young man who throughout his shift, loaded with plates, food and drink, would quietly sing to himself incomprehensibly as the doors swung and the pans in the kitchen clanged: it turned out he was softly reciting the psalms in Greek.

I don't know much about what happened after that but it is clear to me that for my father being Italian was completely bound up with his idea of what a perfect family was supposed to be. For him, the world outside the family house was 'the world' in the Christian meaning of the term; that is, something that should be shunned. And of course the particularity of that world was that it was England. The slip into a dichotomy between Italy (equals home, equals good, equals Catholic, equals safe) and England (equals the world, equals pagan, equals barbarian etc.) was, I think, probably an easy one. But let me tell you about how this construction worked in my life. It was not just a simple case of home versus the outside world because home had all sorts of extensions that went outside it but that were nevertheless comprised within it. For example, the two months a year which I would spend on holiday in Italy itself (the 'real' – well, a kind of 'real' one) were part of what was associated with home life, a kind of extension of it.

Language was fundamental to this creation. When I began school I was unable to speak English. At home English was completely banned; as my siblings and I grew up we always had to be wary of speaking English amongst ourselves because we would be punished if we were caught. We had no television; my father would not have one. He never explained why but I suppose for him it was a contamination from the world outside, the world that was English and therefore a destabilising element for the inner sanctuary of the family. We went to an Italian church and nearly everything we did outside the family was within the compass of this church. There were dances and picnics and things like that; my father was heavily involved in a whole series of Italian community organizations that, along with him getting a degree at Birkbeck in French, eventually moved him out of the waiters' class in which he had been since he came from Italy. So the family was to a great

degree sandbagged off from 'normal' English society as a whole, with the notable exception of school and neighbourhood friends. But with regard to the latter, there was always a slight unease associated with them. So I think that the aim of my father was to create a family that lived in an island that he liked to fancy was Italy. I was told that it was and had no reason to doubt that this was the case.

I could draw on countless examples of how the dichotomy was made real in my mind, but I will limit myself to a few. The way I looked outwards was shaped by this rather anomalous home, an experience no doubt shared by other immigrant families. I interpreted the world around me according to the dichotomy that my father had set up within the walls of the family, and I more or less fully concurred with how I was expected to view the outside world. All the time it was about a judgement, an appraisal of what went on outside vis-à-vis what went on within, with the superiority of the latter always finding confirmation.

Consider, for example, the way one was expected to greet people. In Italy you could kiss them on both cheeks if there was some kind of intimacy, a physical embrace between men and women but also between men and men. At Gatwick or Heathrow I could watch the English coming into the arrivals lounge after a flight and palpably feel the awkwardness of parents greeting their children or worse, more distant family members. A terrible moment of embarrassment was evident whenever a greeting took place; a handshake was too formal but an embrace not really acceptable, so a moment of uncomfortableness had to be overcome before normal intercourse could resume. Amongst Italians this was non-existent. Whenever I met somebody from my family this easiness was confirmed. We knew how to do things.

Food. This was the everyday plebiscite. A meal could consist in, say, an entrée of *prosciutto crudo* tucked around a bed of artichokes. Spaghetti would follow with a crimson sauce flecked with the green of basil and gleaming with the deep yellow of the oil. Heaped teaspoons of grated Parmesan were free for all. Wine was allowed from age 12. A second course might be fried spinach or peppers in

deep pools of oil; bread was abundant, and the meat might be followed by cheese or a sweet and fresh fruit. Coffee, deep and black but sweet was given to all, children included. The world outside ate food: baked beans on toast, the omnipresent sliced white toast and margarine, Heinz tinned tomato soup, the ubiquitous cheddar cheese, dehydrated mashed potatoes or, God-forbid, that strange black paste that's called Marmite in England.

Drink too was important: as I grew up, wine was a sign of civilization. Not the kind of wine drunk by the English, the posh ones that is, the French wine that meant in England you didn't mix with the working class. It meant homemade wine made from grapes delivered from Puglia that we would all go and press with our feet at my grandfather's house. In England, grapes didn't even grow. I never saw a drop of beer anywhere in the vicinity of our home for all my childhood. Drunkenness was associated with the English and pubs were these strange locations where the windows had to be curtained or tinted, where children could not go in because, my father said, the English adults did not want to show their own children what they looked like when they were drunk. Italians drank with their families, at meals, and had nothing to hide from their children.

But it wasn't just the food itself; it was the way it was consumed. The table was like a sign of civilization: the longer you sat at it, the more civilized you were. Inviting English school friends to eat was an agony for me and for them. My father would observe the way they behaved and, as the time slipped by, one could feel their urge to escape from the table's tyranny. As dish followed dish their discomfort increased. One boy I remember being clearly physically repulsed by a slice of salami. I knew there was little to share in the end between him and me, and my father regarded him with disgust, like a cultureless savage.

My father always expected anyone who came to our house to formally express his acknowledgement of my father's presence. You had to say hello on entry and goodbye on exit. This was, according to him, the way things were done in Italy. I always felt terrible embarrassment with school friends at, say, age 14 when

I told them that they must greet my parents before going up to my room. In Italy, my father said, you always did this and it was the proper way to behave.

According to him there had been in England a breakdown in communication between different generations. Children could not talk to adults and vice versa. Children were kept away from tables, they ate separately from their parents, weren't allowed into pubs, weren't encouraged to participate in conversation with adults: simply put, they should be seen and not heard. We, I mean my brothers and sisters and I, were horrified to hear from my father that the English sent their children to bed at seven. At seven? I imagined the agony of English children lying in bed while the still bright sunshine of a June evening pounded through their curtains. If they dared to make a sound their parents would yell 'shut up' at them. 'Shut up'. In my house saying shut up was a criminal offence; something done in the barbarous houses of the English.

The sunshine. This was something we had and the English didn't. From age five onwards I would be sent to Italy, sometimes for all of July, August and September. I remember getting off the plane in Naples airport. The heat would hit you like a sledgehammer. With the sledgehammer came massive quantities of food, endless afternoons wandering through my father's town as everybody closed off between about 1.30 and 5. Then we would go to the beach on the Amalfi coast. In the evening people would sit outside and talk and talk. People always wanted to know about who I was and where I came from. I felt I was important. England had none of this; its rain and grey skies were a confirmation that God had smiled on Italy.



Fig. 3. Being picked up at Napoli airport in 1976.
[Image courtesy Giuseppe Finaldi.]

Girls. After I started going to secondary school girls ceased to be part of my life except for in June. In June a whole flock of them, mostly from the Veneto in Northern Italy would descend into our life. My father now had a business of study holidays for young Italians in London and from about age 14 I would be the tour guide for huge groups of mostly 14-18 year old Italian girls. It was wonderful. English girls looked like frowsy spotty things wearing awful brown school uniforms and thick black shoes. What was that compared to the Benetton clad girls (and then Benetton meant amazing brightly coloured clothes) which one month of the year filled, it seemed to me, London with a whirl of colour and warmth.

The *cantautori* were the backdrop of those summers. The songs of Pino Daniele, Lucio Dalla, Angelo Branduardi and Claudio Baglioni were what Italians strummed clustered around a guitar in Saint James' or Hyde Park. At home we sung and sung all the time. My father had a wonderful baritone voice for opera but around the piano there was 'Carmè quanno te veco' and 'E Spingule francese'. 'O' surdato 'nnammurato' was my rousing favourite. Naples had produced the finest songs ever written; laid up in the heart of every Italian migrant, they were a treasure the moths and rust of having departed from 'o' paraviso' could never touch... Cántano a buordo só' Napulitane!

Religion was another thing that set us apart. Being Catholic meant having another motherland outside of Britain. It was, of course, strongly associated with Italy for obvious reasons. As far as I understood it, an English person who was Catholic was not English. Irish

ancestors somewhere along the line or, if they had converted, they, in reality, had renounced their Englishness. Malcolm Muggeridge's conversion to Catholicism was a great victory for my father but to the English, so I believed, being Catholic meant having something continental about you: a whiff of garlic, the crazy and faintly treacherous notion that the continent could offer you something better than the green and pleasant land. For us in our family, being Italian and Catholic were as synonymous as being English and non-Catholic. In Britain, expressing one's identity was equivalent to being the Other. I was only dimly aware of the fact that there were Italians who weren't Catholic. In Italy itself, one of my aunts lived above an Italian Communist Party branch. She always told me that the men who frequented the place – and I could always see them drinking and playing cards – were dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. As I would go to an Italian church in London, Catholicism and Italian went together. At school, which was Catholic too, nobody was really English, and if they called themselves so it was because they renounced their Irish or continental past. To me it made sense that the Pope was in Italy because I could not imagine God, like my father, speaking anything except Italian, or if he did he would have had a strong Italian accent. At Christmas we had a tree but there was some slight unease about it; it was clearly a pagan and foreign thing, but the crib with baby Jesus that appeared miraculously in the manger was a reconstruction of an Italian village (there were clay figures of pizza makers and fishermen like you got in the bay of Naples); the houses that were made of bent white cardboard seemed to me to be exactly like the houses you could still find in my father's village back in Italy. That Jesus came into the world in Italy was reflected in the panorama of the crib. He (Jesus that is) was clearly Italian.

I could carry on like this *ad infinitum*. Everything in life was about a comparison between an imagined Italy and also an imagined Britain. I was being brought up in the wrong place. Everything that was familiar, pleasurable or worthwhile was associated with an imaginary Italy in which real life took place. There was a refusal of everything associated with Britain. In my house the worst insult was

being accused of showing signs of Englishness. I remember my little brother Luca when he was six being told by my wife Daniela, who intended it as a compliment, that he was 'the most English' amongst all my brothers and sisters. He broke into bitter and desperate tears.

I don't really know how to look back on this upbringing. It is one amongst others, I think, no better or worse than others although I remain hugely grateful for it.

Was all this stuff just my own father's quirkiness, or is there anything to be understood about host societies and migrant communities in general (or at least in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s) from this experience? I can only put forward some ideas.

I am convinced now that my father was wrenched by coming to London from a small village in Italy and treated as a nothing when he first came over to Britain. His reaction was possibly a response to the situation that any immigrant faces when entering a new country, particularly when the host country has a distinct notion of its own superiority vis-à-vis the immigrant. Was becoming British the price that had to be paid in exchange for acceptance? I don't really know if there was a bargain made by Britain in exchange for his loyalty; I don't think it was ever struck by either party. Something like becoming Italian-British, like Italian-American in the USA was never expected. In London you can be almost anything: as long as you work hard, pay the rates or whatever, nobody cares that much. At least this was the case for Italians, who could not be distinguished by the colour of their skin. There was no racism from the outside because I supposedly wasn't British. You could be what you wanted because, fundamentally, there was no mainstream community that felt assailed by the Other. London, I think, had long ceased to be that way, and its mobile population grouped together in national or religious units. That was the way I perceived the situation. However, I think the temptation my father had to create a fictitious fatherland outside of England was irresistible. In a sense it made life easier. All problems could be associated with not really being in the right place, a kind of Zionism of the everyday. We

will meet next year in Jerusalem where everything will slip into its proper place and society will be a reflection of the norms that we maintain in an island of otherness. This choice is one that makes up for life's insecurities and dissatisfactions: there is a golden land in which all will be right.

But you can do this imagining safely only if the society to which you do not in your imagination belong is sufficiently tolerant. It must not make constant demands on your loyalty or things will quickly become explosive. I think that, on the whole, London between 1968 and 1988 was like this, maybe as long as you were white, and like me but unlike my father, spoke English without an accent. There were moments when you were expected to express loyalty. I mentioned the Falklands, but even there it never went further than a few weeks. Nobody was called up to fight and you could keep your head down and believe what you will. Ultimately, I think British culture was so powerful that leaving people to imagine that they were better because they ate better food, were lucky to have nicer weather in their country, treated their children differently or whatever hardly mattered. The unease from the person within the parallel community was, on the other hand, tangible. However well things may have been going, however palpable were integration, success etc., there nevertheless remained the unease of not belonging.

Kureishi's idea that the only way forward for the British and the Pakistanis is a kind of amalgamation of both would have been hideous to my father, and would have felt exactly the same to me as I grew up. The idea, therefore, of multiculturalism made sense, I think, from all points of view. Having said that, it is also true that Pakistan cannot exist within Britain, in the same way that the perception of my world as I grew up was not really about Italy. In the second generation Pakistanis who blew up the London underground I think that the same mentality that was to be found in my family was in operation, although with a much more powerful intensity. The problem of not belonging can be transformed over a generation into something altogether different. Just as Islamic fundamentalism is the product of Islam coming into contact with the

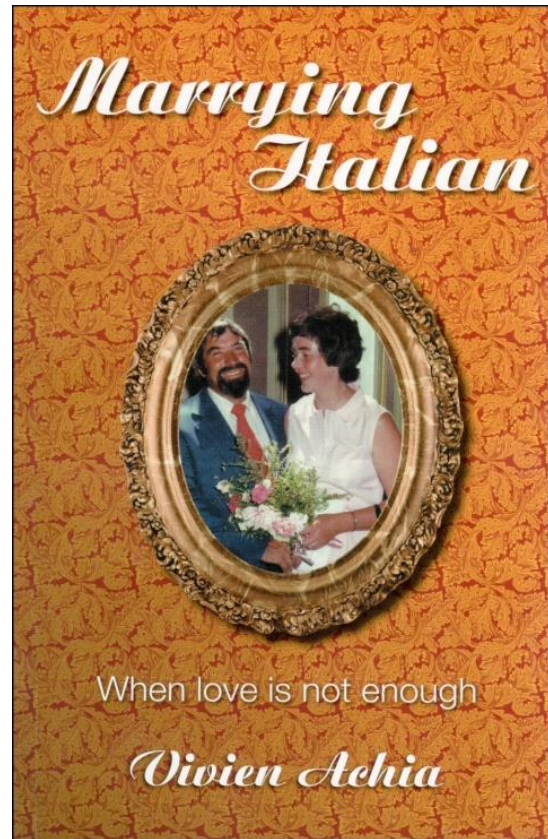
West, so the adoption of new identities, new imagined communities is about a mix in which Kureishi's coming together is refused and an identity of utter separateness is adopted. In reality, this is probably a product of identities actually having come together. It is an abhorrence of a *métissage* that has already come about. It is an imagined refuge from globalisation.

In the last twenty years or so I think the myth that my father made of Italy has died to a certain extent in his own mind as a result of the changes that are clear to all in Italy itself. The lowest birth rate in the world, the passing of laws on divorce, higher abortion rates than in the UK etc., as well as the full scale secularisation of Italian culture have killed off that imagined Zion.

On the other hand I feel that pushing all the blame, as it were, to an obsessive and idiosyncratic father, and painting Britain as a highly tolerant and accepting society is going too far. Looking back then over this experience, I think that my father in reality adopted a double strategy in relation to his children. No doubt it was coming to England that made him realize he was Italian and no matter how many years went by in his life in London he remained such. In Britain it would be laughable to claim that you are British if you have an Italian accent like my father has after 50

years in that country. The sandbagging that I have been talking about goes both ways. One could live in a separate national community, work in it (my father made his money by selling English to Italians) but in the final analysis he never became British and for all his success remained a foreigner in English society. His culture isn't regarded as by any means as the worst around, but it is still considered to be slightly defective. He reacted in relation to us not only by constructing the edifice I have been talking about but also (and this was his second strategy) by aiming at granting us the possibility of superseding this defect to a degree. We could go to really good English schools and use all the resources that England provided. We could speak English without a foreign accent. The revenge of many immigrants is beating the host population at their own game. Mostly this is achieved by making money. In our case I think it was education. We had to do well at school and make up for the defects that he would never get over.

But part of the deal was that there should never be a real abandonment of what he considered to be being Italian. For second-generation immigrants like us, becoming truly English would have meant joining forces with those who had, and still did reject him as not quite fully belonging, a kind of going over to an implacable enemy.



**vivien achia, *marrying italian:*
when love is not enough.
hybrid publishers, melbourne, 2013
book review
by john gatt-rutter**

*Professor John Gatt-Rutter is Maltese by birth and graduated at Cambridge in Modern Languages, concentrating on Italian. He has spent a lifetime teaching Italian language and literature and related topics at several British and Australian universities and was Vaccari Professor in Italian Studies at La Trobe University from 1991 to 2008. Since then, he has been an Honorary Associate of the University and of the Italian Australian Institute. His research publications include a life of Italo Svevo (1861-1928) and a literary appraisal of Oriana Fallaci (1929-2006). Over the last ten years, he has turned his attention to books which have told the life stories of Australia's Italians, which have been almost totally unexplored. His latest book, *The Bilingual Cockatoo* (2014), is a survey of these life stories.*

Abstract: Vivien Achia's *Marrying Italian: when love is not enough* is unique in presenting the experience of marriage between an Italian husband and an Anglo-Celtic Australian wife from the latter's point of view. It is an enquiry as to why, despite the strong attachment between the two parties, the marriage broke down, but it also celebrates their love of life and the joys of belonging to two cultural worlds.¹

¹ *Marrying Italian* was shortlisted for the Community Relations Commission Award for a Multicultural NSW in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards for 2014.

There have been happy marriages between Italians in Australia and home-grown Australians, but they have not been much written about, and the secret of what we might call ethnic blending between Italians and Australians has remained pretty secret. I have read some sixty full-length memoirs of Italian Australian lives, and, up to last year, I found none that delved into the matrimonial experience of such a mixed couple. Then, late last year, there appeared a book by Chris Sarra, the Koori educationist and activist from Cherbourg in SW Queensland. His book was titled *Good morning, Mr Sarra!* (University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 2012). Chris Sarra was one of six children of a Koori mother and an Italian father, a peasant or small farmer from the Abruzzo region of Italy. The marriage, as narrated in Sarra's autobiography, was harmonious and fortifying for the blended young Koori Italian children, and Chris Sarra even rejoiced in meeting his two Italian half-brothers in Abruzzo, his father's offspring from a previous union. Somehow, the brothers established a joyful relationship across the barrier of language and culture, their rustic life-style and ethos being the major features in common between the two milieux.

And now comes Vivien Achia's book – the first that I know of to recount a blended Italian-Australian marriage from the home-grown Australian wife's point of view. Coincidentally, Chris Sarra's Italian father originated from the same region from which Vivien's husband, Eliseo Achia, also drew his family origins, Abruzzo, which is east of Rome, though Eliseo's family had moved to the coastal area south-west of Rome, near Anzio. This area, previously known in English as the Pontine Marshes, had been famously drained under Mussolini in the 1920s and turned into prime agricultural land, which was settled by farmers who were, understandably, enthusiastic supporters of Mussolini's fascist regime. Eliseo's father, an army man, was, as reported by Eliseo to Vivien, particularly committed to the regime, and a strict disciplinarian, ruling his family with an iron fist. His son, Eliseo, was to attempt to do likewise with regard to his Australian family.

Anzio, of course, was the site of a major landing by Allied forces in German-occupied Italy during the Second World War, and the area saw fierce and protracted fighting. Eliseo, then aged 18, went through a traumatic time in that confused period, living dangerously as a partisan and witnessing the horrors of war at close quarters. Vivien, in writing this memoir of her marriage with Eliseo, surmises that her husband's mood-swings and rages may have been influenced by his traumatic war-time experiences.



Fig. 1. Eliseo Achia in 1940. [Image courtesy Vivien Achia.]

Marrying Italian: when love is not enough: the story of a failed marriage in itself might not be absorbing reading. Failed marriages are all too common, almost banal. In fact, both Vivien and Eliseo already each had one failed marriage behind them before they embarked on their marriage to one another. What makes this story of a failed marriage special is that it is a love story, as the title of Vivien's book tells us. On both sides of the marriage, on Vivien's and on Eliseo's, the emotional and physical longing outlasts the dissolution of the marriage and is accompanied on Vivien's side not only by an abiding love for Eliseo himself, but by a love for his family and country of origin. Likewise, Eliseo does not cease to profess his

love for Vivien even after the marriage has irrevocably broken down. What drives the book is precisely the need to understand how there can be so much love in a marriage on both sides and yet the marriage fails. Conjugal love is for both parties a be-all and end-all, and in each case it starts with their need to be loved. Vivien professes this need as she is propelled into her first, hair-raising, marriage, and again when she falls in love with Eliseo. But Eliseo himself, all but 20 years older than Vivien, repeatedly asks her, in her account of his courtship, “Do you love me? Do you love me?” So here we have two people, each of them desperately eager to love and be loved.

And yet, with marriage, the nightmares begin, in a continuous roller-coaster ride alternating bliss and misery with Eliseo’s wild mood-swings. There is plenty of vivid and dramatic detail in Vivien’s account of her life with a husband who expected to be served like a king with exquisite Italian cuisine in a perfectly run household and for whom nothing his wife or their three children did for him was ever good enough. Eliseo’s rages eventually make life unliveable, especially after the grand project to build for his family a spacious and gracious mansion on a twenty-five acre rural plot at Kinglake has to be abandoned and the house sold owing to a mounting burden of debt and the three knee operations that render Eliseo unable to work and to earn an income for extended periods.

Fraught scenes and confrontations between Eliseo and Vivien and the children, and repeated escapes from the intolerable ménage, clandestine house-moves, are dramatically narrated, yet this book is, remarkably, not a mere litany of woes, but is also a celebration. It goes beyond the cathartic release of the accumulated distress and frustration undergone by all members of the family, and celebrates many things worth celebrating. There is Eliseo’s adventure in coming to Australia, though he was comfortably established in Italy. Many Italians, like him, migrated to Australia in a spirit of adventure, rather than out of sheer economic necessity – a fact not often recognized by settled Australians. There is his talent as a builder, realized in hundreds of fine houses which he built in Melbourne’s north-eastern suburbs. There is his convivial verve

among his circle of Italian friends and his stylish dress sense, and his culinary skill and his numerous other practical skills, including that of distilling grappa. His genial personality beams out from the book’s cover illustration showing Eliseo and Vivien on their marriage day.



Fig. 2. *The wedding of Vivien Stewart and Eliseo Achia. [Image courtesy Vivien Achia.]*

Vivien too looks radiant in that picture, and this book is also a celebration of many things in her life. She is a country girl, and the hard-earned joys of country Australia, without the benefit of electricity until she was fourteen years old, are lovingly recalled. Not that Vivien was drawn to farm work, whether in the home or in the field. In fact, with her bookish interests, she stuck out a mile as *not* being a typical country girl or farmer’s daughter. Rather, we might say that she was a natural born women’s liberationist, in that she systematically fought shy of domestic chores. Just as Eliseo was unmistakably Italian, yet far from being your average Italian, not least in marrying Vivien, so Vivien is unmistakably Aussie, but would be hard to pigeon-hole into any preconceived category of Australian womanhood. Not a typical farmer’s daughter, then, but a great lover of animals and the

natural environment, who revels in living out at Kinglake with a small herd of wayward bullocks and a colony of wombats feasting on potatoes, and a paddock thick with springtime daffodils.

Vivien's book is also a celebration of the coming of multicultural Australia, of which she herself is a worthy pioneer. Her inspired vocation as a community librarian is a bright tessera in the mosaic of the history of Australian society, as she makes it her business to find reading matter that will ease new Australians of non-English-speaking background into the English language and an understanding of Australian ways of feeling, thinking and behaving. She co-opts her Italian husband, Eliseo, into this undertaking, persuading him to tell the story of his migration from Italy to Australia. This he does in Italian, and his story is recorded on audiotape and printed on facing pages in the original Italian on one side and in English translation on the other. (I wonder if any of this material survives.)

Vivien herself gets, as it were, translated into Italian as *la signora Vivian* by Eliseo's friends, who now form her social circle. She is entranced by Italian cuisine, and systematically sets about mastering it. She is entranced by Eliseo's family in Italy, whom she goes to visit with Eliseo and their young son Cesare. She is entranced by Italy generally – both the homely environments near Anzio and in the Abruzzo Region, as well as the high-profile historic and artistic heritage of places such as Rome and Venice. She has her distinctive take on all these aspects and experiences, making them real for the reader, and *Marrying Italian* is part of a growing Australian literature of travel and memoir writing which explores and discovers or rediscovers Italy and the Italians from an Australian point of view, subscribing to a cultural heritage which variegates, broadens and enriches the Australian cultural heritage.

The two different cultures – the Italian and the Australian – turn out to have a surprising amount in common, beneath surface appearances. The all too clichéd prominence attributed to family and food as distinguishing features of Italian social culture after all applies equally to Vivien's family of origin as to

Eliseo's. Vivien always has the support of her family whenever needed, even that of her stepfather, though that support is not expressed as effusively as it is by the Italian family. And that support often – indeed systematically – takes the form of abundant provision of good quality food (though the Australian cuisine may differ enormously from the Italian cuisine). The presence of the family support network is felt in every chapter of Vivien's book, in every episode of her life, despite the distance she has put between herself and her parental home – the distance between Melbourne and Wangaratta. This family closeness is carried on to the next generation, Vivien's three children – Elise, Cesare and Anna – being always at the forefront of her attention. There thus appears to be a strong underlying cultural compatibility between the Italian Achias and the Australian Stewarts, the difference between them being mainly one of style.

This is the fascination of this book – the interplay between difference and sameness, compatibility and incompatibility. It is a slice of Australian life that reminds us that no two slices of life are identical the one with the other. Yet each slice tells us so much about what the entire loaf is like, and this slice is particularly rich. It is thronged with people – the two families and their friends and supporters, people they have interacted with and worked with. One of Vivien's many skills as a writer springs, as it necessarily must, from her warm humanity: it is her never-failing awareness of others around her, of mutual bonds. No significant other is summarily photographed, as it were, and summarily dismissed – the presence of family members, friends, colleagues, casual helpers, is constantly felt, acknowledged and referred back to with spontaneity, naturalness and ease. Vivien does justice to everybody, not in the sense of judging them, but in the sense of appreciating them. In spite of the sense of bewilderment in recognizing that "love is not enough" to keep her marriage going, this book generates warmth and uplift. This comes across most clearly in Vivien's determination to keep open the link with Eliseo's family in Italy after Eliseo's death, and in her account of her reunion with them.

This is a life-enhancing book, then, and nowhere more so than in the account of the years spent building what was to be Eliseo's masterpiece, the splendid house at Kinglake. Again, this is a story of a failure, in that Eliseo's physical problems and mounting debts prevented the ultimate achievement of his great dream, but it is also a story of remarkable endeavour, which Vivien recalls with great vividness and in dramatic detail in some of its nail-biting moments – a story of the family over-wintering on the heights of Kinglake in a caravan which had to serve as sleeping accommodation, kitchen, bathroom and general living space, and then of their living for a protracted period in the basement of the house as it was being built. The Kinglake saga of the Achia family brings to my mind that short novel of Ernest Hemingway's, *The Old Man and the Sea*, in which a grizzled old fisherman in the Gulf of Mexico goes out to sea in his little nutshell of a boat and, after a mighty struggle, captures a magnificent fish as large as his boat, only to see it being devoured by sharks on his way back to shore, so that in the end nothing but its skeleton is left, leaving him no tangible benefit, but nevertheless tes-

tifying to his endeavour and to his achievement.



Fig. 3. *The house in Kinglake. [Image courtesy Vivien Achia.]*

Vivien's book testifies to Eliseo's endeavour and to his achievement, but also to her own endeavour and achievement, in rising above adversity. And Vivien herself endures, having again made a home in Kinglake, and remaking it yet again after the devastation of the Black Saturday bushfires. There is something Phoenix-like in new life arising from the ashes, and this book too is revivifying and uplifting.

amati e salia di giovanni andreoni

Giovanni Andreoni, scrittore e insegnante originario di Grosseto, emigrò in Australia nel 1962 dopo aver viaggiato a lungo in Europa. È stato insegnante presso diverse università in Australia e in Nuova Zelanda e nel 1990 ha vinto una borsa di studio bandita dalla Ethnic Affairs Commission (Commissione Affari Etnici) per meriti letterari. Le sue opere sono custodite nella Australiana collection della Biblioteca Nazionale d’Australia (Canberra).

Il Dott. Andreoni ha sempre viaggiato molto e ha esplorato luoghi selvaggi quali l’outback australiano, le steppe della Mongolia e si è interessato di varie culture tra cui quella giapponese e quella cinese.

Abstract: Pubblichiamo qui in anteprima per gentile concessione dell’Autore un estratto da *Il mandarino nel cervello*, il romanzo che Giovanni Andreoni sta scrivendo. Sono due storie di guerra, i cui protagonisti, che l’Autore conosceva bene, raccontavano sempre con molta tristezza e rimpianto. Solo i nomi sono stati cambiati. Il primo episodio, in Slovenia, rivela l’umanità dei personaggi che la guerra cerca inutilmente di trasformare in nemici assetati di sangue. Il secondo, che si svolge a Stalingrado, mette a fuoco il coraggio delle divisioni alpine: Julia, Tridentina e Vittorio Veneto che, spinte dal desiderio di tornare a casa, riescono, anche se decimate, ad uscire invitte dalla Russia. “Dopo la guerra – Andreoni racconta – lessi *Le ultime lettere da Stalingrado* pubblicate, se non mi sbaglio, da Feltrinelli; ne rimasi scosso allora e, ripensandoci, mi viene un groppo alla gola. Credo – continua l’Autore – che queste storie vadano raccontate in un momento storico come il nostro, quando guerra e terrorismo fanno parte del sistema economico delle potenze di oggi.”

La seconda parte del romanzo accompagnerà il colonnello Carmelo Salia e Guglielmo Amati negli anni del dopoguerra. Salia tentò molte volte di ricostruirsi una vita senza riuscirci; troppi erano i demoni del passato da affrontare. Alla fine decise di emigrare in Canada. La sua domanda fu respinta perché aveva superato i limiti di età. Finì i suoi giorni a Catania. Ogni tanto andava a trovare i pochi commilitoni rimasti. Amati divenne dopo la guerra sindaco della cittadina martire di Aprilia, rasa al suolo nella battaglia di Roma. Grazie a lui e ai suoi collaboratori Aprilia tornò ad essere un centro vitale della campagna romana. Anche lui era rimasto bruciato dalla guerra. La terza parte sarà sull’Australia.

“Il padre di Giovanni partì volontario per la guerra nel 1942, a bordo della sua Citroën dai predellini larghi e i fari nichelati sui parafranghi anteriori. La fotografia di tutta la famiglia in tasca, attraversò l’Italia per raggiungere il suo battaglione di stanza in Slovenia. Nessuno ricorda più quanti giorni ci abbia messo per arrivare al fronte dove, ad aspettarlo, c’erano tanti commilitoni di Civitavecchia, Ladispoli e degli altri paesini a poca distanza da Roma. Non sarà stato un viaggio difficile; le strade, anche quelle bianche, erano abbastanza buone e la gente credeva alla propaganda del regime: 10 milioni di baionette, la stirpe italiana nata per disperdere i barbari e così via. Giovanni rimase a Ladispoli in attesa della vittoria finale.

In Slovenia le cose non andavano come diceva la stampa italiana e tedesca. I partigiani di Tito resistevano con tenacia; nascosti nei folti boschi di noccioli attaccavano pattuglie isolate, facevano saltare ponti e strade. Le donne slave erano leonesse pronte a morire pur di liberarsi degli invasori. La guerra partigiana è feroce, non si prendono prigionieri. La repressione italo-tedesca era immediata e brutale senza però risolvere nulla, riusciva soltanto a creare odio e paura; la guerra è sempre sinonimo di terrorismo e non risolve mai un accidente.

L’unico a godersi la vita era il colonnello Carmelo Salia il quale, con l’intensificarsi di attacchi e contrattacchi, morti di qua e morti di là, infischiosene del pericolo costringeva Gu-

glielmo Amati, un povero tenente, a portarlo con la Citroën ora a questa ora a quella taverna con una reputazione per il buon vino rosso e certi manicaretti da leccarsi le dita. Incuranti dei rischi percorrevano strade isolate attraversando zone sotto il controllo dei partigiani; lo facevano quasi ogni sera e il colonnello diceva al tenente che si metteva in tasca per scaramanzia la fotografia di Giovanni e del resto della famiglia:

“Memmo, non ti preoccupare.”

La risposta del nostro non cambiava mai:

“Carmelo, qui ci fanno la pelle.”

Per fortuna la Citroën era diventata un simbolo di pace e gli sloveni l’avevano battezzata Guglielmina in onore del proprietario e autista *de facto* del colonnello Salia. Inoltre i due italiani avevano salvato alcuni musicisti slavi dalle mani di fantaccini avvinazzati. La cosa era andata così: un gruppo di soldati troppo sicuri di se stessi era entrato in una taverna locale per finire di ubriacarsi e non pensare alla guerra. Il sabato sera una banda slava suonava sempre canzoni tradizionali e moderne della Slovenia, dell’Austria e dell’Italia. Gli italiani li avevano costretti a suonare con le loro fisarmoniche e a cantare in coro il famoso inno fascista “Giovinezza”; o perché non sapessero le parole e la melodia o perché non volessero compiacere il nemico, il risultato finale era stato una frotteria, così aveva dichiarato il colonnello Salia ridendo a crepapelle. I soldati cominciarono a malmenare i musicisti che non cercavano nemmeno di difendersi. Per fortuna intervennero il tenente e il colonnello i quali, assistiti da due carabinieri sopraggiunti al momento giusto, non solo spinsero indietro gli italiani ma li arrestarono per aver disturbato un’allegria serata e bastonato dei poveri artisti. Partiti i soldati ubriachi gli sloveni ringraziarono profusamente i due ufficiali di averli salvati dalle legnate.

Due mesi dopo qualcuno parlò con grande entusiasmo di un casolare sperduto nella foresta dove arrostitavano sulla brace di legna un abbacchio che succhiava ancora il latte: la carne tenera tenera si scioglieva in bocca e il grasso leggerissimo avvolgeva di sapore ogni bocconcino prelibato. Mentre attraversavano il bosco il colonnello aveva ordinato al tenente di non pensare nemmeno alla famosa coratella: fegato, cuore, rognoni e animelle, se la sarebbe pappata tutta Carmelo; Guglielmo si

sarebbe accontentato della carne.

Una radura con qualche nocciolo, un grosso casolare, due case poco distanti, una grande stalla per il bestiame e un ovile con pecore e agnelli impazienti che belavano. Fermata la macchina, fatti pochi passi, Guglielmo notò subito le persiane e due grandi porte chiuse. La luce del primo pomeriggio si rifletteva sul parabrezza della Citroën. Si fermarono impallidendo, da una persiana accostata era apparsa la canna di una carabina. Indietreggiando s’accorsero che da ogni finestra sporgeva un fucile. Le porte serrate. Si accucciaron dietro l’auto, la pistola in mano. Non si sentiva volare una mosca.

“Memmo, non ti preoccupare.”

“Non ti preoccupare un cazzo! Lo sapevo che sarebbe finita così.”

Che potevano fare, infilarsi in macchina, mettere in moto e tentare la fuga a tutta velocità; alzarsi in piedi senza pistole con le mani alzate; no, nella guerriglia non si fanno prigionieri. Il tempo non sembrava passare né il silenzio diminuire. S’aprì una porta e una donna vestita di nero si diresse verso la Citroën. Si fermò. Puntando l’indice chiese a Guglielmo e a Carmelo che si erano alzati lentamente dopo aver rimesso le pistole nella fondina:

“Guglielmina?”

Il tenente delle camicie nere fece di sì con la testa senza profferire parola.

Due partigiani armati di mitra uscirono dal podere anche loro fissando la macchina nera come dovrebbero essere tutte le Citroën rispettabili. Carmelo, con un sorriso a fior di labbra:

“Memmo, questi due li riconosco. Suonavano la fisarmonica la sera di Giovinezza.”

La donna e i due uomini li invitarono a seguirli.

Nella grande stanza al pian terreno una dozzina d’uomini armati fino ai denti. L’intera banda musicale era lì; le carabine o il mitra al posto della fisarmonica o del violino; invece degli spartiti: bandoliere piene di cartucce e bombe a mano sottratte ai tedeschi. Quasi tutti gli sloveni parlavano un po’ d’italiano. Sul fuoco di legna tre agnelli, non proprio di latte, arrostitavano allegramente. Tutti insieme passarono una nottata memorabile mangiando e bevendo; il commento del Colonnello Salia:

“Un agnello squisito, ma un rosso troppo aspro purtroppo”.

Ogni tanto oltre la foresta, nel buio profondo, esplosioni e il ta-ta-ta rapido delle mitragliatrici. All'alba Guglielmo, un mal di testa di quelli da sbornia di vino cattivo, si mise al volante con Carmelo accanto; sui predellini, uno slavo di qua e un altro di là con la bandiera rossa sventolante. Atraversarono la foresta senza incidenti. La macchina si fermò a breve distanza dalle linee italiane, protetta dagli alberi e dai cespugli. Gli sloveni strinsero la mano dei due italiani:

“Adesso siamo pari. Non tornate più da queste parti.”

Durante la notte i partigiani avevano attaccato in forze le postazioni italiane e tedesche infliggendo gravi perdite, senza però riuscire a sfondare. Con il primo sole s'erano ritirati in fretta disperdendosi nei boschi.

L'odio e la ferocia ripresero ad inquinare l'anima di tutti e la guerra ad ammazzare e storpiare i corpi giovani di uomini e donne. Il colonnello Salia fu trasferito sul fronte russo. Guglielmo rimase in Slovenia. Guglielmina finì in una stalla a coprirsi di polvere.

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Hitler aveva scritto a Mussolini il quale gli offriva un Corpo di spedizione italiano per il fronte russo:

“Se tale è la vostra intenzione, che io accolgo con il cuore colmo di gratitudine, vi sarà abbastanza tempo per realizzarla, dato che in un teatro di guerra tanto vasto l'avanzata non potrà avvenire dappertutto contemporaneamente. L'aiuto decisivo, Duce, lo potrete però sempre fornire rafforzando le vostre unità nell'Africa settentrionale”.

Mussolini, ignorando il parere dell'alleato tedesco, fece partire lo stesso le divisioni italiane per la Russia dove furono inquadrare nell'armata germanica. Più tardi sarebbero giunti anche gli alpini, cioè le truppe migliori dell'esercito italiano forte di 200.000 uomini schierati sul Don, fra gli ungheresi da una parte e i romeni dall'altra. Salia raggiunse il suo nuovo battaglione nell'ottobre del 1942, prima dell'offensiva finale a Stalingrado.

La Russia è sempre stata il cimitero degli eserciti invasori. Anche questa volta la combinazione dell'inverno, del coraggio e della disperazione dei combattenti, truppe regolari e

partigiani, ebbe la meglio sulla decisione di vincere ad ogni costo delle armate tedesche. Alla fine di dicembre i russi, che da assediati erano diventati assedianti, intensificarono gli attacchi contro le posizioni nemiche nella zona industriale di Stalingrado riuscendo a conquistarle, benché avessero incontrato una resistenza sovrumana. Poi scavarono delle lunghe gallerie per raggiungere blocchi di case nel centro della città trasformati in fortezze dal nemico. Le cantine, in cui s'erano asserragliati i tedeschi, furono fatte saltare con tutti gli occupanti. La lotta continuò tra i ruderi delle scale e delle abitazioni con una ferocia che spingeva, gli uni e gli altri, a colpire e colpire con qualsiasi cosa fosse portata di mano.

Perché combattevano e continuavano a distruggersi? La propaganda era riuscita a convincere la maggioranza delle vittime che la patria è sacra e il soldato deve difenderla con la vita contro l'odiato nemico che vuole distruggerla. I capi lo sanno: una volta ubriacati dal sangue, non resta per continuare a vivere che bere; il sangue scorre rosso come un buon vino e ha più sapore. In Russia, a parte le solite eccezioni, i combattenti non potevano vivere senza quel sangue; nei momenti di stasi alcuni, sconvolti dall'orrore, si sparavano in bocca non sapendo più che altro fare.

Nulla è rimasto in piedi della povera città. Nel 1589 i russi avevano fondato nel territorio dei tartari la fortezza di Tsaritsin per difendersi dalle loro incursioni. Il Volga e le zone circostanti venivano così sottratte al nemico che si proteggeva dai russi attaccandoli. Nel 1670 fu occupata dai ribelli di Sten'ka Razin e più tardi, nel 1774, da Pugacev. Ma solo nell'Ottocento divenne un grande centro commerciale il cui sviluppo si arrestò durante la guerra civile, quando l'armata bianca guidata dal generale Denikin si scontrò con l'armata rossa di Stalin. Ribattezzata Stalingrado per festeggiare la vittoria del piccolo padre di tutta la Russia, si trasformò in centro industriale nel periodo fra le due guerre mondiali. A distruggerla completamente ci penseranno più tardi le armate russe e germaniche; ci vorranno ben dieci anni per far rivivere le macerie imbrattate di sangue. Nel frattempo, caduto in disgrazia Stalin, il nome fu cambiato in Volgograd.

Un ufficiale tedesco scriveva alla famiglia poco prima dell'ultima battaglia:

“Che speranze ci sono? La morte mi fa paura ma il terrore di una prigionia senza scampo nella terra del gelo e del silenzio, mi spaventa ancora di più. Sappiamo ciò che è accaduto intorno a noi. La speranza di un contrattacco dei nostri che possa salvarci sfondando le linee dei russi, i quali ci tengono inchiodati in questa sacca, è svanita. Resisteremo finché sarà umanamente possibile. La steppa davanti a noi è coperta di neve gelata; terra triste senza colore; chissà se c'è una collina al di là della nebbia? Abbiamo ancora da mangiare e lo dividiamo con i ratti di notte. Siamo pieni di pidocchi. Rimpiango i primi giorni, un assalto dopo l'altro, i carri armati avanzavano nella neve, le bombe a mano. Ci siamo abituati agli scoppi, nessuno ci fa più caso, anzi li preferisco al silenzio. Per fortuna non dura mai a lungo. La battaglia riprende e arrivano i primi feriti. Vogliamo solo una cosa: vivere, vivere ad ogni costo.”

La macchina da guerra tedesca era tanto perfetta e inarrestabile, tutto era stato previsto e programmato prima, eccezion fatta per la sconfitta e l'annientamento; anche la resa, soluzione tanto umana quanto ragionevole, non fu mai presa in considerazione da Hitler e i suoi gerarchi, che ordinarono invece il sequestro dell'ultimo sacco di lettere giunto in Germania con l'ultimo aereo da Stalingrado. Il sacco fu aperto, un certo numero di lettere furono scelte a caso e, cancellati nomi e indirizzi, il personale del Ministero della Propaganda si accinse ad esaminarle attentamente per scoprire quale fosse lo stato d'animo dei soldati assediati a Stalingrado.

“Ho passato la vita tra le stelle studiando l'universo; ho sempre trovato l'infinito accogliente. Non ho mai partecipato a nessun combattimento. Il mio compito era quello di prevedere il tempo; continuo a farlo anche adesso quando non sento più le esplosioni e i colpi di fucile. Che importanza può avere se la temperatura scenderà sotto i 20 gradi gelando la neve caduta di giorno e di notte. Ormai i nostri carri non hanno né carburante né munizioni. La battaglia di Stalingrado è finita e noi abbiamo perso. Ti ricordi le vacanze sull'Adriatico? Il sole, soltanto un'ombra da queste parti, mi colma di rimpianti. Mi torna

in mente il passato, soprattutto la nascita del piccolo Helmut. Eravamo così emozionati. Vorrei dirti mille cose, ma non riesco nemmeno a cominciare. Ti ringrazio. La nostra vita è stata bella, non vorrei cambiare neanche un giorno. Sei giovane e devi continuare a vivere. Helmut, come ogni bambino di questo mondo, ha bisogno di un padre e di una madre. Non dimenticarlo mai. Strano, sono vissuto in milioni di anni luce e soffro in secondi.”

In un mucchio di macerie protetti da lamiere spesse, tre tedeschi e un romeno aspettavano e ogni tanto sparavano, sparavano a un nemico che si movesse tra le rovine o a un gatto in cerca di qualcosa da mangiare, che poi finiva arrostito come un coniglio sul fuoco acceso dai tre con le schegge delle porte e delle finestre sparse dappertutto. Passavano le giornate in una specie di caverna scavata nei cumoli di macerie; la legna non mancava e il calore del fuoco li manteneva in vita nelle notti più gelide. Poi arrivò un carro con il lanciafiamme, bruciò le rovine e quanto c'era sopra e sotto. I tre soldati buttarono qualche bomba a mano, spararono un paio di raffiche e finirono liquefatti nella piccola grotta. Il carro, con uno sferagliare di cingoli, procedette per eliminare chi ancora resisteva.

A Stalingrado i tedeschi avevano perso la guerra ma il ministro della propaganda Goebbels, contando sulla fede cieca nel Führer:

“...Non vogliamo ritirarci davanti a quello che il Führer esige da noi... il Führer ha ordinato, noi gli ubbidiremo! Se mai c'è stato un momento in cui abbiamo creduto con fedeltà nel valore sacro della vittoria, è proprio in questa ora...la vediamo davanti a noi, a portata di mano, dobbiamo soltanto coglierla. Dobbiamo soltanto dimostrare la forza di decisione di porre la vittoria davanti a tutto il resto. Questo è l'ordine del momento e perciò: ora popolo alzati e tempesta scatenati!” Con queste parole fu suggellata la distruzione della Germania. Ci vollero ancora due lunghi anni di morte e di rovina per mettere in scena, a Berlino, l'atto finale del crepuscolo degli dei i quali, trascorsi pochi anni, sarebbero risorti oltramar come la Fenice.

Lungo il Don ungheresi, italiani e romeni aspettavano. L'attacco cominciò il 4 dicembre 1942. La resistenza fu accanita ma i carri ne-

mici riuscirono a sfondare sia nel settore della divisione Ravenna e, più a sud, nel settore della Terza Armata romena, aggirando così da destra gl'italiani. Il colonnello Carmelo Salia aveva dimostrato di essere un fegataccio in Slovenia come in Russia, dove purtroppo non aveva trovato *isbe* dove si mangiasse qualcosa di buono. Ciò lo rattristava più del freddo che da bravo siciliano non riusciva a sopportare. La vita del soldato è dura, per consolarsi s'aggiustava nell'orbita dell'occhio destro il monocolo. Ne aveva le scatole piene di minestre di patate, di cavolo bollito e di vodka. Lui, oltre al mangiar bene, bere meglio e dormire in santa pace con una giovane donna di genereose proporzioni, non voleva altro dalla vita; la guerra maledetta gli aveva tolto ogni piacere. Se ne stava con i suoi soldati a cui mancavano vestiti adatti al gelo, scarpe, cibo nutriente, munizioni, carri e semoventi di un calibro capace di perforare la corazzatura dei T34 nemici. I soldati l'adoravano. Carmelo, nei momenti più brutti, quando i russi sembravano avere il sopravvento e fame e paura fiaccavano anima e corpo, si alzava in piedi incurante del fuoco, si aggiustava il famoso monocolo, giratosi prima a destra poi a sinistra diceva con voce tranquilla una sola parola:

“Allora?”

Bastava per scatenarli; si buttavano contro i carri armati con le bombe a mano tedesche (quelle italiane non erano così efficaci) riuscivano a colpire i cingoli fermandoli. Un carro immobile diventa una trappola; gli occupanti vengono eliminati con un'altra bomba a mano buttata nella torretta. Se il nemico per non bruciare vivo esce all'aperto, è abbattuto da un colpo di fucile o di baionetta.

Il Corpo d'Armata alpino fino a quel momento aveva respinto ogni attacco senza indietreggiare. Fu accerchiato dalle forze russe. Gli alpini continuarono a combattere in attesa dell'ordine di ripiegare che giunse a metà gennaio. La ritirata fu difficilissima. I morti d'ambo le parti si accatastavano nella neve, fantocci mostruosi senza nessun odore congelandosi completamente in poche ore. Gli occhi soprattutto sconvolgevano Carmelo, preso alla gola da un'angoscia che per qualche istante gli faceva perdere il controllo di se stesso; non avevano colore, erano gelo. Il liquido e l'umido di quegli occhi diventavano una pelliola di ghiaccio in cui spariva il rosso di una

goccia di sangue, il colore scuro o chiaro dell'iride, l'espressione dell'ultimo attimo di vita.

Il freddo era il grande nemico del colonnello, nelle gambe e nei piedi. Uscito dalla trincea nella neve in un momento di stasi, vide il corpo di un ufficiale russo morto di fresco ma già semicongelato; indossava stivali imbottiti, le calzature invernali migliori. Riuscì a toglierli e se li infilò subito. Aveva evitato il volto; il corpo congelato sembrava un pupazzo di ghiaccio rovesciato, impolverato dalla neve caduta nel primo mattino. Poi vide gli occhi, la bocca semiaperta, la mancanza di espressione di un bambolotto rotto, di un pesce essiccato dal sole e per un attimo, un attimo soltanto, un lamento sottile di paura e di rimpianto, gli attanagliò le tempie. Ritornò sui suoi passi invaso da una profonda pietà, una sensazione di calore. Con un paio di commilitoni scavò una buca nella neve e vi deposero l'ufficiale; poi ritornarono in fretta nella trincea, i fucilieri avevano ripreso a sparare, colpi singoli e precisi, molti i cecchini. Giunsero una decina di carri T34. Intanto erano anche giunti, in aiuto di Salia e i suoi uomini che resistevano disperatamente, due semoventi tedeschi di buon calibro i quali aprirono subito il fuoco. Lo scontro durò 6 ore. I russi si ritirarono lasciando sul campo otto carri in fiamme; due soli erano rimasti a proteggere il ripiegamento dei fucilieri. Un fumo denso, nero, offuscava il biancore della neve nell'aria.

Carmelo si coprì gli occhi con le mani per veder meglio i suoi soldati. Erano sfiniti e mancavano ancora 500 chilometri di steppa innevata e di gelo prima di arrivare al villaggio di Bol'setroikoje all'ingresso della valle di Sebekino, dove ad aspettarli c'erano ambulanze e camion carichi di viveri e di medicinali. Avevano respinto tanti attacchi dei russi che volevano distruggerli, o prenderli prigionieri per farli sfilare sconfitti nelle strade di Mosca. Nella lunga marcia della colonna con i reparti alpini in testa, armati e ancora capaci di respingere il nemico, chi si afflosciava sulla neve non si sarebbe più rialzato. I corpi assiderati fanno da margine alla “biscia nera lunga una quarantina di chilometri.” La colonna rallenta, s'ingrossa se, davanti a chilometri di distanza, avvengono combattimenti, altrimenti si assottiglia e marcia in fretta. I feriti caricati sulle slitte, ricoperti da teloni, ogni tanto si lamentano.

Pochi sono i muli rimasti; la carne è necessaria a mantenere in vita chi marcia verso la salvezza. Le razzie di bestiame non sempre riescono; i contadini difendono le bestie rimaste sparando dalle *isbe*, talvolta sono rinforzati da partigiani e fucilieri. La temperatura scende fino a 40 gradi. Chi può si rifugia nelle *isbe* dopo aver eliminato la resistenza. La colonna s'ingrossa di giorno in giorno di sbandati; sono ungheresi, italiani, tedeschi e romeni, seguono gli alpini, ancora capaci di respingere i russi, verso la valle della salvezza. Molti trascorrono le notti all'aperto, sotto teloni e stracci; moribondi e vivi ammucchiati tutti insieme. Chi non muore assiderato si alza e la marcia riprende.

Salia e i suoi erano in testa alla colonna. Non sapevano quanti chilometri avessero già percorso e quanti ancora ne mancassero. Tiravano due grosse slitte cariche di feriti. Ad ogni fermata scaricavano i morti nella neve. Oltre ai due muli da macellare, la sera prima avevano trovato un'*isba* con quattro capre e una vecchia coppia di contadini. La donna s'era

rifugiata in un angolo, l'uomo aveva cercato di difendere le bestie ma un soldato l'aveva abbattuto colpendolo in testa con il calcio del fucile.

Il 31 gennaio del 1943 finisce la lunga marcia. Gli uomini camminano lentamente con il volto abbassato, coperti di stracci tolti ai morti o razzati nelle *isbe*. Sono pelle e ossa, segnati dalla fame. In disparte due carri tedeschi prendono fotografie per documentare ciò che è successo. Carmelo si ferma al lato della strada all'ingresso del villaggio. Vorrebbe mettersi il monocolo, guardare i suoi compagni e dire: allora? Chiede invece una sigaretta all'autista di un'ambulanza. L'accende e aspira due o tre boccate, assaporando il fumo. Non ha voglia di procedere, di tornare a casa, di ricominciare da capo. Ha perso ogni cosa nella ritirata e non gliene frega niente. Ha salvato la pelle e questo gli basta. Non è del tutto consapevole dell'enormità della sconfitta subita. Finita la sigaretta ne chiede un'altra e riprende a fumare lentamente.

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