

Of Machiavelli, Mazzini and Many Things¹

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It was fifty years ago in March of this year that I enrolled in Arts I at this University and now almost a year since I retired from the Challis Chair of History. Thus I thought I might mark this half century of involvement with the discipline and this University by pondering a little this evening on researching and writing history. I belong to a generation which does not feel comfortable with the personal pronouns, 'I' and 'me'. But I have now reached the age where my times are the subject of historical investigation, where I am asked to lecture on what it was like in the olden days and where my life is evidence for the experiences of a generation. It is my memories not my opinions that now matter.

When I entered Arts I at Sydney University in March 1955, its student population numbered only some six thousand. I was sixteen years old, far from precocious or sophisticated, and my world had hitherto been confined to New South Wales country towns and to a Methodist boarding school for girls. I did not know much about universities or what I wanted to do—except for one thing, and of that I was certain. I wanted to study history. My instinct was well grounded because history has given me an extraordinarily interesting and privileged life.

As to what drew me to history, the only answer I can give is curiosity, curiosity about difference, and a love for the great nineteenth-century historical narratives of Tolstoy and Stendhal. My own exposure to difference had been almost entirely through reading. In my life, it was confined to Catholics, to the two Italian prisoners-of-war who had worked on my grandfather's property, and to the usual leavening in the social composition of country

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towns, the Chinese greengrocer, the Lebanese draper and the Greek cafe. I think it was curiosity about the multiple ways that men and women fashion and have fashioned lives, societies and worlds that also disposed me to travel as well as to history, differences in time, differences in space.

In my undergraduate career at Sydney, I received an education in European culture—in history, literature, political and moral philosophy. My only ventures beyond Europe were in History III, which was Asian history, and the legendary year-long Australian history course on the First Fleet. If Australia was missing from most of my pass undergraduate education, in History IV we were compelled to do the 20,000 word thesis on Australian history. Mine, which is best forgotten, was on ‘Public Opinion for and against the Renewal of Transportation to NSW 1847–1849’. I say best forgotten because of two memorable gaffes— getting the title of the new book of John Manning Ward, Challis Professor of History, wrong in the bibliography, and misspelling Van Diemen’s Land all the way through.

While in no way happy with my subject, I am still grateful for that early training in archival research in the old Mitchell Library. It was in the Mitchell that I first experienced the frisson of excitement and visceral connection to the past bestowed by the literal handling of the raw material, the actual laying of hands on the paper and the writing. In the Mitchell, it was the letters of James Macarthur and that wonderful radical paper, *The People’s Advocate*; in the Florentine Archives, the minutes of Council meetings in the hand of Niccolò Machiavelli; and then on and on, in many archives and libraries and in many hands, through to the present. Last year it was letters written by an early twentieth-century art historian in Florence to Ottoline Morrell. There was an extra moment there. The papers are held in the home of Morrell’s grandson, so I read the letters under Augustus John’s stunning portrait of Morrell and—as her grandson mentioned in passing—at the desk T. S. Eliot used when he came to stay. But it is not helpful to think about Waste Lands when one is trying to research and write.

From convict transportation I moved on to politics and government in Renaissance Florence. I joked at the time that I must be the only person in the world who had written theses on nineteenth-century New South Wales and early sixteenth-century Florence, and that one day I would join the two together in an article on the influence of Dante on Henry Lawson—in post modern times it would have been the opposite, the influence of Lawson on Dante. One should always be careful when one is being flippant—years later I did write on Dante’s Australian presence.²

If nineteenth-century New South Wales to fifteenth-century Florence was a leap, it was also to foretell a certain restlessness in my research interests. The first paper that I ever presented was on Machiavelli’s political experiences; hence the Machiavelli in this evening’s title. The last paper I gave before retiring was on cross-national and cross-gender friendship in the mid-nineteenth century, through an exploration of the relationship of the Italian nineteenth-century revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini with a group of radical British women; hence the Mazzini in the title. The ‘many things’ in between and alongside include Australian-Italian relations across many areas, Australian writing on Italy, past and present, Australian travel writing, the travel and overseas lives of Australian women, Italian migration to Australia, Australian cultural history, and my present ARC project with Glenda Sluga and Barbara Caine on British women and Italy over the long nineteenth century that ended in 1914. While I might wander a little in my research, what is obvious is that almost all my work in one way or another is connected to Italy.

I was a restless child of the 1950s hankering after a more exotic life than that provided by West Wyalong and the Methodist Ladies’ College. My education had taught me that the real world lay beyond Australia—in Europe—which was art, culture, literature and also freedom. Like so many of my generation of young middle class men and women, my goal was to get out of Australia and experience Europe and the world. It was on this phenomenon extended back into the past that I wrote in my

study of Australian women abroad.

The general goal was Europe: why did I choose Italy? Again it was not at the time an unusual choice. Clearly my fascination with Italy was part of the long British cult. The British who settled in Australia brought their Italian interests with them, read their Dante and Petrarch, travelled to Italy, took Italy as image and subject in their art and writing. Their perceptions were framed by English texts, English guide books. But occasionally they did stop to ask themselves what was so special about the sun and warmth that so excited the English, or whether the Bay of Naples was quite so spectacular if one had seen Sydney Harbour. In Naples, they also pondered on the impact of Australia's Mediterranean climate on the tough and virile British character which had been forged in bleak and challenging terrains. Would Australia's abundance of sun and warmth turn the descendants of the British in Australia into soft, lazy and effeminate Neapolitans?³

My time at University coincided with the beginnings of mass migration to Australia but there was no connection between the background of the Italian migrants and the Italy for which I hankered. The 1950s were the period of the beginning of the great vogue for things Italian, particularly in the area of style, when, for example, American *Vogue* was promoting Italian fashion as part of the battle of the United States to contain Communism in Europe. If far removed from the world of Italian high fashion, I did gravitate to the first espresso bars in Sydney and to Lorenzini's cafe near the Mitchell Library, where I learnt that not all cheese was Kraft wrapped in silver paper, that there was wine other than Barossa Pearl, and that not all coffee was made from bottled essence. It was also the time of a great burgeoning of Italian cinema, first the films of De Sica and Rossellini, and then those of Antonioni, Visconti and above all Fellini. The short answer I usually give to why I took up Italian history is that I saw *La Dolce Vita*—but also Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday*—at an impressionable age.

As for Italy as subject matter for my doctoral research, I think

this was not only a decision for one place, it was also a decision against alternatives. It relates to my self-definition as a timid dissenter and an outsider (is there any academic who does not so self-define?). This meant that Oxbridge and research on British history was too grand. France was intellectually frightening—I had read too much Sartre. Germany was unthinkable. Italy was obvious. My timidity and limitations are apparent in that my imagination did not extend beyond Europe to Asia, Africa or the Middle East. And I would have encountered far more difference if I had ventured into the fringes of the towns of rural New South Wales where the indigenous Australians struggled to survive. I am a document of my times as well as an historian.

My choice of Italy because Britain and France scared me means that at some level I shared in the British view that Italians somehow were not a serious people, a view that was still well alive in the first half of the twentieth century. I once wrote a piece on Australian representations of Mussolini, most of which were favourable until 1940.⁴ The general line was that, while British societies had no need of such a dictator, he was good for Italians who needed firm discipline—a view which was publicly expressed by R. G. Menzies.

As to why I chose medieval and Renaissance Italy as my subject matter, this I think had something to do with being a woman, a feeling that, while the hard stuff of modern politics was for men, culture was women's work. Paradoxically, while I may have chosen the Renaissance, which I felt was accessible to a woman, I also opted for subjects largely concerned with government and politics. My period was the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when the Florentine Republic oscillated between the *de facto* rule of the Medici and more open, broad-based regimes; a period when the Italian peninsula became the venue and the prize in the battle for dominance in Europe among the great powers of the day, the Holy Roman Emperor, the Catholic Kings of Spain and the Most Christian King of France, and the small Italian states like Florence had to pursue the politics of the weak to survive.

The issues on which I wrote for my PhD and in the succeeding decade included an analysis of the formation and consolidation of a ruling class across the fifteenth century; leadership and political struggles in the so-called broad-based republican regime which came into being in the wake of a coup against the Medici in 1494 and was in turn overthrown by the return of the Medici in 1512; the interplay of the pursuit of personal gain and a tradition of civic duty in a society which was, on the one hand, ruthlessly competitive and, on the other, under the influence of the prophesying priest Savonarola, had elected Christ as King of Florence. Analysis of the political struggles led me on to rethinking our understanding of the political vocabulary of the time, in the writing of Machiavelli and Guicciardini for example, to adding meritocracy to our understanding of terms of social and political classification such as nobles, optimates, first citizens, middling citizens.⁵

I want to expand a little now on my work on leadership, or rather on a leader, because it brings my favourite Florentine, Niccolò Machiavelli, onto the stage. And I am rethinking my position on Machiavelli at the moment for a chapter for the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*. By the late 1490s the republican regime was on the brink of collapse. The struggles for power and place, and the fall-out from the burning of Savonarola, had led to almost total paralysis of government, to financial crisis, and to rebellion in the subject territories in the context of a very threatening external situation. The solution was—not the present University one of calling in consultants—further constitutional reform. The elite, and would-be-elite, favoured a formalised, tighter, more oligarchic structure, but they failed. In this dangerous situation, the Florentines, as they had done in the past, looked to the example of Venice, the byword for political stability. The lesson they took from Venice on this occasion was that of the doge, a permanent constitutional head of state, a leader.

The occupancy of the position of constitutional head of the Florentine Republic, the *Gonfaloniere*, was normally two months, a measure designed to prevent the emergence of one man rule.

In 1502, the Florentine Councils took an unprecedented, and hitherto unthinkable, step and decided to elect the next constitutional head for life, to elect a *Gonfaloniere a vita*.

The man elected, Pier Soderini, did not do a bad job in the early years, and did survive for ten years in the face of Medicean conspiracy and the opposition of many of the leading men and families, who were outraged by his failure to carry out further reform and to hand the state over to them. But his enemies were able drive him into exile in 1512, when his foreign policy of unswerving loyalty to France collapsed before the victories in Italy of the Holy Alliance of the Emperor, the King of Spain and the Pope, Julius II, patron of the Medici. Servile devotion to one superpower is never a good idea.

My reconstruction of Soderini portrayed a man who certainly intended to preserve the interests of his family, and a man who, to survive as head for ten years, had to be a competent and shrewd politician. He was certainly a good manager. Contemporaries usually described Soderini in terms of moral qualities: goodness, innocence, integrity; as a timid man of probity and piety, concerned with righteousness and reputation, a man of Christian virtue, rather than Roman *virtu*. I found no reason to reject this assessment. My view was on the whole accepted by Anglo-American historians but was criticised by some Italian colleagues who argued that Pier Soderini and his relatives were working to have their family replace the Medici and to make him prince of Florence. An article on the historiography of the period has described this division of opinion as resulting not only from different ways of reading evidence, but also to an 'Anglo-Saxon' sense of fair play and constitutionalism, in contrast to an Italian conspiratorial view of history. As I later commented in some further work, there is little appreciation of an 'Anglo-Saxon' sense of fair play in my Irish-Australian background.

The coup that sent Soderini into exile was bloodless. There were few other victims, but among the few was Niccolò Machiavelli.⁶ He had entered the Florentine civil service before Soderini's election but had come to be regarded in the city as the

Gonfaloniere's lackey. Certainly he was trusted by Soderini and employed frequently on diplomatic missions, and Soderini had listened to him when he introduced a militia in 1508. In turn Machiavelli was totally loyal to the republican regime. After Soderini's fall, Machiavelli was bitterly critical of the former head. On Soderini's death, he penned the following epitaph.

The night that Pier Soderini died
His spirit went to the mouth of Hell, where Pluto cried
There's no place, feeble soul, for you in Hades
Go off to Limbo with the other babies.

Machiavelli's bitterness is hardly surprising since Soderini's fall was followed by Machiavelli's dismissal, his subsequent torture and confinement, and his virtual permanent exclusion from the life of political participation. But, *pace* Machiavelli, among the fruits of his enforced retirement were two great pieces of political writing, *The Prince* and *The Discourses*.

In writing on Machiavelli and Soderini, my aim was to explore the relationship through a reading of available evidence and then to speculate on the impact of the experience of Soderini on Machiavelli. Machiavelli in his writing was concerned with leadership and power, and above all the survival of the new ruler in the dangerous times of large-scale and bloody warfare when the sacking of towns and the quartering of armies meant that civilian suffering was greater than that of the military. While Soderini's fall may have been bloodless in Florence, it was preceded by the terrible sack of the subject town of Prato. Pier Soderini was a new ruler in dangerous times who lost power. He was also, on my interpretation, a ruler concerned with righteousness, religion, right behaviour and reputation, a man who had neither the physical nor the psychological forces, the *virtu*, to take on and master *fortuna*.

One of the more famous themes in Machiavelli's *The Prince* is that the virtuous ruler necessarily comes to grief among the many who are not virtuous. Soderini is never mentioned in *The Prince* but I have found it useful to ask whether or not it was a coincidence

that the political writer who declared that leaders who conduct affairs of state as men of compassion, kindness, religion and good faith learn the way to self-destruction, should also be the man who witnessed at first hand the at least moderately successful and generally popular regime which he himself had faithfully served, come to grief. It did so, in large part, because Soderini, the leader of that regime, refused to use extraordinary power to move against those plotting his demise, to break his word on treaties, to defend himself and his government.

When I became Pro-Vice-Chancellor, there were a few references to my working on Machiavelli, with the implication that I would know much about dirty politics, about using the stiletto on the path to power, about fear rather than love, about the arts of deception and false faith. But I was, like Pier Soderini, an innocent abroad and, in any case, my Machiavelli is the loyal and honest civil servant who, in announcing the composition of *The Prince* to his friend Francesco Vettori, wrote: 'And of my faith there is no need to doubt because having always kept faith, I am unable to break it. He who has been faithful and good for forty years as I have been cannot change his nature.' He was also the republican citizen who, to paraphrase Quentin Skinner, insisted that citizens cannot retain their liberty unless the government remains in their collective control.⁷

What I had wanted to learn from Machiavelli were his lessons about the need to live in the world as it is, without ill-founded nostalgia or hope; to accept that, while the world is not totally relative and some things are without equivocation wrong, there are multiple value systems and that these are not necessarily compatible; to come to terms with the reality that choices are rarely between good and bad, and are often between two competing goods or for the lesser of two evils.

Machiavelli is above all associated with the teaching that the ends justify the means. However, he was not writing about any ends but about one end, the creation and survival of a healthy political society able to protect its citizens from internal and external terror and destruction. It is an issue that does not go

away and, indeed, came up in Australia recently in the views put forward by two Melbourne academics on torture being justified if it serves to protect the wider society. I do not know, but Machiavelli has taught me that there is a real issue and dilemma here, that there is no simple answer. As is obvious to many of you, my views of Machiavelli have been much influenced by the interpretations of Isaiah Berlin whose ideas across a wide spectrum have always attracted me.⁸

My early work on Florence was narrowly political. Subsequent decades have shown my blinkers. I have just come across a recent Columbia PhD on the art patronage of Pier Soderini. I had managed to work on him for three years with so little interest in art patronage that my only knowledge of his connections to art was that he had got hold of some large marble blocks for Michelangelo. I did not follow up on what Michelangelo might have done with those blocks—the *David*? a *Pietà*?

Similarly, when I was working on the 1512 coup against Soderini, I investigated the family backgrounds, patronage networks, political attitudes and financial interests of the conspirators. What it did not occur to me to look at was their sexual preferences. A later post 1970s study argued that the conspirators were almost all homosexuals, and that one of the motives in the conspiracy was that Soderini's regime was taking anti-sodomy legislation seriously.⁹ Given that, as we now believe, homosexual experience in some form may well have been the norm for young Florentine males, and that it is young men who usually take to the streets in conspiracies and rebellions, I am not sure that, even now, I would want to change my conclusions on the coup, although I would certainly want to include this new perspective.

The problems I dealt with in Florentine history no longer attract the same attention from Renaissance historians. Yet I think that many of these problems remain relevant in most parts of our world: how to construct stable government in new states; how to ensure the survival of weak, small states in the jungle of superpower politics; the interplay in politics of personal

interest and public service in the lives of those who aspire to and acquire power; how to live with optimism and commitment in Machiavelli's world as it is.

When I finished my research on the Florentine ruling class and the republican regime, I intended to stay with Florence and sketched out a project on anti-Medicean and republican exiles. But by this time, I was living in Australia with three small children and my material was all archival, requiring lengthy periods in Florence. I did make one foray into Florence with the children in 1976 to finish my study of the ruling class. 1976 was an extraordinary year in Italy, the year of elections when the Communist Party received its highest vote and when the Red Brigade went into action. Typical of the confusion of that year was that my children went to a convent school but all our friends, being good chic Italian academics, were on the far left. Thus the kids could say their Hail Marys and sing the *International* and *Bella Ciad* with equal ease. My most treasured image of that year is of looking out of the window onto the garden and watching the two men who lived next door, both active members of *Lotta Continua*, an extreme left party, washing and hanging out to dry a collection of red flags. The revolution was to be clean. 1976 was for me an exciting experience of political street theatre, of oratory and of political hope. We were later to learn about our naiveté in 1976, and Italy after that time slid first into the corruption scandals of *tangentopoli* in the 1980s and then into the sleaze of Silvio Berlusconi in the 1990s.

While I was casting around for new subjects, help came from outside when I was asked to participate in a project at the University of Milan on foreign public opinion on Italy and Italians. The project soon collapsed but I had a subject and for about a decade I wrote on connections between Italy and Australia. This work eventually led me in two other directions, to Italian migrants and Australian travellers, the two connected in my mind by an image of Sitmar Line ships passing each other in the Indian Ocean in the 1950s and 1960s; the ships moving south carrying Italian migrants seeking material sustenance, those moving north, young

Australians in search of cultural nourishment.

My work on the migrants began with studies of Italian-Australian women and then expanded into the book that I have just finished with Loretta Baldassar on migration to Australia from the Veneto region of Italy.¹⁰ This book also connects me to the self of the 1960s and to the 'worlds we have lost'.

The Italy to which I voyaged at the beginning of 1961 was in the midst of the economic boom that was to transform it from a rural to an industrial society in the space of a decade. But in 1961, the only visible evidence of the boom outside the towns and cities of the north was on the railways, the trains packed with southern rural workers journeying to the factories of the north. To travel even a few kilometres out of Florence into the hills above Pistoia was to enter the world of 'la miseria', the primitive conditions and grinding work of rural poverty. To journey south as I did into Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia and Sicily was indeed to travel back in time.

The Veneto, the hinterland of Venice and the homeland of the migrants in our book, was until very recently agricultural and desperately poor, referred to as the 'Calabria of the north'. It was a place of emigration. It was the also the area of the fiercest fighting in Italy during the First World War, and the Italian region that supplied the most emigrants to Australia in the 1920s and 1930s. Since the 1970s, the Veneto has been the site of extraordinary economic progress based on the small enterprise model. The town of Treviso is now the wealthiest in Italy. I would add in parenthesis that the University of Sydney profits from the wealth of Treviso. The town is the site of the Cassamarca Bank and its foundation which has for the last six years been funding some thirteen lectureships in Italian studies in Australian universities, including two here.

While doing research for the book, I travelled to the Veneto villages in the high foothills of the Alps, the villages which had in desperation sent so many of their people abroad. There was no way I could in my imagination connect the present day small towns with their shops full of expensive consumer goods, their

streets full of tourists en route to the luxury ski resorts, to the past. Only in the cemeteries could I find reminders of the 'miseria' and the devastation. The Veneto of the pre-1970s is indeed a world we have lost.

It was useful to have present in my mind the images of the rural poverty I had seen at first hand in the 1960s, when I read the migrants' life stories of the world they had left or talked to them about their pre-migration experiences, a complicated process because of the problematics of memory and the human wish to eradicate, romanticise, exaggerate or exploit unfortunate pasts. Some of this no doubt is happening in this paper.

My work on the writing of Australian travellers and dwellers in Italy also led me to Australian travel writing in general and to my study of the overseas lives of Australian women over the period that began with the steamship and ended with the jumbo jet.¹¹ Informing the work on Australian writing about abroad was the obvious assumption that what we write about others tells us more about ourselves. Thus I wrote in *Duty Free* that there was no Australian identity but only identities and these had been forged abroad as well as at home, in contact and collision with others, as well as in isolation. Through that study, I became increasingly interested in what has been given the clumsy label of intersectional histories, approaches based on the assumption that it is not fruitful to look at national histories in isolation, and that interaction with other nations plays a crucial role in the construction of national identities and national cultures.¹² The project on British women and Italy is situated within this framework.

British fascination with Italy and the inspirational role of Italy in English literature has a long history. But the generations of the Romantic and mid-Victorian eras added a new dimension, an intense—and paternalist—interest in political events in the Italian peninsula, in the struggles for Italian liberation from foreign rule and for unification.¹³ British money, British diplomacy, and the legitimation provided by British support played no small role in Italian unification. Italian emancipation was thus not only an

event in Italian history but also a vibrant and passionate episode of Britain's past. I would contend that Italian emancipation was also an event in the history of British feminism.

There were many different strands to British enthusiasm for the Risorgimento. Popular feeling centred on the swashbuckling figure of Giuseppe Garibaldi and the political classes gave their backing to unification under the King of Piedmont. But the revolutionary leader who lived most of his life in political exile in Britain and knew England best was Giuseppe Mazzini.¹⁴ He was also the most articulate exponent of the idea of the Italian nation, the most prolific writer for the cause and the begetter of the most conspiracies and rebellions. His goal was a united Italian republic achieved by the popular will. He failed.

In Britain, compared to the adulation that surrounded Garibaldi, Mazzini was adored by a rather restricted circle, and he was hated by the Government—and the *Times*—as a dangerous republican subversive. Such was the milieu of nineteenth-century Britain, at no time was any attempt made to lock him up or deport him. But, few as they may have been, the impact of the men and women of this Mazzinian circle on events in Italy, on winning support for the Italian cause in Britain, and on the subsequent record, was far out of proportion to their small number. What is distinctive about the British Mazzinians was the significant and active presence of women in the network, women who were for the most part Non-Conformist in their religious upbringing, educated, cosmopolitan, independent and radical, women who were to be conspicuous in the feminist campaigns which developed from the mid 1860s.¹⁵

The relationship of the women with Mazzini was both intensely personal and political; indeed devotion to Mazzini was inseparable from dedication to the Italian cause which he embodied. Mazzini was a man of great personal magnetism, a man of charm and empathetic sensibility whose carefully crafted presence—beautiful, brooding, intense, always dressed in black in mourning for his country—joined to the moral credibility of total dedication and self-sacrifice to his cause made him the

epitome of one kind of Romantic hero and the personification of Italy's sufferings.

Mazzini was also the proponent of one of the most advanced cases for the emancipation of women in mid-nineteenth-century Europe; he was more radical I believe than for example John Stuart Mill. And in a sense he lived out his doctrines in his relations with women. He had an unusual capacity to operate within a gendered sociability and a need of strong emotional bonds with women. All this is attested to in his correspondence, which was prolific, with an extraordinary proportion of his letters written to women. In some years in the 1850s and 1860s, over a third of the letters in Mazzini's published correspondence were addressed to women.¹⁶ The letters cover personal lives and the political cause. He relayed information to the women and discussed plans and tactics. According to one of Mazzini's critics, the foreign women had too much influence and knew too much; the fate of many patriots too often depended on the discretion of five or six ladies.

The work of women for Mazzini's cause extended beyond the acceptable fund raising via bazaars and subscriptions, social networking and translations for the Italian and British press, to public speaking and writing, to membership of organised pressure groups, and in the cases of Emilie Ashurst and Jessie White Mario to acting as couriers between England and Italy, and as activists in Italy where both were arrested. Mazzini took the women, their condition, their problems and their ambitions for a voice in the public world seriously and gave them a place in his revolution. It was they who went on to write the record at the time through their collection and preservation of Mazzini's letters and other material, and through their biographical writing. Indeed, the British public in the latter part of the nineteenth century was to read the Risorgimento through their eyes.

As I mentioned a moment ago, the British Mazzinian women went on to become active in the feminist cause in both Britain and Italy. The political experience and the confidence that they had gained in writing and working for Italian emancipation was essential preparation for their future activities. I think I would

argue that in the mid-nineteenth century there was more space and more opportunity for women to become politically active in international and cosmopolitan causes than in domestic and national ones.

In my earlier work on Australian women abroad, I was struck by the number of women who from the late nineteenth century travelled and worked overseas with international and humanitarian organisations, and who linked up with movements for peace and social justice and refugee relief. This makes me ponder about the relationship of women to internationalism and cosmopolitanism more generally from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

Mazzini and British women takes me into other places; to the relationship in general of women and charismatic leaders, to cross-national marriages, to friendship between men and women and the role of intimacy in the public sphere in the nineteenth century. It also takes me back to earlier work on Australia and Italy. The Risorgimento had its Australian champions, who were for the most part motivated by sectarianism and anti-Catholicism. That Pope-hating Protestant parson, John Dunmore Lang, wrote to the people of Rome in 1849 congratulating them on driving the Pope, Pius IX, from his throne and from Rome.¹⁷ Such was the tyranny of distance that Lang's letter only arrived after the Roman revolution had been crushed and Pius IX was safely back on his throne. When a great commemorative meeting was held in Sydney to mark the death of Garibaldi, among the chief mourners were the masons who commended him for his war against the priests—who were worse than assassins, vipers and crocodiles.¹⁸ Of a different character was the interest in the Risorgimento of the Tasmanian Andrew Inglis Clark, the only republican at the 1891 Constitutional Convention, who was a dedicated follower of the political ideas of Mazzini. Clark's admiration for Mazzini and the heroes and martyrs of the Risorgimento is clear in the long poem, 'My Pilgrimage', which he wrote after visiting Italy in 1890.¹⁹ If less enthusiastic, Alfred Deakin was also much taken with Mazzini's teaching.

History for me is dialogue—dialogue between my sources and myself, between past and present. It is also a constant process of learning. I think to be a good historian—and this is something to which we only aspire—one needs to cultivate both detachment and compassion, with an outlook that is both liberal and pluralist. One has to develop the narrative imagination, the capacity to try to understand what it might be like to experience life from a position other than one’s own, a position that might be totally different or totally contrary to one’s own belief and values, a position that can be almost unimaginable.

History is for me narrative and I have always been fascinated by the ways historians construct and plot their narratives. In retirement, I find myself rereading the historians from whom I can learn to write, including the great Edward Gibbon who taught us, and brilliantly illustrated in his own work, that history’s mode is irony.

Imagination, detachment, compassion, a capacity to live with ambiguity and the ironic mode may be virtues for the historian; I am not sure if they make for good managers. Of his parliamentary career before he turned to the writing of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon wrote: ‘The eight sessions I sat in parliament were a school of civil prudence, the first and most essential virtue of an historian’.²⁰ Of my final years at this University, my time as Pro-Vice-Chancellor, I would only say that it is no bad thing for the observers and commentators to descend into the sand pit, even a very small sandpit, to gain some visceral experience. I have no regrets. As to whether I dwelt in Gibbon’s ‘school of civil prudence’, that is another question.

I believe that I belong to a very privileged academic generation and that universities were in many ways better places in my past. But as an historian, I know that, for the ageing who look back, the past is usually a better time and place. Dante contemplated with nostalgia the Florence of his ancestor Cacciaguida when and where civility still reigned. The universities of my youth were elite institutions, students and academics were few. One reason why I could finger the letters of Machiavelli in the Florentine Archives

was that there were very few people working in the old *sala di studio*, on an average day about eight. The reading room in the new archives has space for over a hundred readers and the microfilm reader stands between me and Machiavelli's hand.

We now have mass education but our ideas about universities hark back to the elitist past. Yet it is economically—and indeed logically—impossible to give an elite education to the masses. If it is mass education, it cannot be an elite experience. It is a contradiction in terms and impossible to realise. I think we need to give more attention to this dilemma.

As to the future, what do I see as the biggest challenges to history and the humanities? I could answer—in ugly language—the commodification of education and the corporatisation of the tertiary sector, but the real challenge is that of coping with change, the challenge of ensuring that we do not resist change to the point that the humanities lose their viability, nor yet yield so easily that they lose their integrity. I believe that training in history and the historical perspective has much to offer in confronting the challenge. From Niccolò Machiavelli, I learned that we must live in the world as it is and not as we create it in nostalgia or in dreams. But from Antonio Gramsci, founder of the Italian Communist party, I learnt that if we are pessimists of the intellect, we must also remain optimists of the will. Why else in this time would I have become a Pro-Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for the humanities? But history is full of surprises, the humanities have a long history of survival, and I am after all an historian who has been concerned with *renaissance*, *risorgimento* and *resistenza*, rebirth, revival and resistance.

Notes

- 1 I thank Professor Angus Martin and the Arts Association for arranging this lecture and pay tribute to Professor Martin for his commitment to, and unstinting work for, the Association. I would also express my appreciation to the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, and particularly to its head, Richard Waterhouse, for the generous co-sponsorship of this lecture.

- 2 Roslyn Pesman Cooper, 'Sir Samuel Griffith, Dante and the Italian Presence in Nineteenth-Century Australian Literary Culture', *Australian Literary Studies* 14.2 (1989): 199–215.
- 3 Roslyn Pesman Cooper, 'Majestic Nature—Squalid Humanity': Naples and the Australian tourist 1870–1930', *Australian Cultural History* 10 (1991): 46–57.
- 4 Roslyn Pesman Cooper, "'We Want a Mussolini': Views of Fascist Italy in Australia", *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 39.3 (1993): 348–66.
- 5 Roslyn Pesman Cooper, *Pier Soderini and the Ruling Class in Renaissance Florence*, Biblioteca Eruditorum, 31, Kiepe Verlag, Goldbach, 2002.
- 6 For a fuller discussion, Roslyn Pesman Cooper, 'Machiavelli, Pier Soderini and Il Principe, in *Pier Soderini and the Ruling Class in Renaissance Florence*, pp.115–40.
- 7 Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli*, Oxford, 1981; *Visions of Politics*, vol.2, *Renaissance Virtues*, Cambridge, 2002.
- 8 Isaiah Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli', in *Studies on Machiavelli*, ed. Myron P. Gilmore, Florence, 1972, pp.147–206.
- 9 Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York, 1980, pp.515–17.
- 10 Loretta Baldassar and Ros Pesman, *From Paesani to Global Italians. Veneto Migrants in Australia*, forthcoming, University of Western Australia Press, November 2005.
- 11 Ros Pesman, *Duty Free: Australian Women Abroad*, Melbourne, 1996.
- 12 For two particularly interesting studies from this approach in relation to British history, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, New Haven, 1992; Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire. Indians and the Colonial Encounter in late-Victorian Britain*, Berkeley, 1998.
- 13 For two recent studies of the mid-Victorian fascination with Italy, see Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Political Imagination*, New York, 1998; Roderick Cavaliero, *Italia Romantica. English Romantics and Italian Freedom*, New York, 2005.
- 14 On Mazzini, see Denis Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, London, 1994.
- 15 Ros Pesman, 'Intimacy and Revolution in Exile: Mazzini, Mazzinians and British Women', unpublished paper presented at Conference, Love of Country: Making Nations in Italy's Diasporic Private Sphere, University of Pittsburgh, April 2005.
- 16 *Scritti editi e inediti di Giuseppe Mazzini*, Imola, 1906–43. A large proportion of Mazzini's letters to British women, those written to the four Ashurst sisters, were published in *Mazzini's Letters to an English Family, 1844–1872*, ed. E. F. Richards, 3 vols, London, 1920–22.
- 17 Roslyn Pesman Cooper, 'Australian Images of Rome', *Bolletino del C.I.R.V.I.* 23 (1991): 54.

- 18 Roslyn Pesman Cooper, 'Garibaldi e L'Australia', *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento* LXXII.2 (1985): 206–13.
- 19 Andrew Inglis Clark, 'My Pilgrimage', Clark Papers, University of Tasmania Archives, C4/H8. See also John Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation. The Making of the Australian Commonwealth*, Melbourne, 2000, pp.9–11. I thank John Hirst for drawing my attention to the Clark poem.
- 20 Edward Gibbon, 'Autobiography', *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and Other Selections from the Writings of Edward Gibbon*, ed. and abridged Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, New York, 1963, p.41.