

## ***The End of Arcadia: American Writers in Italy (1915-1965)***

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### 1. American Writers and Italy

The topic is one on which rivers of ink have been employed to produce countless books and a number of university dissertations. American writers and intellectuals have visited Italy regularly since the Eighteenth Century – that is to say since the creation of the “United States of America” as a place “to start from”. And the general impression – highly influenced by the cyclic appearance of those Henry James or Edith Warton adaptations – those movies that generally start in the parlour of a Bostonian banker bored by the preparations for the forthcoming wedding and end up – after much drama and chatter – in the rooms of some lavish hotel with a view on the Canale Grande in Venice – the general impression, thanks to Merchant, Ivory and to their countless imitators – is that, - surely - Italy has had a profound influence on the perceptions of many American writers and novelists. But is it true?

I once phoned a friend telling him “I am working on a piece on American writers and their relationship with Italy, I wonder if you can help me”. This friend of mine is a respectable novelist who knows American literature fairly accurately. “Of course I’m going to help you” he told me. “What can I do for you?” “I wanted to ask you which writers, in your opinion, have most been influenced by their travels in Italy” “Have you had a look at the works of Henry James and Edith Warton?” “Not really” – I told him. “I wanted to restrict myself to that generation of writers who were active after the First World War .” Oh! A very long pause. “Well, there’s always Pound”.

“There’s always Pound” is a refrain which I was going to hear *ad infinitum* every time, surprised at the scarcity of material I found on the subject, I phoned other friends, University lecturers, experts on American or Italian literature. Naturally, if one was to widen the research to include the more “popular” novels (murder mysteries, detective stories), the number of examples would be more significant. But if truth be told, I cannot bring myself to care too much about “what exactly” Robert Harris had Hannibal Lecter do in Florence, in the follow-up to *Silence of the Lambs*.<sup>1</sup>

During this morning’s session we’ve heard about the influence Italy has had on the great American painters, architects, politicians and statesmen. Therefore there must be an equally important influence Italy has had on the great American writers of the Twentieth Century, mustn’t it?

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<sup>1</sup> If by any chance you have read *Hannibal* by Harris – published in 1992 – you will remember that at that point we discover Annibal Lecter has gone to live in Florence, learned to speak perfect Italian and Tuscan, and was even made the curator of a museum located in a very elegant *palazzo* similar to the one we are in today.

## 2. Van Wyck Brooks

Certainly Van Wyck Brooks thought so. As you surely know, Brooks was one of the main literary critics of the last Century, even though his fame was somehow overshadowed by the importance of Edmund Wilson. Wilson was nine years younger than Brooks. Wilson was born in 1895, Brooks in 1886. Van Wyck Brooks' fame faded after his death in 1963. But one hopes that one day the Library of America – our Pleiad – will re-publish his most important works. It would be a shame if this didn't happen, because it is actually Brooks who wrote the only existing book exploring the relationship between American writers and Italy: *The dream of Arcadia: American Writers and Artists in Italy, 1760-1915*<sup>2</sup>

What was the theoretical framework of Brooks' book? This book was published more than half a Century ago, in 1958, in that long forgotten era in which America had not yet been colonized by the intellectual and pseudo-intellectual fad of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and, unfortunately – Umberto Eco. In those times one was quite happy with the idea of “theory” perfectly summed in the venerable words of Horace: *dulce et utile*. Dedicated to his friend Bernard Berenson – another follower of the sweet-useful school of critique – Brooks' book was based on an accurate and in-depth examination of the American classics. And its declared purpose was to unveil – to use Brooks' own words – “a story never told before”.

Let's stop for a moment to consider that period: it was 1958 and the story had not yet been told. And what is this “story” told by Brooks? It's the story of three generations of American writers, and of the cultural stereotypes they meet – and largely help perpetuate – in their journey to Italy.<sup>3</sup> It is also the story of their poetic answer to the meeting with those places and people, as it unfolds from their writings once they left – in the words of Washington Irving – “Italy's poetic land” to return to “Our honest American hills and dales where stubborn fact presides”<sup>4</sup>

## 3. The First Generation

The first generation is defined by Brooks as “*the statesmanly minds of the Revolutionary epoch*”.<sup>5</sup> The American Revolution had been conceived following the spirit of the ancient republics. Those were the sort of men who, in Thomas Jefferson's words, wanted to

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<sup>2</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, *The Dream of Arcadia, American Writers and Artists in Italy, 1760-1915* (New York: Dutton, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> One would like to be able to say that those writers travels widely across Italy. In fact, this is the story of how Americans have invariably limited their travels to the exploration of what could be seen in the surroundings of the four major cities: Rome, Florence, Venice and Neaples.

<sup>4</sup> “[O]ur honest American hills and dales where stubborn fact presides.” Brooks, 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, 8.

“*have a peep into Elysium*” before they died.<sup>6</sup>). Therefore in their opinion, a visit to Rome was simply a must! Brooks carefully tells us of all the American writers and artists that, according to legend, have shed emotional tears in approaching St. Peter’s or the Pantheon for the first time.<sup>7</sup>

In this respect, the first generation of American writers had a great advantage over the following generations: when they arrived in Italy Italians had only a vague idea of the United States of America, without preconceptions of any kind on the nature of Americans. In 1821 the American historian and novelist George Bancroft was travelling in Italy. A bookseller asked him where he was from. “I am an American, from Boston” answered Bancroft. The bookseller told him he had, in his shop, a large volume on Boston before proceeding to show him a large book on the history of Hindustan. “I am sorry”, apologized the bookseller, “I thought that Boston *was* Hindustan”.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. The Second Generation

The second generation described by Brooks is the one mainly concerning literature, with writers of the caliber of James Fennimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Herman Melville. Just like the previous generation, they also subscribed to this vision of Italy as Arcadia. They all had had a classical education and were familiar with Latin. They knew Latin writers by heart, and probably they expected to meet Cicero and Horatio walking through the streets of Rome. To Longfellow, for example, Italy was a sort of Holy Land, whose grandiose ruins would inspire him to recreate in poetry the atmosphere of the past.<sup>9</sup>

But to second generation writers, perception of Italy was conflictual. For the first time, Italy stopped being considered for what it represented – as a single entity, an abstract concept-. The image of Italy started being projected in comparison, -and in contrast to- the rising greatness of the United States, with its economical power and its political importance. As a writer commented, to enter Italy was to slip from the present into the past, from movement into stillness, from hope into memory.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*, 30. As time went by though, I have noticed that Italians have had a chance to get a better idea of the inhabitants of the United States of America, and have ended up by developing their own stereotypes on the ingenuity of Americans. One of the legends on the naivety of Americans concerns the Colosseum. It is said that when the Americans saw the Colosseum for the first time their comment was: “How splendid it will be, once it’s finished!”. After the Second World War the legend changed, and tells of American soldiers and tourists in the post-war years looking at the Colosseum and commenting: “We certainly bombed them well!”

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*, 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, 26-27.

If, on the contrary, one looked at Italy from the point of view of what James Fenimore Cooper defines as the great sin of the American Republic – namely “*the money-getting mania*”, “*the vice of incessant activity*”, and “*the property patriotism*” – then Italy becomes undoubtably “*the land to love*”<sup>11</sup>

Others, with more aesthetic leanings, thought of Italy as the ideal place to take refuge from the calculating atmosphere of the United States, the ideal place to nurture oneself and one’s spiritual inclinations. Hawthorne actually stated that there was a special quality in the air people breathed in Florence, which helped meditation and transcendence.<sup>12</sup> It is perhaps superfluous to note how all the above writers were free from material worries and came from wealthy families.

## 5. The Third Generation

This vision of Italy changes dramatically for the writers of the third and last generation examined by Van Wyck Brooks. It is the generation of Mark Twain, Henry Adams and yes, finally, of Henry James and Edith Warton. At this point these writers were persuaded that Americans themselves – albeit with their naivety and their innocence – represented the essence of the spirit and the greatness of Rome much better than the Romans themselves.

Notwithstanding their admiration for great historical figures like Garibaldi or Mazzini, they found the political decay in Italy – and in the declining Pontifical State – unbearable. Henry Adams stated that no law of progress was applicable to Rome.<sup>13</sup> Mark Twain defined Italy “*that vast museum of magnificence and misery.*”<sup>14</sup> In works like come *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain – poking fun at Italy and Europe – cuts the umbilical chord that had linked America to its cultural roots.

Italy was transforming itself in the eyes of Americans. That which once was described as ‘the place of imagination’ now became described as the place in which, whoever stayed for too long became irredeemably overcome by an overwhelming idleness. Brooks comments - correctly in my opinion – that this new attitude towards Italy was infantile, but it was one which pleased the new class of American readers.<sup>15</sup> This new class of American readers was composed of men and women who grew up some distance from the main centers of culture such as Boston and New York. The American reader, individualistic, practical and efficient grew up in an age when in America ‘business was business’.

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<sup>11</sup> *Id.*, 58-59. Cooper, Brooks writes, declared that “Italy is the land to love,” after spending nearly two years there. Brooks adds that Cooper found Italy to be the country furthest removed from “the money-getting mania” of America and what Cooper called “property patriotism.”

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*, 132.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*, 145.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*, 155. In Twain’s words, Italy was “that vast museum of magnificence and misery.”

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, 156.

It had required one hundred years , but now American writers could affirm that they were able to succeed splendidly, even without Arcadia. This ‘we can do without’ attitude was accompanied by a sweeping fashion for collecting which took hold at about the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thanks to art collectors and the creation of large museums, Americans could now admire Botticelli, Raphael, Titian, without having to leave home and cross the ocean. Now it was the Italians and Italian art which moved across to the United States.

Clearly, there were exceptions. One of the exceptions was the novelist William Dean Howells. For his biography of President Abraham Lincoln, Howells was appointed American Consul to Venice. But Howells was one of those singular Americans who wanted to take the time to learn Italian.<sup>16</sup> And, perhaps because he was able to learn in depth about Italians themselves, he did not observe in them the laziness that was usually described by other American writers.

For Howells, Italy had never been a museum, but a living and real civilization. And the same is valid for writers such as Edith Wharton and Henry James. For them Italy retained its golden aura which would contribute to their literary inspiration. For this reason there is a considerable amount of Italy in their written works.

It is important to recall that Italy itself was changing in the post-unification period. James wrote, towards the end of the twentieth Century, that Italy was tired of being admired for its grace and beauty. Marinetti’s ‘The Futurist Manifest’ was published in 1909, 5 years later the first world war begun..

## 6. The following 50 years

This is the point at which Van Wyck Brook’s book ends. Now I would like to sum up upon the salient points of the whole story and proceed ahead – the 50 years following, from 1915 to 1965. We haven’t a lot of time, but I would like to examine, or at least cite, a few of these writers.

Brooks dedicated his book to Bernard Berenson. It might be useful if I were to continue the story at the point at which Brooks left it, to make a reference to Barenson now. Barenson, it is known, arrived in Italy for the first time in 1888 and spent most of his time here in Tuscany.

Barenson was a humanist in the real sense of the word, who had the rare gift of being able to form friendships with all types of people. One of the people who he befriended was Ernest Hemingway. Whilst re-reading Hemingway’s correspondence to prepare for today’s offering I came across a letter addressed to Berenson

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<sup>16</sup> *Id.*, 150. Having learnt Italian, Howells edited ‘Memorie’ by Carlo Goldoni

I quote:

“You see there is the problem of our up-bringing.” Writes Hemingway, referring to himself and his own generation “When I was your age, when we both were boys,” Hemingway tells Berenson, “ you had the freedom to move around in Europe as you wished and your problems were self imposed. ... When I was the same age the problems were imposed by other people and they were the Adamello, Riva, Pasubio, the Sette Comuni, (Altipiano de [sic] Asiago) Monte Grappa, the Montello, and the Basso Piave”<sup>17</sup>

What Hemingway says about himself was, clearly, true for all of those Americans who had discovered Italy as a result of the World War. And they were a new generation coming almost entirely from middle class America. Prior to that, there had been a surprising degree of uniformity between American writers . Almost all were Harvard educated where they learnt a reverence for classical literature that remained with them for life.

That period though was the beginning of the end of the typical upper class American education, cosmopolitan and infused with the classics, during which every student was brought up on Cicero and Plutarch. The twilight of the era in which practically every American who visited Italy had already heard described, even before seeing them, the important landmarks of Rome and the Renaissance. Furthermore, those who came to fight a war were already sure that they would not find any Arcadia.

In his Story of Modern American literature, the critic Alfred Kazin asserted that many writers of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (such as Hemingway) were not able to draw upon a ‘useable past’ – that is a past immersed in classical education – and this was precisely why they became such strong and independent writers.<sup>18</sup>

Their instincts were those of the pioneers, wherever they went and whatever the topic of their writing. For them life had begun with the war. Because of the fact of being here in Italy or in Europe against their will they were determined not to draw pleasure from what

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<sup>17</sup> “You see there is the problem of our up-bringing. When I was your age, when we both were boys, you had freedom to move around in Europe as you wished and your problems were self imposed. ... When I was the same age the problems were imposed by other people and they were the Adamello, Riva, Pasubio, the Siete Comuni, (Altipiano de [sic] Asiago) Monte Grappa, the Montello, and the Basso Piave.” Ernest Hemingway, *Selected Letters 1917-1961*, Carlos Baker, ed. (New York: Scribner, 1989): 810.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Kazin, *On Native Ground: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 3d ed., 1995 (1947)): xiv: “It was this lack of what used to be called ‘a useable past’ that made so strong and independent writers of the first half of the [twentieth] century.”

they saw: death and suffering or societies tied to a past which they wanted nothing to do with, and this is precisely the point at which Ezra Pound fits in. Pound spoke for those Americans who were indifferent – or openly hostile – to all of the grand words expounded on Italy’s noble past. He opposed ‘ the hypocrisy of the unreal appreciation of art’, secondary appreciation, which he calls ”Kulchur”.<sup>19</sup>

Pound and Hemingway found themselves detached from their original traditions, those of American realism (our version of provincial culture) as represented by Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson. Not only had the first World War isolated these writers, but it had contributed to increasing their sense of mission. They became testaments to modernism.. Is it not a case, to give one example, that during the time he had spent in Italy as a soldier, Dos Passos – by his own admission, spent less time visiting museums than reading Flaubert. And when he tells of visiting Giotto’s chapel in Padua his description is immediately followed by discourses on Picasso and Gris.<sup>20</sup>

American writers had completed a journey. Firstly they ceased trying to assimilate to standards in Europe, then declared their complete independence from old European ways, and finally tried to take the lead in European Modernism which had tried to destroy and recreate the ancient classics.

## 7 Fascism

The advent of Fascism kept American writers even further apart from the development of Italian literature. A story by Dos Passos written at the end of the 20’s provides an idea of the concept that many Americans had of Italy in that period. The story is entitled ‘A city that dies by heartfailure’.<sup>21</sup> It is a tale of a group of Americans sailing around the Mediterranean forced, by a storm, to dock in Savona. The tale begins:

“Cities are like men except that they live longer. Like men they suffer from diseases, they are carried off young by consumption; in old age they die slowly of cancer or hardening of the arteries. Sometimes heartfailure or murder does them in in a few days. That’s what we debated walking under the empty grey colonnades of Savona: was it murder or heartfailure?”<sup>22</sup>

These Americans, walking through the city, discover that it is dead. There is no longer life. All of the workers – explains a Fascist official – who had been corrupted by foreign

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<sup>19</sup> Brooks, 257.

<sup>20</sup> John Dos Passos, *Travel Books And Other Writings 1916-1941* (New York: Library of America, 2003): 611-612.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*, 600-604.

<sup>22</sup> “Cities are like men except that they live longer. Like men they suffer from diseases, they are carried off young by consumption; in old age they die slowly of cancer or hardening of the arteries. Sometimes heartfailure or murder does them in in a few days. That’s what we debated walking under the empty grey colonnades of Savona: was it murder or heartfailure?” *Id.*, 600.

ideas, were forced out and obliged to emigrate. It doesn't need much imagination to identify Dos Passos' description of Savona with what Italy generally had become under Mussolini: dead. In the 20's the American modernists periodically pushed themselves to visit Italy, but their principal base always remained Paris.

There are other examples. For instance there is Faulkner's story 'Divorce in Naples' which was written in 1931 and which was inspired by his Italian visit of 1925. The story has little to do with Italy. In the story by Faulkner Italy is mentioned only fleetingly and serves simply as the introduction whilst the narrative focuses on the rift between two homosexual seamen as their vessel arrives at Naples.

One could also discuss George Santayana who established himself in Italy in 1920 and spent the following 30 years there, until his death in 1952 at the age of 89. He was a Fascist sympathizer and found pleasure in the invasion of Abyssinia by Mussolini in 1925. But he was also an elitist, gradually distancing himself from life. His novel 'The last Puritan' became a best seller in the USA. It was written whilst the author was in Italy but does not mention Italy at all.

## 8. The second World War.

This was the situation up until the outbreak of the second World War. William Weaver, who later became the translator of Moravia, Morante, Bassani, Primo Levi etc. has written that on his arrival in Italy in the autumn of '43 he knew the name of only one living Italian author, Ignazio Silone. And of Silone he had only heard about a few months earlier. This ignorance of Italian culture was typical of writers of his generation. (He was born in 1923).<sup>23</sup>

The generation of American writers of the second World War had discovered Italy, but for them – once again- Italy was nothing more than a battlefield. The American novel originating in the second World War was generally an experience of war itself. Only after the end of the second World War were the Americans made aware of the atrocities committed during the war. The cruelty of American soldiers and the fact that not all had been saints. We can see this in the 'war books' written beyond the Italian combat zone by authors such as Norman Mailer, James Jones, Gore Vidal and Irwin Shaw. And we see it in all these novels which have Italy as their background.

American literature originating from the second World War, even if often set in Italy, has little to do with Italy but much with the American atrocities. Though official war reports make no mention of these atrocities. In his book 'War Time' Paul Fussell tells how, during the invasion of Sicily in 1943, the Navy and Army were told that the zone would be overflown by American troop transport planes. But at the crucial moment they were taken for German aircrafts, and American soldiers started being shot at. Before the attack

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<sup>23</sup> William Weaver, ed., *Open City: Seven Writers in Postwar Rome* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth, 1999): 10.

ended some 23 planes had been shot down and more than 200 Americans had been killed.<sup>24</sup>

In this context one could also speak of the novel 'The Gallery' by John Horn Burns, appearing in 1947, which received considerable critical success.<sup>25</sup> Edmund Wilson, Norman Mailer and Gore Vidal were much taken by the book. Burns had spent a large part of the second World War in Africa and in Italy. His experiences in Naples as an Intelligence Officer (in Italian one talks of 'Information Service', but by now the term 'intelligence' is commonly in use) form the narrative structure of his work which can be considered the American counterpart of the novel by Curzio Malaparte 'La Pelle' of 1949. Like Malparte, Burns describes the hidden life of the city. The black market, prostitution, theft and the way in which the Americans (who won the war) behaved towards the Italian population.<sup>26</sup>

A perfect example of the absurdity of war written by a post war American novelist is 'Catch 22' by Joseph Heller, published in 1955. The novel is set towards the end of the second World War from 1943 onwards. It is the story of a B-25 bomber pilot, Yossarian, which interweaves with the experiences of a number of other characters. The principal events take place on the island of Pianosa, to the west of Italy, base of an imaginary squadron. Another popular theme of the second World War, as we see described in Heller, is the theme of Italian incompetence. Italians are presented as the very antithesis or serious, fanatical National Socialists. American authors represent them as individuals on the very limits of the ridiculous, animated by the desire to save their own skin at any cost. At the same time this stereotype reinforces the legend of Italians as a population most humane in war.

## 9. After the Second World War

After the fall of Mussolini American writers began slowly returning to Italy. From 1945 until 1950 there is practically no one: Italy was a nation heavily devastated by the war. Weaver remembers that the few Americans who had the courage to come to stay in Italy were frightened to drink the local water. Weaver recalls that, when he visited the frescoes

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (Oxford: OUP, 1989): 21.

<sup>25</sup> John Horne Burns, *The Gallery*, (New York, NYRB, 2004). The novel takes its title from the Umberto I gallery which Burns describes as 'the unofficial heart of Naples'.

<sup>26</sup> Speaking of Malaparte, my excursion into modern American literature and its relationship with Italy would not be complete if I didn't quote at least Percy Winner and his novel 'Dario' from 1947 which he describes as 'imaginary reminiscences'. Winner was the Associated Press correspondent in Rome in the 20's. Under the pen name Dario Duvolti, the book's protagonist he became in reality Curzio Malparte, of whom Winner describes the life and career from 1925 to 1945.

of the Sistine Chapel or the Caravaggios at San Luigi dei Francesi, he was often completely alone.<sup>27</sup>

One cannot omit the influence which the birth of the neorealist Italian cinema had on the American perception of Italy. In American eyes Italian life and culture seemed so brutal and backward. Then, in the 1950's American writers arrived in Italy: Sinclair Lewis, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal. One came to Italy because the cost of living was low, not to visit the museums. These authors limited themselves, for the greater part, to visiting with other Americans. Only in rare cases did they mix with Italians and made little effort to get close to the Italian way of life. There was no real exchange. They were just tourists in Italy.

We have the example of Tennessee Williams and his 'The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone' (1950) which tells of how when her wealthy husband dies during a trip to Rome, the famous actress Karen Stone decided to abandon the scene and withdraws into a type of exile. But Italy and the Italians do not really figure in the story.

Sinclair Lewis died in Florence in 1951. His novel 'World so wide' (1951) was set in Florence and describes the life of the expatriate community. It is the story of an ex- Army Major, Hayden Chart, who, recently made a widower, meets an American art historian, Oliva Lomond, who attempts to introduce him to the beauty of art. The novel also works as a tourist guide. Chart also meets a young provincial American girl, Roxanna Eldritch, who works in Florence as a journalist. Chart breaks off his relationship with Oliva and, in the end, marries the solid, honest country girl. Once again, one could say that Italy and the Italians are not part of the story.

Almost none of the American writers arriving in Italy in that period tried to learn the Italian language or to meet Italian writers. Weaver describes how their Italian visits had "a transient touristic quality, like a shipboard gathering".<sup>28</sup>

In their novels Italy is just the backdrop against which the events of the Americans take place. Novels produced by American authors in the following years with Italy as the background can seem picaresque – as with William Gaddis's first novel entitled 'The Recognitions' published in 1955.<sup>29</sup> And there are many other similar examples especially historical works.<sup>30</sup> But you see the point: modern American novelists have a

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<sup>27</sup> Weaver, 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*, 32: "Most of the Americans who came to Rome made little or no effort to learn the language, meet the local writers...So these occasional gatherings had a transient touristic quality, like a shipboard gathering."

<sup>29</sup> *The Recognitions* is a monumental work, full of literary, historical, religious and mythological allusions. The tale follows events spanning 30 years and more than 50 characters who interlace against the background of New York, New England, Paris, Italy and Spain.

<sup>30</sup> 'Giuliano' by Gore Vidal was written in 1962. It is a novel written in the first person that narrates the story and the life of the Roman Emperor Flavio Claudio Giuliano who

view of Italy which is precisely the idea you would get were you to see the country from hot air balloon.

## 10. Conclusions

I started this presentation speaking of the great critic, Van Wyck Brooks, and it seems to me appropriate to conclude with another, Edmund Wilson. From the pages of his book the conviction – which Brooks had but had lacked the courage to state clearly – that for American authors Italy has always been an imaginary object. For this reason therefore Italy has had a significance only for those authors who were well versed in classical literature and who studied Latin and Greek. For those educated with a classical background the word Italy had a significance. But even for these Americans, or for the majority of them, Italy, as a real entity, concrete, alive, did not have much significance.

With the passing of the years, as the American writers who visited Italy were no longer equipped with a classical culture. Italy had lost every significance in their imagination. They would have been able to compensate for this shortfall if they had had the desire to learn to speak Italian. But they never felt a real necessity for it. After all, it is America that dominates the world.

Edmund Wilson received a classical education and knew Latin well. But this is what Wilson wrote in his diary in 1963. ‘I felt this spring as if the entire past of Rome had been pushed by the war into history, that it is now finished’. My attention is always on other matters; such as the anglo-saxon civilization and Soviet Russia imposing itself upon the world.<sup>31</sup>

Even for a cultured person such as Wilson, Italy had become irrelevant – irrelevant to Wilson and in the eyes of all other American writers. The dream of Arcadia is over.

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reigned from 360 to 363 AD. In the introduction Vidal writes that the novel is about the changes in Christianity brought about by Constantine and his successors. Following that, ‘A soldier of the Great War’ by Mark Helprin 1991. The novel recreates the atmosphere of the first World War and is based upon research by Helprin who served in Israel. ‘The Volcano Lover’ by Susan Sontag 1992. A sentimental tale based in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It tells of the unhappy love affair between Lady Emma Hamilton and Lord Nelson. In the background some references to politics with a little republicanism feeling.

<sup>31</sup> Edmund Wilson, *Europe Without Baedeker* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1947, 1966): 63.