

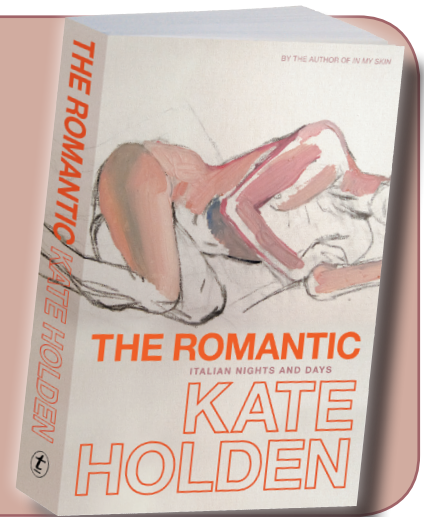
The Romantic: Italian nights and days

Kate Holden

ISBN 978-1-921656-74-3

RRP AUS \$32.95, NZ \$40.00

Non-Fiction, Trade Paperback



About Kate Holden

Kate Holden completed an honours degree in classics and literature at the University of Melbourne. Kate's first book, the bestselling *In My Skin: a memoir*, was published by Text in 2005 to critical acclaim and released in eleven countries. Kate has also written a popular column for Melbourne's *Age* newspaper for several years, as well as widely published essays, short stories and literary criticism. After time in Rome, Shanghai and London, she once more lives in Melbourne.

A reader's introduction to *The Romantic*

In her bestselling memoir *In My Skin* Kate Holden recounted the gripping story of her slide into heroin addiction and prostitution. It also told of her gruelling journey to recovery. *The Romantic* is the next episode in Kate's life.

Having left Melbourne behind, Kate is determined find a new life, new experiences. In her own words she *has come to Italy in search of three things: Rome, Romantics and Romance. Four things. Herself.* (p.4)

This book chronicles her relationships with Italian men as she travels to different Italian cities experiencing love, passion, fun and betrayal. Ultimately, Holden seems to be richer for the experiences, molded by them and scarred too.

Questions for discussion

- Holden provides graphic detail of sexual experiences, describing the most intimate moments of these encounters. Do you admire her honesty or condemn her for it? What might be the motivation for such revelations?
- Holden seems to move between men rather quickly even having a relationship with two brothers, Guido and Massimo, at the same time. What do you think of this? Are your judgements of people clouded by their sexuality/relationships?

- To what extent might their behaviour be seen as exploitative? To what extent might she be seen as exploiting others?
- Do you see Kate's behaviour and experiences as empowering?
- When Holden does find true love with Gabriele, she is devastated to learn that in her absence he has found another lover. In the three way liaison that ensues, with whom do you feel most sympathy? Are your sympathies with Holden from whose perspective we see the situation and feel the devastation; do they lie with Gabriele who appears to be in love, in spite of himself, with two women simultaneously, or do you feel for Donatella who appears to understand and like Kate but finds herself in a difficult situation?
- The following are Holden's ruminations about her own life: (p.193)

Puttana.

Is she, is she, is she?

She has only tried to make herself happy.

Other people happy.

Perhaps she was wrong.

What does she know of the rules? If you are used, but you consent, is it still wrong? Where is the space for simplicity, for something easy and free? A rhyme that won't come right, that stumbles on her tongue.

Does it matter?

Answer each of the above questions Kate asks and explain your response.

- In her dedication, Holden describes this book as 'a sincere memory in shaped retrospect.' What do you understand from this? What does this suggest about the cathartic experiencing of writing? How might this link to the fact that Holden chooses the third person, *she*, as the vehicle through which to tell her own story?

8. How did the use of third person affect your reading experience and your emotional response to the book?
9. Holden uses quotes from literature on the title page of each chapter of this book. Examine each quote as you consider her relationship with the man whom it describes and discuss the reason for its selection. What does it reveal about each of the men? Is the quote a fair representation of the relationship described in the chapter?
10. Rufus describes Rome as a whore:

Rome is always the lover that got away. It's the most beautiful, enchanting, bitchy, subtle, obvious place. She kisses you and she bites you and kisses you again. It's all there in front of you, but you'll never come to the end of the mysteries. There are always more secret places...She wraps her arms about your eyes and steals your heart and you don't mind at all...The Whore of Babylon. (p132)

While this is a description of Rome, discuss the way in which it may indeed describe Holden herself as well as her experiences of the capital.

11. Holden says of herself that she is interested in *erotica*. The blurb at the back describes this book as *sexy, dark and intoxicating*, while *News Weekly* describes it as a *confessional, redemption story*. Others have described it simply as self indulgence or even as pornography. How would you categorise this book? Justify your response.