

This first full-length study in English on seventeenth-century Italian travel writing enriches our understanding of an unusually fertile period for Italian contributions to the genre. The intrinsic qualities of this literature can now be grasped in terms of the larger question of cultural identity in Italy. For Hester, the specifically literary characteristics of Italian travel writing — including its humanism or Petrarchism — highlight the classic eminence throughout Europe of a prestigious tradition inherent to Italy, one compensating then for the peninsula's lack of a national political identity. Appeals to the cultural authority of that tradition represent a means of addressing and overcoming anxieties about the Italian subject's diasporic status during the "Golden Age" of European global colonial expansion. Self-funded travelers Francesco Carletti, Pietro Della Valle, Francesco Belli, Francesco Negri, and Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri are the major authors studied who journeyed through Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and America.