

Titolo: THE UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF BRUCE CHATWIN

Sottotitolo: At the Festival of Voyages—in Genoa, Italy, from November 18 through 20—the book of Bruce Chatwin’s unpublished letters will be presented by his widow and the author of his biography. The book covers 40 years of writings by the author.

The unpublished letters of Bruce Chatwin written from 1948 to 1989 range from those sent from school to his parents, to those dictated on his deathbed. They will be presented in a national premier in Genoa on November 18 to 20. The occasion will be the Festival of Voyages, three days dedicated to the English writer who has become a cult symbol for those who see the voyage as a means of exploration and discovery. Or, as Proust used to say, for those who wish to see “new lands with new eyes”. The book covers forty years of Chatwin’s life, and the curators of his estate—his widow, Elisabeth Chatwin, and Nicholas Shakespeare, the author of his official biography—will be in Genoa to present it. When the book came out in England more than a month ago, the anthology of Chatwin’s letters soon became the talk of the town, thanks to the caustic brief footnotes his widow appended to the bottom of his letters. She denied the veracity of many of the episodes that he recounts. When Chatwin writes of the 350 guests at the reception for his engagement with Elisabeth in 1965, she gives an immediate rebuttal. “We never gave this reception.”

The Chatwin Prize, “Wandering through the World”, is now on its ninth year. Born in La Spezia, it was the brainchild of Luciana Damiano, who, from the beginning, was taken under the wings of the writer’s widow. From La Spezia the Prize wandered over to Genoa in 2006. It also did a French version in Nice from 2005 to 2008.

“Our goal is to spread the thoughts of Bruce Chatwin, thereby promoting the traveling culture both in Italy and abroad,” explains Luciana Damiano. “We would like to explore and examine the expressings of the great travelers, in all their shades and hues. Not just literature, but also photography, architecture, cinema. In our first edition of the event, we gave an award for the best sound track in a travel movie. With time, our budget became more restrained, forcing us to concentrate on a few main themes. But all the same we have become a reference point for all travelers of culture and generosity, which are many in number. And I keep hearing from them. The last person to contact me was the rock singer, Jovanotti, who went to South America with the Bible in one hand, and ‘In Patagonia’ by Chatwin in the other.”

At the moment Damiano is reading “In Tibet: A Clandestine Voyage” by Flaviano Bianchini, who traveled 800 kilometers on foot with a Buddhist monk to reach Lhasa. “It’s a fantastic book!” enthuses Damiano, “And it testifies to the reality that only on foot can you make discoveries and truly meet other cultures. That is the only way to deepen your knowledge about others and about yourself. Chatwin used to say that we are made for walking, and he was right. But it’s hard to do. You have to be in good shape and be strong. What I find irritating is the voyage seen as a challenge. There are people who climb the sacred mountain of Tibet, just to say that they did it. To me that is a violation of the sacredness of the site.”

From November 18 to 20, the Festival of Voyages is proposing exhibitions, encounters, and film projections on the theme of travels. It starts off with a photography show by Ivo Scaglietti, “Under Abraham’s Tent” (at Palazzo Rosso—Genoa’s Red Palace—from November 18 to 28). It continues with encounters organized in collaboration with the University of Genoa School of Architecture and its Faculty of Arts on “Africa Today and Yesterday: 1905-2010 in the Land of the Dogon”, with a workshop for Genoese school children on travel-writing at the Luzzati Museum. The Grand Finale will be the show at the duke’s palace, Palazzo Ducale, with readings, projection of films, and a ceremony for the winners of the competition and special awards. This year’s prize winners are the

Canadian writer, Cees Nooteboom; the musician, Vinicio Capossela; and the photo-reporter Ivo Taglietti. Present at the ceremony will be the jury: writer, Ermanno Rea; photo-reporter, Mario Dondero; and Elisabeth Chatwin, widow of the writer, and fairy god-mother for the Chatwin Prize.
Renzo Raffaelli