

Battles for Italy and for a heart

A KISS FROM MADDALENA

By Christopher Castellani

Text, \$34.95

Reviewed by **Margie Thomson**

MANY a love story has been set against the backdrop of war — offering an irresistible juxtaposition of opposites, and dramatic explosions of one kind or another.

Events in *A Kiss From Maddalena* take place in a tiny Italian village during the confusion of the last couple of years of World War II, after Italy has surrendered to the Allies but war still rages throughout the country. This love story offers so much more than you might expect.


There's romance, yes, but also its opposite: a tender portrait of a community clinging to the life-raft of tradition as modernity washes around it, threatening to swamp the old ways. Not only heartbreak, but its quieter cousin, disappointment, lurk in these pages. People do not always get what they want (hardly ever, in fact), yet life goes on and people eventually adapt.

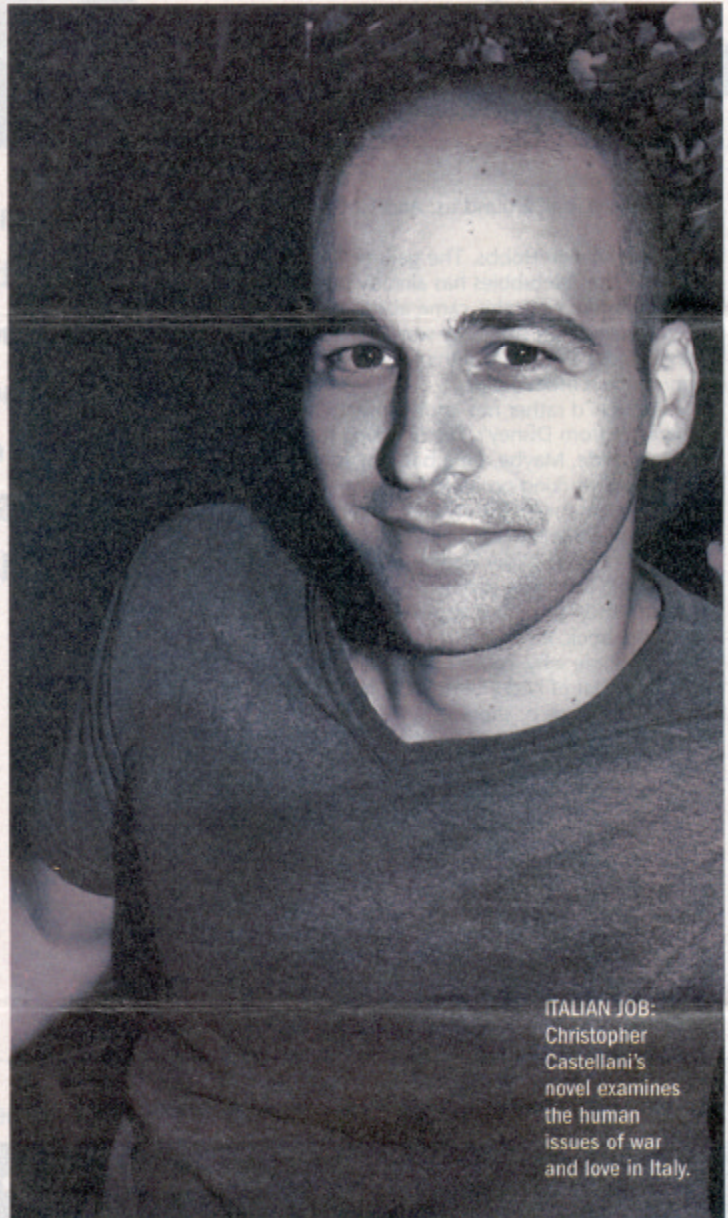
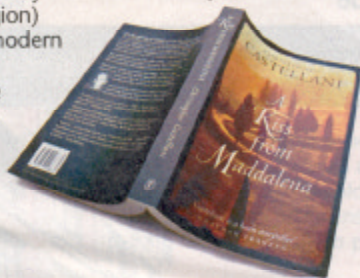
Which sounds gloomy. Yet this is a wonderful, compelling novel — the kind that, if this were summer, I'd be recommending for a holiday read. But don't wait.

As the German tanks rumble towards Santa Cecilia, 18-year-old Vito is in love with beautiful Maddalena, and dreams of marrying her. Not much chance, it seems, as with a sick mother, absent father and skinny body, his prospects don't look so good. Yet, to everyone's surprise, and widespread disapproval, Maddalena falls for him.

Then the Germans arrive and everything, literally, falls apart. Maddalena's family flees to a different part of Italy to wait for the end of the war. Vito meanwhile devises a plan to win the love of Maddalena's family.

This is a moving exploration of what it is to be human that works cleverly at both intimate and broad political levels. Here is young love in all its confusion and fervency, as well as cynicism, betrayal, sacrifice.

Maddalena and Vito are unlikely heroes. Neither is an adventurer, and they have the simplest of dreams: to stay in their tiny village and have children. But that is no longer the way the world works, and ancient forces (family and religion) combine with modern ones (America, materialism, the lust for new life in a new land) to dictate the path these young people will take. 



ITALIAN JOB:
Christopher Castellani's novel examines the human issues of war and love in Italy.

Archetype Allen & Unwin and *canvas* have five copies of Christopher Castellani's *A Kiss From Maddalena* to give away. Write your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to: *canvas*, Castellani giveaway, PO Box 3290, Auckland, by September 19.