

Introduction

In her best-selling memoir, *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes imagines heaven as a maze of gravel roads lacing the Tuscan countryside, each leading to a villa or church to be explored with the thrilling sensation of having gotten lost.¹ One visits rural Tuscany, like many other iconic places in the world, in the hope of feeling the intoxicating combination of recognition and disorientation that Mayes calls her heaven. The Tuscan countryside, like other rural places, seems to invite the visitor to dwell for a while, perhaps even buy an old house and try to become one with the place and its history: “The language, history, art, places in Italy are endless – two lifetimes wouldn’t be enough. And, ah, the foreign self. The new life might shape itself to the contours of the house, which already is at home in the landscape, and to the rhythms around it.”² A sojourn in Tuscany promises a new self, at once at home in the landscape and foreign to it, in a perpetual tension that keeps taunting the “residential tourist” with the power of one hundred renovation projects. The perfect home, at once true to the land and to oneself, is as elusive as it is tantalizing.

The residential tourist, Mayes’ aspirational self, is a perfected local, one who learns from an old peasant to forage for herbs and call them by their Tuscan names but refuses to join so many other locals in shopping at the mall down in the valley, by the autostrada. In a similar vein, for many Italians, Tuscany has become Italy perfected. Marco Tullio Giordana’s filmic saga, *The Best of Youth* (2003), follows a family through the violent conflicts of post–World War II Italy until everyone who has survived the storm can be gathered safely in a nicely restructured house somewhere in the Tuscan countryside at the dawn of the new millennium. After all, by the time the series aired on TV and was released in the theaters, every Italian had been exposed for years to Gavino Sanna’s 1980s commercials for Barilla’s line of baked goods, named after a Siennese white mill

¹ F. Mayes, *Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996): 4.

² *Ibid.*: 12.

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(the Mulino Bianco). Appearing after a long season of political strife, those commercials promised a newly pacified and prosperous society the wholesome authenticity that only a Tuscan rural setting could evoke. The brick-and-mortar mill soon became a tourist destination in its own right, a symbol of harmony worth a detour, perhaps as a family outing to one's own family ideal.

These experiences of the Tuscan countryside rely on highly selective senses of place and time, capable of producing coherent and legible images. They are also exquisitely modern. According to sociologist Dean MacCannell, tourism should be understood as the search for an experience of coherence and totality, contrasted with the fractured and relatively meaningless character of the tourist's perception of modernity.³ In a modern form of pilgrimage, the tourist collects experiences of authenticity in the ongoing attempt to make herself whole and share this wholeness, or meaningfulness, with others. A central argument of this book is that in a fundamental sense everyone in rural Tuscany has been a tourist over the past century. Even the "locals" have struggled to be "at home in Tuscany," to paraphrase the subtitle of Mayes' book. Over the past century, the Tuscan countryside has changed radically in its social and spatial features. Generations of locals and strangers have witnessed these changes with a mix of disorientation and exhilaration, even as they contributed to shaping them, trying to make sense of them and construct coherent narratives. This search for coherence and totality has been particularly successful in Tuscany, making it the setting for countless clichés. But Tuscany has also been the setting of countless stories of conflict and misrecognition. Many of those stories have been forgotten, but often not without leaving traces that have shaped what Tuscany is today. This book attempts to retrieve some of those stories and traces.

Not only are the experiences to be had in Tuscany exquisitely modern, the very landscape people come to see and feel is the complex and contradictory product of modern processes and sensibilities. Rural Tuscany is today above all an iconic landscape, represented and recognized all over the world. It is a landscape that projects an aura of immutability and yet also one that has changed radically and rapidly over the past century. In celebrating the Tuscan lifestyle, another residential tourist and memoirist, Ferenc Máté, detects a distinctive resonance between people and landscape in rural Tuscany: "Perhaps part of a Tuscan's calm comes from the ancient hamlets and towns around him, where houses, churches, and art have stood firm for centuries; and from a countryside that, for the

³ D. MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

most part, has changed little over time. There are olive groves whose trees are hundreds of years old, and vineyards that have been vineyards since Etruscan times.”⁴ Calm is far more present in Máté’s perception than in the historical record. Rural Tuscany was one of the areas where the rise of fascism in the early 1920s was most violent; where the struggle between Communist sharecropping peasants and conservative landlords raged for years after the end of World War II; where the flight from the farms in the 1950s and 1960s was widely lived as a threat and a trauma; where the influx of Sardinians and other immigrants raised specters of decay and barbarization; and where leftist administrators nurtured for decades dreams of regeneration through massive infrastructural investments. And it is also a place where olive and vine growing have changed a great deal. The vineyards and olive groves Máté sees (and owns) look very different and are cultivated very differently from those of half a century ago, and of course they are often tended to by people like himself, rather than by sharecroppers. Indeed, there are no sharecroppers left in rural Tuscany.

A beautiful landscape is one that resonates with its inhabitants and visitors.⁵ This is not only a personal and subjective experience but also one with a collective dimension. Some societies are perceived to be at odds with the landscape they inhabit, others as perfectly adjusted to it. Of course these perceptions are selective and problematic insofar as no landscape conveys a simple and unitary message, but they can also be powerful and persuasive. This book understands landscape not as simple topography or scenery, but as a complex and evolving set of relationships between place, in its multiple meanings, and society, with its tensions and fractures. From this perspective, landscapes are of course about senses of place.⁶ They look and feel in distinctive ways to those who experience them. This book, however, contends that landscapes are also about senses of time, about the stories that a place tells (or is made to tell) and those that are left untold or get forgotten. Writing the history of a landscape means to follow at least some of those stories over time, tracing the origins of the stories a place tells today, but also retrieving those that have been silenced, all the while trying to understand how and why that silencing “took place.” Doing so means to challenge the

⁴ F. Máté, *The Hills of Tuscany: A New Life in an Old Land* (New York: Flamingo, 1999): 29.

⁵ This notion of beauty as resonance (*stimmung*) was theorized by Friedrich Schiller and the German romantics. See Chenxi Tang, *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity: Geography, Literature, and Philosophy in German Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008): 77–81.

⁶ Steven Feld and Keith Basso (eds.), *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996).

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sense of coherence and totality some landscapes project. Historians are often cruel storytellers, eager to dispel myths and comfortable tales, but a good historian must also take those myths seriously, understand their appeal, and account for their emergence. Thus, this book is about the incongruities as well as the clichés that have made up one of the world's most celebrated landscapes.

Like any other landscape, but perhaps with uncommon poignancy, rural Tuscany bears the incongruous signs of a myriad of stories and trajectories. Sly sharecroppers, even slyer real estate agents, rebellious rural Communists, pragmatic politicians, immigrant Sardinian shepherds, concerned preservationists, and millionaire celebrities have all left traces and told stories about the hills of Tuscany. Indeed, as recently as the late 1970s, rural Tuscany appeared as a cacophony of voices and perspectives. Some of the farmhouses that had been abandoned by the peasants lay as decaying ruins; others were being restructured for tasteful relaxation; some others were surrounded by large herds of Sardinian sheep; and yet others concealed kidnapping victims. Yet, today few landscapes in the world appear as unitary, coherent, and seemingly legible as the Tuscan hills. Their beauty depends on such legibility, nor is the coherence simply an illusion. The Tuscan landscape may well be the most painstakingly regulated countryside in the world, and such regulatory efforts are themselves the product of complex and conflicting senses of place and time, not to mention massive amounts of physical and cultural work. There is no denying that the Tuscan landscape today “resonates” more than many others in the world, but this resonance has been the outcome of complex and contingent historical processes, full of twists and turns. Thus, this book is in part about the ways in which societies, sometimes, “come together” and manage to create a coherent sense of themselves and of the spaces they inhabit, malgré tout, just to see such coherence come under ongoing and forever increasing threat. After all, resonance between society and place produces both beauty and vulnerability.

Many of the memoirs written by people who grew up in rural Tuscany share the mix of familiarity and disorientation evoked by Mayes in her version of heaven, although their attention focuses on different objects and events. Ivo Guerri, for example, was born in 1945 to a family of small-scale farmers in the Orcia valley, at the southern edge of the province of Siena. Like many of his generation, he did not follow in his parents' footsteps but became a construction worker instead, eventually specializing in the restructuring of old farmhouses for the tourists' enjoyment. He also developed a passion for biking and storytelling. His memoir opens with the tale of a bicycle ride on a spring morning: “As my legs pedaled

calmly and effortlessly, my mind and my eyes were attracted to the landscape, which I knew so well.” There was Mount Amiata, the extinguished volcano that “seemed to have been put there by someone, as guardian of the valley.” There were the odd clay formations, similar to upside-down udders. And there were the smells of spring. But then Guerri switches from a spatial to a temporal tale, marveling at how much the valley has changed in his lifetime. What used to be a hostile and barren landscape is now a paragon of harmony and gentility. But who created all that? “The Fanfani Plan [a major land reform of the early 1950s], the Reclamation Consortium, the new earth-moving machines that were made available to the new farmers, and their entrepreneurial initiative have contributed to the radical transformation of this land, giving it that harmonious aspect we admire today.”⁷ For Guerri, the Orcia valley, which UNESCO has listed as a World Heritage Site largely for being recognizable from the paintings of the fourteenth-century Sienese Primitives, is a landscape where modernity has redeemed itself. Harmony and gentility have come with the roar of the tractor.

Guerri is far from alone in telling the recent history of the Orcia valley (and of rural Tuscany in general) as a story of ruptures.⁸ The sense of historic continuity evoked by some residential tourists contrasts with more fractured senses of time, punctuated by the succession of distinct generations. The first rupture was World War II and the anti-Fascist and anti-Nazi Resistance of 1943–1944. In the wake of these events the sharecroppers of Tuscany, and of north-central Italy more generally, organized by the Communist Party, rose up against their landlords. As former sharecropper Rino Pecci told me in an interview, “from the foundation of sharecropping in the 1400s until 1943 nothing had changed. After that everything has changed. But it was not inevitable. All of that could have lasted another one hundred years. Some people do not realize that.” The second rupture was the “rural exodus” of the late 1950s and 1960s, when Tuscan agriculture shed two-thirds of its workforce and thousands of farms were abandoned. Then came a third rupture in the late 1970s and 1980s, when a new kind of agriculture, based on the recapitalization of a few crops (above all the newly established vineyards), and novel kinds of cultural valorization and tourism ushered in some welcome, albeit always fragile and contentious, prosperity.

⁷ I. Guerri, *Val d'Orcia: Mattino di Primavera: Ricordi di un Ragazzo di Campagna* (San Quirico: Donchisciotte, 2008).

⁸ Federico Scarpelli, *La Memoria del Territorio: Patrimonio Culturale e Nostalgia a Pienza* (Ospedaletto: Pacini, 2007).

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These ruptures are part of the senses of place and time that have made the Tuscan hills, and, on one level, this is a book about transitions in political economy and the ways these transitions have reshaped both land and society. The book's narrative arc charts a path from tradition to modernity, and finally to postmodernity, setting these shifts in the unlikely setting of an iconic place that now projects an aura of permanence and immutability. Since the early twentieth century, if not earlier, Tuscans of all stripes have debated the categories or "regimes" of tradition and modernity, and today's reliance on intangibles such as landscape beauty is often interpreted by Tuscans themselves as the hallmark of a postmodern or postproductive economy. Each of these regimes produced specific spatial configurations, or landscapes, and they all shaped distinctive senses of time and place. In space we read time, as Karl Schlögel has put it, and in Tuscany tradition, modernity, and postmodernity could indeed be read in space – in the present, retroactively, and as aspirations for the future.⁹

The landscape of tradition in Tuscany was that of sharecropping, which forged both land and society for centuries. This regime, however, felt more coherent in retrospect, after its disappearance, than when it ruled the land. Arguably, sharecropping had been in flux for decades before its collapse in the 1960s, and the Fascist regime had been instrumental in both buttressing and transforming it. By the same token, rural Tuscans, especially a restless and militant peasantry, had anticipated the landscape of modernity for decades, only to find its realized features surprisingly hard to decipher. The Communist Party, by far the most popular political force in the region after World War II, struggled to articulate a coherent message, promoting "modern" ways of life and bemoaning many of their consequences. Finally, the postmodern or postproductive landscape is shot through with the melancholic quest for elusive sources of authenticity, a quest that leads people to harken back to imagined pasts that are made to matter in the present.

This complexity of perspectives suggests that the language of transition is ill equipped to make sense of the nonlinear ways people perceive and engage with their surroundings and make sense of change. Historians can tell the history of landscape along one trajectory, shaped by macroscopic changes through which societies go when understood as systems, albeit at different times and speeds. In an economic vein, for example, it would be possible to argue that Tuscany remained traditionally rural longer than, say, Lombardy or the English Midlands; transitioned to

⁹ K. Schlögel, *Im Raumen Lesen Wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003).

modern forms of agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s; and then partook of the rise of the heritage industry, perhaps even pioneering some of its “postmodern” features. In a political vein, we could argue that the authoritarian paternalism of fascism gave way to class struggle after the war; then a period of uneasy pacification followed, presided over by the Communist Party and allowed by the subsidies the latter managed to funnel from Rome and Brussels; and finally Tuscany reached some kind of postideological stage after the end of the Cold War. Each of those transitions shaped the land as a source of livelihood and a stage for political negotiations. Stated this way, landscape changes in historical time writ large, the one that undergirds the temporality of “history in general,” to use Reinhart Koselleck’s expression.¹⁰

People, however, do not only live in “History.” They also live in their own multiple and overlapping times. Mayes was by no means unique in experiencing different senses of time, or temporalities, when travelling between San Francisco and Cortona, Tuscany. Those senses were for her simultaneously deeply personal and meaningfully collective. Indeed, that is why she was able to write a best-selling book about them. But those senses were not linear and mutually exclusive; they coexisted in complex ways. When in Tuscany, Mayes brought with her some of San Francisco, with its sense of time, and vice versa. That is indeed how she came to experience and interpret the two places. But it is not at all necessary to move across oceans to live in more than one time. Post–World War II Tuscan peasants, for example, became “modern” while still on farms, and their sense of modernity was tinged with the seemingly incompatible utopias of consumerism and Communism. They struggled to make sense of the places they inhabited – that is, of their landscape – on the basis of those temporal experiences. Arguably, they had a farther distance to travel than Mayes could ever imagine. Some of them partook of the unprecedented possibilities of the “economic miracle” and became entrepreneurs in the complex networks of proprietary capitalism typical of the Italian industrial districts.¹¹ Many more came to be employed in the booming construction and manufacturing industries, in trajectories that to them seemed no less entrepreneurial than those of their new bosses. Yet others were “left behind” in a countryside that for a while changed too fast to become a legible landscape.

¹⁰ R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). See also Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

¹¹ I have written about the Italian industrial districts of small-scale forms and their complex relationships with mezzadria in *In Gold We Trust: Social Capital and Economic Change in the Italian Jewelry Towns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

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In a beautifully worded passage, geographer Doreen Massey urges us to imagine space as “a simultaneity of stories-so-far.”¹² When we tell the history of society only over “historical time,” the temporality of history in general, we are bound to ignore this coexistence of multiple stories, with the senses of time and place in which they are embedded. By contrast, when we tell the history of society over space as well, we are more likely to attend to the mundane but crucial fact that Cortona was made up of Mayes’ stories, of those of the old peasant who may have taught her how to forage for herbs, and of those of the locals who shopped at the mall down by the motorway. In slightly more abstract language, thus, the notion of transition cannot do justice to the phenomenology of place, with its plurality of stories and experiences pointing in different directions and embedding different paths. Thus, this is also a book about the opposite of transition. It is a book that attempts to write a “spatial history” capable of attending to the co-presence of different senses of place and time, as well as to the losses societies incur in thinking of themselves as positioned within one trajectory, when the very spaces they inhabit speak of the simultaneity of conflicting paths and experiences. In Tuscany, coherence and totality did not simply emerge (or survive); they came at a cost, and after a fair amount of conflict.

Nostalgia has been the wage of change, its emotional cost. Rural Tuscany is a landscape saturated with nostalgia, an emotion that stems from the awareness of rapid change over space and time.¹³ Both “foreigners” and “locals” wax nostalgic on the Tuscan hills, although the foreigners tend to see Tuscany as a stage where they can connect to a more authentic self and way of life that has been lost to their version of modernity, whereas the locals are more aware of the temporal changes that Tuscany has experienced in recent decades. To simplify matters, the foreigners’ form of nostalgia is more spatial and the one felt by the locals more temporal in character, with the caveats that Tuscany has produced many kinds of “local nostalgia” and that a “nostalgic local” is perhaps something of an oxymoron (the nostalgic self is never at home).

The following chapters show that these emotional investments are by no means recent. Nostalgia already informed the relationship between rural Tuscany and the Fascist regime, for example. Indeed, almost all the personal and collective trajectories that have intersected in the Tuscan countryside (all those “stories-so-far”) have produced their

¹² D. Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005): 9.

¹³ See Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), and especially the chapter “Nostalgia for the Present” (279–296), in which Jameson theorizes historicity as a perception of the present as history.

own distinctive form of nostalgia. The Fascists in the 1930s fought to “restore” an imagined peasantry that was simultaneously locally rooted and fervently national; the Communists of the 1950s imagined as their mission the completion of the post–World War I peasant struggles, forcibly interrupted by the Black Shirts; the leftists of the 1970s looked at the post–World War II unrest as a missed opportunity to usher in a truly dignified form of modernity; the environmentalists of the 1980s and 1990s argued for the necessity to “preserve” vulnerable relations between people and land; and so on. In some ways (and this is by no means unique to Tuscany), the rural society that mattered in the present was the one that was always already gone.

We owe cultural critic Raymond Williams the fundamental insight that the paradoxes of modernity truly stand out in the countryside and in its relationships with the city. Indeed, the previous paragraph can be interpreted as a version of the “escalator” effect Williams detected in generations of English writers’ search for a Golden Age of rural bliss. Tradition, and thus the modernity to which it is contrasted, is a constantly moving target. This book, however, does not look at these cultural perceptions primarily from the vantage point of literature or art, but from the perspectives of “ordinary” people in their engagements with the places they lived in. Williams argued that “a working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation.”¹⁴ In other words, a particular countryside becomes a landscape when the material conditions of its production are ignored. It was the leisured classes that invented landscape as a source of enjoyment and an object of control. Ordinary people do not have “landscapes”; elites do. Geographer Denis Cosgrove has influentially argued that in early modern Europe a particular “way of seeing” gave rise to landscape as abstract space to be dominated and/or artistically enjoyed.¹⁵ Geographers themselves, together with other scientists, have measured, observed, and otherwise acted in such a way as to create landscape categories founded on particular representations of nature-and-society interactions.¹⁶

¹⁴ R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973): 120.

¹⁵ Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). See also Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). The large body of literature on the relationship between landscape and imperialism also approaches the issue in a similar manner. See, for example, W. J. Thomas Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁶ In the United States, this conception of landscape as the result of the interaction between a particular natural area and a particular culture was codified by Carl Sauer in the 1920s and 1930s. This conception, and the associated methodology, then became

I do not question the validity of these claims, but I aim to broaden (and perhaps also rescue) the experience of landscape from this elite genealogy, however influential it has been, and consider not only the gazes, but also more generally the senses, of “ordinary” people in their engagements with the places they inhabited and the stories those places told. The elite ideology of landscape, based on the separation of consumption and production, on the distinction between practicality and esthetic pleasure, and on the entire ideological apparatus of emerging capitalism, silenced and removed from consideration other perceptions, sensibilities, and “structures of feeling” that belonged to the subaltern classes.¹⁷ But by attending to people’s senses of their landscape, those structures may become accessible again. Capitalism itself has been a structure of feeling in rural Tuscany – a material process that could be experienced not only shaping the land and society, but also the terrain of affect and emotional engagement. Capitalism was a looming threat for some, a set of aspirations for others, and perhaps a combination of the two for most. Tuscans could never agree on when (or even whether) their region had “joined” capitalist modernity. Was traditional sharecropping converging toward a form of rural capitalism even before the rise of fascism? Was the exodus from the farms in the 1960s to be accepted as a sign of progress, or countered as the consequence of social decay? Were the new specialized vineyards a symbol of capitalist restructuring? Were the new shepherds “rural capitalists”? Was rural tourism a form of debasing speculation or a practice of resistance against the homogenizing power of consumerism? Tuscans confronted and debated these questions both as abstract propositions and as emplaced, even embodied, processes, negotiating the distance between the “tide of history” and the personal stories that made up their lives.

In line with recent anthropological thinking, this book argues that landscape is not only scenery to be represented artistically or territory to be investigated scientifically. It is also a set of concrete experiences that connects people and place, informing particular ways of being in the world. In the words of anthropologist Tim Ingold, we should adopt a “‘dwelling perspective,’ according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of the past generations who have dwelt within it, and in doing so, have left something there of themselves.”¹⁸ From this perspective, landscape

canonical in geographical studies. See the collection of essays, Carl Sauer, *Land and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

¹⁷ Williams was of course aware of this. In his own words, “We can be certain that many more men than writers have looked with intense interest at all the features and movements of the natural world,” R. Williams, *The Country and the City*: 120.

¹⁸ T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000): 189.