

**Relocation Narratives 'Made in Italy':
Self and Place in Late-Twentieth Century
Travel Writing**

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Abstract

At the intersection of life writing and travel writing, relocation narratives form a distinct subgenre of contemporary travel memoirs concerned with the inter-subjective and intra-subjective experiences of travellers who become settlers in foreign locales. Lured by the dream of the ‘good life’ abroad, transnational writers detail their post-relocation experiences in autobiographical accounts that seek to educate and entertain global readers about what it means to accommodate to a new life in a new land. This study examines the entwined processes of identity (re)formation and place attachment represented in recent relocation trilogies set in Italy, highlighting the tension between reality and illusion in the pursuit of *la dolce vita* in the adopted homeland.

Focusing on Frances Mayes’s popular Tuscan texts, Annie Hawes’s Ligurian trilogy, and Tim Parks’s memoirs set in Verona, the study addresses how their accommodation over a period of long-term foreign residency is represented in multipart nonfiction accounts. Are their memoirs of ‘becoming Italian’ merely an exercise in social distinction that appropriates Italian ‘authenticity’ and packages it for global tastes? Or does dwelling in cultural difference over time lead to the development of an intercultural competence that is one aspect of an engaged form of cosmopolitanism? A close reading of the language, stylistics, and form of relocation narratives reveals a tension between colonial and cosmopolitan orientations as strategies for cultural representation.

By re-positioning themselves across geographic, conceptual, and generic boundaries, relocation writers are mapping out new possibilities for identity-making through new patterns of home-making within contemporary transnational lifestyles. Their deep immersion in place enables the production of situated readings of Italy, Italians and Italianness that avoid essentialising otherness through the recognition of dialogical subjectivities.

Keywords: travel writing; autobiography/memoir; lifestyle migration; cosmopolitanism; identity formation.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This project began in an airport bookshop in 2003 when I picked up a copy of Annie Hawes's *Extra Virgin* to enjoy a few hours of 'light reading' while awaiting a flight connection. I remember noticing how many other similar titles lined the shelves in the *travel & holiday* section, and I later became curious about the classification of these books, which were not travelogues or guide books per se, but relocation stories by travellers who had decided to stay put in foreign locales. We were spending a sabbatical year in Italy and I wanted to read something for the "non-tourist" – for someone not just passing through place – by someone with local knowledge. Little did I know then that we would stay in Italy or that my original curiosity would lead to doctoral research on these works. Sometimes, I think, you write the book you need to read: ten years on, this is the result.

I wish to thank Clive Scott who trusted my initial hunch and guided me through the first phase of my research at UEA. His support was unequivocal, especially in encouraging me to fill the void of secondary literature on this topic. A doctorate is a long journey, one that overlaps with and is sometimes overtaken by other life journeys; he was a most patient and unflagging guide. My heartfelt thanks to Stephen Benson who took over the supervisory baton and helped me to contain and shape the interdisciplinary sources that fed this project whilst not losing sight of its literary dimension. His generous criticism and support have made this PhD a very humanising experience, and it has been a great pleasure to build a dialogue with him over the years. I also wish to thank Giles Foden who encouraged me to write with conviction from a place of deep knowing, avoiding abstraction and breathing space into my writing. I have been very fortunate to find in UEA a community that has challenged and nurtured me over time, both up close and from afar. As a transplanted Canadian living in Italy and studying in the UK, mobility and place-attachment are much more than academic interests, and UEA has been a wonderful port of call. The feedback received from my viva examiners, Dr. Petra Rau of UEA and Prof. Tim Youngs of NTU, was crucial in helping me ground and refine my arguments. As far as any examination can be called 'pleasurable', my viva experience truly was, and I thank them most sincerely for their professionalism and generous mentoring spirit.

A final note of thanks goes to family and close friends who have supported my intellectual explorations and other adventures over the years. My very special thanks go to Vincent and Leonardo Della Sala – my two main travelling companions and most ardent supporters – for the sense of discovery and of homecoming they provide me each day. This work is a result of routes and roots we three have explored together, and to them I dedicate this project.

Epigraph

“Everything went wrong all the time [in Italy], but somehow it didn’t matter, while in other countries even if everything went perfectly, life was still a misery.”

Michael Dibdin, *End Games*

“Italy is not a country for beginners.”

Tim Parks, *Italian Ways*

Introduction

La dolce vita – a phrase synonymous with Italy’s cultural distinctness. The expression has been stretched thin through overuse, its significance co-opted by contemporary marketing interests seeking to promote everything from pasta brands to holiday tours. The phrase now loosely identifies a desirable lifestyle, one with symbolic associations to quality-of-life values ranging from good food and wine, to temperate climate, unhurried pace, leisure and sociability, health and security, family and community ties, fashion and design sense, and everyday elegance. Tracing the origins of ‘the sweet life’ and its related associations is a good starting point for understanding why Italy continues to exert such a powerful pull on travellers, tourists and migrants.

Popularised as a catch-phrase for a carefree Italian way of living following Federico Fellini’s 1960 film *La Dolce Vita*, the title’s irony is lost today in our casual understanding of its significance as broadly related to Italian glamour and spontaneity. Then, the expression aptly captured two contrasting currents in Italian post-war life – urbane society and mundane domesticity – which presented strikingly different versions of ‘the sweet life’ that functioned as counterpoints in the film and in the protagonist’s, Marcello Rubino’s (played by Marcello Mastroianni), quest to build a meaningful life. This central narrative tension is depicted through his pursuit of profitable but meaningless work for the gossip pages of a tabloid, drifting among Rome’s social élite whose glamorous and decadent lifestyle he participates in through a series of casual affairs, and his contrasting desire to be a serious writer and maintain a relationship with his live-in girlfriend. Though he aspires to be a novelist, he wastes his talent as a journalist on the trivial and ephemeral by fabricating ‘news’ stories from celebrity gossip and manufactured media events. This misdirection finds its parallel in his personal life in the playboy lifestyle he pursues through a series of pointless encounters culminating in a grand flirtation with Sylvia (Anita Ekberg) whose wet romp in the Trevi fountain shivers with the promise of sex but ultimately leaves him cold.

Fast-forward fifty years and Mastroianni’s quest is picked up in twenty-first century Rome by the aging playboy Jep Gambardella (played by Toni Servillo) in Paolo Sorrentino’s recent *La grande bellezza* which premiered at Cannes in May 2013, was nominated for the Palme d’Or,

and won the 2014 Oscar for Foreign Language Film. The film pays homage to Fellini and to Rome as Jep follows in his precursor's footsteps on a picaresque journey through the eternal city's fashionable quarters, elite society and decadent nightlife: Rome has never appeared so lyrical, or so crass. Like Marcello, Jep is also a journalist and *manqué* writer: his single novel published forty years earlier remains a reminder of unrealised potential as he, "*il re dei mondani*", 'the king of the worldly', celebrates his sixty-fifth birthday at yet another Roman party showcasing vulgar varieties of 'sweetness'. Despite his wasted talent and wasted years, the film does not mock the delusions of this perennial quester, suggesting, instead, that all journeys perhaps lead to disillusionment since all lives fall short of achieving *la grande bellezza*, the great beauty promised in youth. Few pilgrims remain pure of heart enough to see the enchanting beauty behind Rome's façades, treasures locked away in secret gardens and private collections. With cigarette dangling from a wry smile, Jep shrugs his perfectly-tailored shoulders and offers a simple explanation for why he sold out his dream: "*troppe belle feste*", 'too many good parties'. His quest for meaning and his misdirection make him a modern Everyman: the great beauty of life sacrificed to more immediate pleasures, the sweet life made bittersweet by regret.

In late modernity, multiple versions of the sweet life are accessible to contemporary questers in myriad locations. Italy continues to attract tourists and pilgrims, but *la dolce vita* today is sought far from the Via Veneto's bustling bars and Rome's nightclubs, indeed far from any of Italy's fashionable metropolitan centres and sophisticated cultural settings. Contemporary aspirants search for the good life in rural or semi-rural outposts and in the everyday practices of local culture, in what is decidedly un-urban, unsophisticated and mundane. The quest today is associated with an anti-decadent aesthetic: a return to the senses, to an organic way of living, to what is natural in the human experience. Since the late-twentieth century, travellers have been drawn to Italy in search of a better quality of life based on a rural idyll: a retreat to the countryside, living in harmony with nature, with traditional social arrangements and with local culture. Today, downshifting to a 'slow life' in the countryside is the apogee of the good life for many metropolitans seeking escape from the malaise of postmodern living; a renewed rural idyll shapes the quest for *la dolce vita* in the late-modernity. This lifestyle-motivated migration and its representation in narrative nonfiction form provide the overarching scope of this thesis.

The global flow of people, capital, goods, services, and ideas has helped define the twentieth century as a ‘century of migrations’ which is understood as an existential and epistemological condition embedded in a range of material and metaphorical contexts.¹ New patterns of mobility and place attachment in the late-twentieth century have destabilised the conceptual distinctions underlying travel and tourism, concepts such as home/away, local/foreigner and every day/holiday. Relocation narratives are a cultural product of these fluid mobilities and complex connectivities,² offering insight into shifting patterns of identification and identity-making for contemporary travellers. Unlike conventional travelogues which recount physical journeys undertaken by those moving through foreign landscapes, relocation narratives are less concerned with *movement* and more with *settlement*: they present the post-relocation or resettlement experiences of writers who ‘go native’ in foreign locales by deciding to stay and build new homes abroad. As George and Sattin note: “this is not the literature of movement but rather the literature of staying put” by writers who have “committed themselves to a place, another place” (2002: vii-viii).

Silvia Ross uses the term “settlement literature” (2010: 122), Giorgia Alù refers to “villa books” (2010: 285), Wendy Parkins to “Tuscan farmhouse literature” (2004: 259) and George and Sattin to “home-abroad books” (2002: ix) in identifying this form of travel writing that is not about travel per se but about settlement. I prefer the terms ‘relocation narrative’ or ‘relocation memoir’ which shift the focus away from the specific abode to the process of dwelling-in-displacement and the central role narrative plays in reconstructing the personal experiences of lifestyle migrants. Relocation memoirs describe how new identities emerge in new lands through the experience of building a home abroad. This is the literature of arrival, an integral part of a mobility cycle that contains both the flux of travel and the fixity of settlement: an act of physical displacement or dislocation simultaneously ‘places’ or ‘locates’ the self in a new horizon of experience, one which displaces conventional self/other paradigms narrowly defined by nationality, and which gives rise to complex identifications and identities.

Ross (2010: 122) notes how the “*topos* of life among the locals”, the narrative terrain of recent expatriate writing, shifts the focus away from account of movement to account of settled life in a new land, revealing how place-based epistemologies evolve through sustained engagement

¹ James Clifford (1998).

² Tomlinson (1999: 2) refers to the “rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life.”

with cultural difference over time. Hulme (2002: 97) points to the contemporary practice of “deep immersion” – of travel writers immersing themselves in foreign cultures and languages for extended periods – as a way of “acquiring the sort of intimate knowledge which gives them access to people and places unknown to short-stay travellers, let alone tourists.” Whilst literary critics signal a shift in the type of travel tale told and in the epistemologies of self and place produced through sustained foreign residency, more investigation is needed into the modalities of this contemporary form of transnational engagement and the modes of representation through which transplanted writers reconstruct their accommodation to life in a foreign place over time.

My thesis seeks to fill this gap by analysing the ways in which contemporary relocation narratives ‘Made in Italy’ reconstruct the experience of cultural accommodation in multipart, nonfiction format. Focusing on three transnational writers and their respective relocation trilogies – Frances Mayes’s *Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy* (1996), *Bella Tuscany: The Sweet Life in Italy* (1999), and *Every Day in Tuscany: Seasons of an Italian Life* (2010); Annie Hawes’s *Extra Virgin: Amongst the Olive Groves of Liguria* (2001), *Ripe for the Picking* (2003), and *Journey to the South* (2005); and Tim Parks’s *Italian Neighbours: An Englishman in Verona* (1992), *An Italian Education* (1996), and *A Season with Verona* (2002) – I am interested in tracing the writers’ migrating sensibilities as they engage in a process of identity (re)formation by building new lives in new lands. The sense place conveyed in their accounts is far from a simplified rendering of a romanticised tourist destination; instead, in Marilyn Alder Papayanis’s words (2005: 20), it a “complex and unstable interweaving of desire, promise, expectation, and materiality.” Indeed, Italy functions as much more than a captivating landscape in these texts; it is the meaningful space inhabited by travellers who become settlers through a process of accommodating to cultural differences over time.

My investigation will test the hypothesis that ‘dwelling in difference’ leads to deeper epistemologies of self and place as transnational writers negotiate multiple identifications with place and with place-specific practices over time. To this end, I draw on Papayanis’s study of expatriate writing, which argues that expatriation is a life project with both aesthetic and ethical dimensions, one which combines “a variety of discursive and life strategies” in seeking to answer the question “how should I live?” (2005: 1). Papayanis understands the act of voluntary migration as arising from “constellations of motivations, desires, and responses in which expatriation, as an ethical practice, is a significant mode of apprehending some important life good” (2005: 1). The ‘ex-centric’ expatriate writers she investigates all rejected life within the

confines of modern industrial society in pursuit of ‘the good life’ in marginalised or colonised domains elsewhere.³ Whilst she agrees with postcolonial critics’ questioning of the claims made by such privileged writers whose relocation is voluntary and whose aesthetic work can be imbricated with an Orientalist discourse of alterity, she also contends that the desire to “de-centre” oneself is not “inevitably dishonourable” and the ethical dimension of the expatriate story deserves careful critical analysis (2005:2).

Papayanis’s historicised reading of modern expatriation as a migratory phenomenon linked to a profound disenchantment with the Great War and with Western capitalist expansion in the early-twentieth century helps shed light on the ethical life projects of late-twentieth century transnationals who relocate for lifestyle motives associated with the quest for a better quality of life. This latter form of displacement unfolds in an era of mass migration made possible by modernity, and the contemporary accounts of relocation reveal both continuities and discontinuities with their modernist literary antecedents, as will be explored below. Chapter One of my thesis lays out the conceptual framework for my argument: first, analysing *what* relocation narratives are and situating them on a literary timeline; next, identifying *who* the contemporary transnationals are that relocate to Italy and their motives for migrating; then contextualising *where* and *when* this pattern of mobility unfolds; analysing *how* their experiences are reconstructed formally and stylistically in nonfiction texts; concluding with a consideration of *why* relocation writing is culturally significant and deserves more scholarly attention.

Since the definitional meanings of ‘expatriate’, ‘transnational’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ often overlap in the discourse of travel and mobility studies, a clarification of the conceptual vocabulary that shapes my investigation is helpful at this stage. I use the term ‘transnational’ rather than ‘expatriate’ since the latter term implies a binary relationship between home country and host country in which displacement is generally construed as temporary and resolved through repatriation.⁴ By maintaining the distinction between ‘home’ and ‘away’, this dialectical conceptualisation fails to capture the complexity and contingency of contemporary mobilities, or to account for the multiple senses of belonging to a foreign place experienced by

³ Papayanis examines works by D.H. Lawrence, Lawrence Durrell and Paul Bowles, as well as contemporary narratives by Don DeLillo and Michael Ondaatje, which she reads as ‘post’ modern responses to, or revisions of, the earlier discourse of expatriation.

⁴ Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expatriate> indicates that the term, deriving from the Latin ‘ex’ (out of) and ‘patria’ (fatherland), commonly refers to a mobile class of professionals or skilled workers sent abroad by their companies for set periods during which they receive favourable tax treatment by their host countries before returning to their home countries.

contemporary migrants. ‘Transnationalism’ is a more helpful term as it points to the current web of trans-border relations which connect individuals, ideas, interests, goods and services in today’s globalised world, a world in which one’s connection to place is often open and hybrid, resulting from interconnecting flows rather than fixed, territorially-bounded affiliations.

In the 1990s, geographers and social theorists pointed to a re-conceptualisation of ‘place’ arising from the processes of globalisation and time-space compression.⁵ Massey (1994) signals how ‘place’ no longer can be conceived as a refuge from the hubbub of dislocation and fragmentation associated with globalising processes, or as an unproblematic source of identity; it must, instead, be understood as a complex and dynamic interplay of people and their environment: ‘place’ as an open process of intermingling and exchange rather than a closed, bounded site. Held (1995: 103) signals that the more people engage in border-crossing activities and transnational social networks, the more likely they are to adopt ‘cosmopolitan attitudes’ which he defines as “a willingness to engage with the other” and “an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences”. Whilst lifestyle migrants in Italy are globetrotters with a cosmopolitan outlook, their desire for a rural escape and more natural lifestyle is rooted in place and in place-specific practices. This tension between localising and globalising tendencies underlying notions of ‘place’ is one which frames my investigation into the challenges which postmodern mobilities pose to a modern notion of place as a material centre of meaning connected to a rooted and unified sense of identity.

Clearly, Italy presents a powerful lens through which contemporary transnational writers explore a complex sense of place, one which incorporates notions of fixity and of flux deriving, respectively, from modern and postmodern traditions. In the trilogies examined, ‘Italy’ functions as both a thing in the world that can be known through regular and sustained contact (ontology) and as a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world (epistemology). The sense of place developed by Mayes, Hawes and Parks over decades of transnational residency and displayed across their respective trilogies reveals an evolving understanding of Italy on both these scales. Whilst these transplanted metropolitans are initially drawn to rural Italy by qualitative aspects of place – quality of life attributes associated with beauty, security, and authenticity – which seem insulated from or not yet (fully) eroded by the forces of globalisation, their long-term residency gradually reveals that the ‘local’ is inescapably inscribed by the ‘global’. The bucolic idyll of Italy which lures them there in the first place is gradually revealed

⁵ See, for example, Barnes and Gregory (1997); Bird et al. (1993); Harvey (1996); Massey (1994).

as a construct, one which is actually apparent upon considering the very presence of these transnational writers in rural Italy and the forces of globalisation it involves.

By examining the process of resettlement which their memoirs reconstruct – what I call the ‘arc of accommodation’ of relocation writing – I will show that through deep immersion and sustained interaction in global-local spaces, transnationals develop multiple identifications and loyalties which transcend national parameters as well as other self/other delimitations. By attempting to give shape to the transplanted self, the self unmoored then resettled in foreign soil, their autobiographical accounts describe a contingent state of being, one in constant flux; this state of ‘becoming’ reveals the self continuously interrogating itself through negotiation with cultural others. Bauman (1993) maintains that the conditions of modernity and postmodernity necessitate a constant negotiation among subjects and others given the routine ways in which people and practices fluidly intermingle in multiple constellations of place and time in the present age. These relocation trilogies offer a window on the dynamic interplay of contemporary intercultural relations, revealing how transnationals engage with locals in diverse ways – meeting, conflicting, or weaving together – through their representations of dialogical encounters in global-local spaces.

As such, relocation accounts are arrival stories with a twist: they do not ‘arrive’ at a fixed destination in any conventional sense. The relocated selves are always evolving, the settling-in process always unfolding (even after decades of foreign residency), and the moment of final integration always incomplete since accommodation to life in Italy unfolds as a lifelong project. My investigation shows that through sustained foreign residency and long-term engagement with cultural differences, contemporary transnational writers develop a dialogical imagination – what Robbins calls “a density of overlapping allegiances” (1999:250) emerging from the everyday experience of dwelling in difference over time – which enables them to imagine ‘difference’ differently and to render ethical representations of lives ‘(Re)Made in Italy’. Through a close reading of the different critical registers, metaphors, and tropes that run across their respective trilogies, my study seeks to understand the politics and poetics of otherness inscribed in relocation writing by reading these texts within a broader context of the discourse of displacement.⁶

⁶ Caren Kaplan’s investigation of the politics of travel discourse (1996) considers various historicized forms of displacement – nomadism, exile, expatriation, migrancy – and their attendant formal and rhetorical features. However, she does not address transnational relocation as a distinct form of mobility nor consider how the *topos* of everyday life among the locals, a characteristic of relocation writing, expresses a different kind of cultural engagement with ‘otherness’, one which moves away from colonialist/neo-colonialist forms.

After presenting the conceptual framework in the first chapter, Chapter Two of my thesis revisits key features of relocation writing through a close reading of Frances Mayes's Tuscan trilogy, tracing the rhetorical evolution in her depictions of Italy and Italians as she accommodates to life in Cortona over twenty years. Central to Mayes's sense of place is how she reconstructs Italianness through everyday material culture in her new environment: she 'becomes Italian', at first, brick-by-brick as she undertakes to renovate and decorate a three-century old Tuscan farmhouse, then bite-by-bite as she turns her hand toward the culinary challenge of mastering Tuscan cuisine. I will explore the extent to which Mayes's engagement with cultural difference is a performance of Italian authenticity: a superficial process of social distinction linked to lifestyle practices and accoutrements more than a deep-seated and transformative process of identity reformation.

Chapter Three focuses on Annie Hawes's Ligurian texts and the richly textured story landscape she creates through a layering of realistic details drawn from her immersion in everyday life over the fifteen-year arc of her memoirs. I will analyse Hawes's development of an intercultural competence as her sensibility evolves and accrues insight; over time, she is better able to interpret cultural differences for her global readers by situating these particulars within increasingly nuanced contexts on local, regional, and national scales. Moreover, her dialogical depictions of locals avoid an idealising impulse to portray Italy as a romantic idyll and Italians as exemplars of an aestheticised way of life by, instead, revealing their multiplicity and heterogeneity. While aesthetic representation works to distance readers from human reality, the telling minutiae of Hawes's depictions collapse such distance, forcing readers to confront the complex workings of Italian social reality in its plurality and its particularity.

Chapter Four examines Tim Parks's trilogy set in Verona and his seemingly uncomplicated and unrehearsed portrayals of Italians rendered in affable accounts with a humorous tone. At first glance, these easy, light-hearted depictions belie Parks's sophisticated style of social commentary: his layered insight into the country's complex nature is revealed through the ambiguous details of place which he presents with a mixture of irony, ambivalence, and affection. His accumulation of impressions about Italy's internal workings gathered through a process of deep immersion over three decades of foreign residency creates a composite portrait that resists easy essentialisms about national character. Presenting episodes of everyday life through a layering of details, his sketches are complex and he continually recalibrates his own

cultural impressions based on new experiences and awareness, as well as on his own shifting identifications and hybrid sense of self.

Finally, the Conclusion seeks to draw together observations on the three sets of trilogies to demonstrate how relocation accounts offer a potential for ethical cultural representations through dialogical depictions of difference. This narrative dialogism is rooted in the evolving standpoints of transnational writers as insiders and outsiders who simultaneously participate in and record everyday life elsewhere, and in the heterogeneous portraits of Italians which their narratives paint. Bakhtin's concept of formal "dialogism", elaborated in the long essay "Discourse and the Novel" included in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), applies to the genre of travel writing which, like the novel, emerged in diversity and continues to criss-cross generic boundaries as it evolves. Relocation narratives offer a striking example of travel writing's generically constitutive heterogeneity, manifesting its hallmark hybridity through the explicit tension between movement and settlement – dislocation and location; flux and fixity; globalism and localism – which defines both its form and its content.

In all three trilogies studied, relocation to Italy is a defining act for the authors, shaping not only their personal histories but their writing as well: their Italian memoirs present an exploration of the relational arts of the self through the experience of displacement. As such, these autobiographies contribute to diasporic literature's exploration of selves uprooted (in this case voluntarily) and transplanted in foreign soil: never fully belonging to one place, neither the one they have left, nor the one they have arrived to, migrants form complex social, cultural and affective bonds with multiple places and develop a plural sense of 'home'. The term 'diaspora' captures this sense of liminality, of living on the threshold between two fixed places or stages, never fully occupying one or the other. This liminal state of being aptly describes the relocation experience of transnationals who are simultaneously insiders and outsiders in Italy; their sense of Italian social reality is fundamentally plural and their narrative reconstructions reflect this plurality.⁷

⁷ See Prof. Khachig Tölölyan of Wesleyan University in conversation with Prof. Robin Cohen of Oxford University: <http://vimeo.com/25020401>. Tölölyan here describes 'diaspora' as a flexible and productive term, more textured and nuanced than 'multiculturalism', which goes beyond simple foreign policy objectives. He claims the term diaspora has been appropriated by governments seeking to reduce complexities of interconnectedness in order to encourage lobbying and fundraising for 'the homeland'. Tölölyan advocates using the concept of diaspora to think critically about complex mobilities, uncertainties, and attachments in the present age.

CHAPTER 1 –

Relocation Narratives ‘Made in Italy’

Introduction

This chapter lays out the conceptual framework of the argument, drawing on the literature of travel to situate relocation narratives on a timeline of recent writing that investigates the subjective shaping of the self through experiences of travelling and dwelling in foreign place. The concept of ‘lifestyle migration’ within sociological studies on mobility and migration, as well as concepts deriving from social theory and tourism studies, are then examined in order to contextualise the motivations for this narrative production. Next, the ‘Made in Italy’ dimension of these texts is unpacked to demonstrate how Arcadian ideals inform the construction of Italy as a rural idyll in relocation accounts. Lastly, an examination of the authors’ migrating sensibilities across their trilogies reveals a tension between colonial and cosmopolitan orientations in how relocation accounts are told, pointing to narrative dialogism as a key to cultural representation which respects differences.

1.1 Relocation narratives

Relocation writing achieved mass diffusion in the 1990s, with the success of bestsellers like Peter Mayle’s *A Year in Provence*⁸ helping to stretch the literary genre of travel memoir in a new direction by presenting the ‘exotic every day’ through the mundane experiences of travellers who become settlers in new homelands. Their stories follow a familiar trajectory: there is a house to restore, DIY skills to hone, a new language to learn, fascinating locals and local customs to decipher, and local delicacies to consume. George and Sattin have noted the common narrative thread running through ‘home-abroad stories’: falling in love with a foreign place and imagining the possibility of a new life there; making that dream a reality by moving there and settling down, often involving the transformation of a run-down farmhouse into a home; dealing with locals (builders, neighbours) and the language barrier; adapting to the new environment and its internal changes over time (2002: ix-x). Although relocation stories are set in diverse locales and depict residential stays ranging from sojourn to settlement, they share a common impulse or motivation: the search for something intangible which is loosely captured

⁸ Peter Mayle’s *A Year in Provence* (1991) is regarded as the forerunner of this subgenre and is the first of a trilogy of Provence books describing the slow life in Lubéron, followed by *Toujours Provence* (1992) and *Encore Provence* (1999). He subsequently published *French Lessons* (2001) and *Provence A-Z* (2006) plus various novels set in France.

in the phrase ‘quality of life’.⁹

Situated on the generic cusp between travel writing and life writing, relocation narratives deploy a dual focus that appeals to readers’ touristic and voyeuristic tastes: first, a focus on place which looks outward on exotic landscapes accessible through travel and tourism; second, a focus on self which looks inward on the private lives and personal transformations of travellers who become settlers in adopted homelands. This hybrid focus is not only a key to their popular appeal, but also to their literary significance. Relocation narratives rework generic conventions on two fronts: those of ‘memoir’ and those of ‘travel writing’. Whilst memoirs generally presume the stability of the self – its unity, its knowability and scrutability – through a narrative reconstruction of chronological episodes in an individual’s life which offer an index of coherent subjectivity, travel memoirs problematise this unified representation by recognising the mutability of the self through the experience of travel. Contemporary travel displaces modern categories of identification (including national identity) as postmodern identifications lead to a process of identity (re)formation through encounters with cultural difference.

Furthermore, by tracing unconventional journeys, journeys less concerned with material movement and more with the movement into ever-deepening spheres of belonging acquired through a process of settling in a foreign place, relocation narratives also rework travel writing tropes related to *movement* including ‘escape’, ‘quest’, and ‘return’.¹⁰ They typically begin as ‘great escape’ narratives which describe fleeing from the frenzy of modern life to places that hold out the promise of a better quality of life, often places in the sun and/or the countryside, and of finding personal fulfilment by living along simpler lines, closer to nature and in convivial communities. This pastoral flight from the complications and corruptions of ordinary life into a green world that offers refuge and reconciliation is a literary trope with a long tradition of antecedents, as shall be examined below. Contemporary relocation writing re-enacts the Romantic rejection of the modern and pursuit of primitivism and organicism through a flight from the city to the countryside in search of the good life, defined as a ‘simple’ life, and a nostalgic revaluing of the past and of traditional practices.

Fuelled by a holidaymaker’s dream of escaping dreary workaday life in London in search of

⁹ To date, there has been no systematic study of relocation writing which examines its contexts of production and reception. More analysis into its history, socio-economic conditions, rhetorical features, and diverse regional settings is needed.

¹⁰ An overview of travel archetypes and tropes in literature is provided by Jennifer Laing and Warwick Frost (2012).

sundrenched Mediterranean views and bronzed suitors, Annie Hawes recounts how she embarks on a working holiday in Liguria in the mid-1980s, falls in love first with a tumbledown stone farmhouse which she buys and restores, then falls in love with the *ragazzo* next-door. She documents her relocation experiences in a trilogy of texts which span two decades, charting both her personal transformation and the external socio-economic changes in the area over this period.¹¹ Similarly, Frances Mayes's sojourn begins with an escape to the Italian countryside, seeking refuge from professional pressures in California and a fresh start following a midlife divorce. On a trip to Tuscany, she falls in love with *Bramasole*, a three-hundred-year-old stone villa (whose name means 'to yearn for the sun') near Cortona, which she acquires in 1990, gradually restores, and lives in first as a holiday home then as a permanent residence.¹² Tim Parks is also drawn to Italy by its sensuous charms, its frescoed Renaissance piazzas, and the promise of 'downshifting' to a slower lifestyle. With his Italian wife, he moves to a provincial town near Verona in 1981 then produces a trilogy of texts detailing his process of becoming 'at home' in Italy over the next twenty years.¹³ In all three cases, Italy is posited at the outset of their journeys as a refuge from the anxieties and influences of postmodern life, as an uncontaminated space where individual lives can be remade along simpler lines.

The trilogy is a particularly apt narrative format for capturing the 'journey' motif, which manifests itself in these texts less as a physical journey and more as an existential journey of personal transformation. At the outset of her Tuscan trilogy, Mayes claims that the idea of living in Italy was about imagining "a different life, the chance to be extant in another version" (*UTS*, 28). Twenty years on, she reflects: "At the moment I turned the heavy iron key in the door and stepped into my Italian life, I could not have pictured myself here two decades later, could not have foreseen the pleasure, complexity, hassle, frustration, joy, or my intense love for *Bramasole*, a place-in-time that took over my life" (*EDT*, 1). Although Mayes's move from California to Cortona, Hawes's move from London to Liguria, and Parks's relocation from London to Verona are about spatial mobility, their trilogies are primarily concerned with detailing the experience of existential displacement as they learn "to be extant in another version" by forging new identities and finding a place within a new scheme of things.

¹¹ Hawes's Ligurian trilogy comprises: *Extra Virgin* (*EV*, 2001); *Ripe for the Picking* (*RFP*, 2003); *Journey to the South* (*JTS*, 2005). The first two texts offer reflections on the economic transformations in Liguria in the 1990s whilst the final text charts her visit to Calabria and broader reflections on Italy's north-south internal divisions. All subsequent citations refer to these editions, with titles given in abbreviated form.

¹² Mayes's Tuscan trilogy comprises *Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy* (*UTS*, 1996), *Bella Tuscany: The Sweet Life in Italy* (*BT*, 1999), and *Every Day in Tuscany: Seasons of an Italian Life* (*EDT*, 2010). All subsequent citations refer to these editions, with titles given in abbreviated form.

¹³ Parks's memoirs on Italy include: *Italian Neighbours* (*IN*, 2001), *An Italian Education* (*IE*, 2000), *A Season with Verona* (*SWV*, 2003). All subsequent citations refer to these editions, with titles given in abbreviated form.

The overarching theme of relocation writing – the construction of self in a foreign place over time through encounters with locals and with local, place-specific practices – follows a ‘quest’ pattern. Youngs (2013: 88) outlines the quest motif in literature: “The protagonist embarks on a mission, encounters impediments, removes them (more often than not), attains his or her goal and sets out on the return voyage, having increased his or her (usually his) own worth through the successful completion of the objective (unless the nature of the quest precludes return)”. In relocation narratives, the quest is prompted by a search for a better quality of life, leading travellers away from metropolitan centres in their home countries, often to the countryside and traditional communities in host countries. The sociological context in which this pattern of ‘lifestyle migration’ unfolds will be analysed in the section that follows. Suffice it to say here that relocation narratives reflect a widespread interest in lifestyle makeovers that emerged at a specific historical juncture, the dawn of the twenty-first century.

The millennial urge to escape to the countryside, slow down and re-connect with life’s natural rhythms is part of a contemporary ‘slow living’ philosophy that embraces personal, community and environmental well-being as goals.¹⁴ Wendy Parkins notes that *la vita lenta* is presented as an alternative to the “speed and anomie of global postmodern culture” with simplicity, tranquillity, sustainability, conviviality and authenticity in the practices of everyday life as core values (2004: 259). Mayes, Hawes and Parks reveal, however, that settling into the ‘slow life’ is itself a slow process, and that living a ‘simple life’ in Italy is anything but simple. Predictably, settlement in an adopted homeland is not a seamless process: the impediments that migrants encounter and negotiate provide a dramatic story frame to their relocation narratives. Their deep immersion in the Italian every day involves a series of social and cultural collisions arising from relations and perceptions forged in both inter-subjective and intra-subjective contexts. The best accounts offer a ‘thick description’ of these encounters through a dialogical understanding of how self and place interact in sustained foreign residency.¹⁵

Hulme (2002) points to Peter Robb as an exemplar of ‘deep immersion’ whose richly textured

¹⁴ The term ‘slow living’ derives from the Slow Food movement which originated in Italy with Carlo Petrini in 1986 as a response to ‘fast food’ culture. Slow Food is against the globalisation of agricultural products and works for the preservation of traditional and regional cuisine by encouraging local farming practices, sustainable food production and the promotion of small local businesses. ‘Slow living’ extends the ‘slow’ philosophy beyond food to all aspects of daily life with sustainability as its core value.

¹⁵ The anthropologist Clifford Geertz coined the term in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) to indicate an ethnographic approach wherein human behaviour is described in specific contexts and thus more accessible to non-experts.

Midnight in Sicily (1996) offers such a depth of detail in evoking a sense of place that it is “travel writing as cultural history.”¹⁶ As the following excerpt from Robb illustrates, one who actually resides in Italy, rather than just passing through on holiday, can, over time, gain a deeper understanding of place and its layers of meaning:

A road sign woke me from my daze. A black on yellow notice, as we curved over the shoulder of the hill, announced Montelepre. Montelepre had been the home of the bandit Giuliano. The hills of western Sicily, the wild and remote interior, were just above Palermo. Half an hour’s drive from the city centre. Dario remarked, pulling up his *kefiah* and lighting a cigarette, the roads were worse in those days, and bandits harder to chase, but the nearness lent a new weight to that judge’s sardonic words about the bandits being inaccessible *only to the police*. We passed the grim closed town huddled on the hill and spun downhill through the land that was looking green again. (*MIS*, 59)

Here, Robb paints the portrait of a place both materially and morally bereft, hinting at the dark motive for this through a layering of details: the town of Montelepre, a mafia stronghold, is wild, remote, and barren, abandoned even by the police. Though the passage portrays a particular landscape, Robb hardly offers a touristic snapshot of a foreign locale; instead, he presents a ‘situated reading’ of place which resonates with cultural history.

To date, no secondary literature has addressed the type of deep engagement with Italy expressed by transnationals like Robb who reside there and can offer nuanced interpretations of place. In the case of Mayes and Parks, only the first books in their popular series received critical attention, neglecting to consider these first memoirs as stories of initiation which unfold across trilogies whose multipart format reveals evolving sensibilities and rhetorical forms.¹⁷ Relocation accounts are, in fact, stories with a long finish. They map out an arc of accommodation as authors move through various acculturation phases that characterise their process of becoming ‘at home’ in Italy: first, a *confrontation* with place that focuses on cultural difference and novelty; second, a *negotiation* with place that juxtaposes contrasting cultural paradigms; third, an *accommodation* with place that involves deep and sustained engagement in local community over time.¹⁸ These phases should be understood as cyclical, not linear: as new situations arise,

¹⁶ Hulme (2002: 98). I will show that Tim Parks is on par with Robb in producing accounts of the Italian every day that serve as cultural history.

¹⁷ On Mayes, see for example Alù (2010), Folks (2004), Parkins (2004), Ross (2009), Russo Bullaro (2005); one significant exception is Saggini (2005) who analyses Mayes’s first two memoirs. Secondary literature on Hawes and Parks is scarce, tending towards journalistic reviews rather than academic articles. This lack of scholarly attention, partly due to the popular reception of these texts, is a gap my research seeks to fill.

¹⁸ I am drawing here on Edward C. Knox’s use of the term “literature of accommodation” in his study of 20th-century nonfiction by American writers in France who tell the story of their quest to prove themselves worthy or suitable in their new cultural contexts. Knox uses the term “accommodation” instead of adaptation or integration to draw attention

patterns of confrontation and negotiation repeat themselves. Consequently, relocation stories do not describe a teleological progression towards integration, but rather a cyclical process of accommodation.¹⁹ There is no moment of definitive arrival or complete integration in the adopted homeland, nor do these texts reproduce the archetypal pattern of ‘return’ to the original home and re-integration in society there. For expats, identity-making, like home-making, remains a work in progress.

Fig. 1



This indeterminate and hybrid position gives transnationals a unique perspective on cultural difference. Who better to convey how it feels to inhabit a foreign place – the strangeness, exhilaration, fear, and friction – than one who has deliberately relocated there, who is not quite a local but is more than a tourist? Occupying a liminal space somewhere between insider and outsider status, transnationals are ideally situated to render a layered and textured account of place viewed through a field of shifting identifications. Indeed, through their experience of “dwelling-in-travelling”,²⁰ Hawes, Parks and Mayes are ideally situated to produce nuanced readings of Italy that focus on aspects of quotidian life ranging from food to football – what Tomlinson (1999: 7) has called “the fine grain of everyday cultural practices defined by locality”. Expatriation, which involves a decisive commitment to another place, is not new nor is Italy a particularly new destination for expats. What *is* new is the emergence in the late-twentieth century of a different kind of expatriate with a different travel story to tell. To

to the “nuances of congruence and reconciliation, of allowances made and recognition of a new norm to which to adhere” (2003: 95).

¹⁹ Cultural adaptation or integration has been widely studied by psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists with many conceptual models and strategies of adaptation proposed; this thesis does not purport to draw on that vast body of literature. The three phases of accommodation I have identified reflect my own descriptive labels for a process of acculturation I see unfolding in the narrative trilogies under consideration. My thinking has, in a general way, been influenced by Eric Kramer’s (1997) theory of Dimensional Accrual and Dissociation (DAD) which examines the communication styles of various cultures to explain differences that influence intercultural and inter-ethnic relations as well as individual and group acculturation processes. The DAD theory does not presuppose a linear metaphysic of “progress” which is presumed in some theories of acculturation wherein intercultural adaptation moves in an “upward-forward” manner toward total and final assimilation.

²⁰ James Clifford (1992) analyses the dynamics of “travelling-in-dwelling” and “dwelling-in-travelling” in global cosmopolitanism.

understand the conditions for the emergence of relocation narratives at the dawn of this millennium, a brief historical survey is helpful here.

The word “expatriate” (*ex patria*) denotes one who has left his homeland either temporarily or permanently for another place of residence whilst “cosmopolitan” (*cosmo polis*) signifies one who is a citizen of the world and generally fits in everywhere, yet their meanings often overlap when talking about an élite class of travellers with mobility, money, and education which has enjoyed the Western cultural legacy from a position of privilege over the past five-hundred years. These terms conjure several distinct images of travellers on a historical continuum: young nobles and the wealthy gentry of Britain and the Continent on extended Grand Tours through Europe’s cultural capitals in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; British colonial officials in India, Africa and other outposts of Empire in the modern period of European imperialism; nineteenth-century Romantics fleeing industrial cities for the Alps and for the Mediterranean region; English interwar writers escaping to the Continent in the wake of post-WWI disillusionment; American modernist artists and writers living bohemian lifestyles in Europe’s fashionable cultural centres in the 1920s; contemporary professionals working in foreign capitals on contract for multinational businesses; contemporary lifestyle migrants in search of a new Arcadia in rural outposts at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Despite significant differences in time, place, occupation, and motivation, Western expatriates have always been an élite group of cosmopolitans who *choose* to live elsewhere – motivated by the attractions of a different culture and way of life – and who can return home if and when they so desire.²¹

Travelling in pursuit of knowledge was a new paradigm that entered travel literature in the eighteenth century, the age of reason and science. Philosophical debates about human nature and the role of civilisation led to a questioning of European culture and a desire to weigh its accomplishments and legitimacy. The Grand Tour evolved as a form of cultural pilgrimage for young aristocrats to visit the shrines of Europe’s classical past, often in the company of tutors who acted as both guides and guards. Whitfield notes that, in addition to taking in classical architecture and sculpture, the young élite were also expected to absorb “the culture and manners of continental Europe”, thereby acquiring “social style and intellectual perspective” (2011: 155). He describes their journeys as following “predetermined and conventionalised”

²¹ Bruce Robbins (1992) notes that contemporary cosmopolitans lay claim to being ‘citizens of the world’ by virtue of “independent means, high-tech tastes and globe-trotting mobility” (171), and generally belong to transnational occupational cultures which give them the *choice* to live abroad and return home if/when it suits them (177).

routes, destinations, sights and experiences (2011: 154), noting that although France, Germany, and the Netherlands were on the itinerary of the Tour, Italy was its main goal:

The aim of the Grand Tour was to expose the insular Englishman to the seeds and fruits of European culture at its highest development, in the lands where it had its birth in the classical era. Greece had long been in decay and, under Turkish control, was regarded as unfriendly, if not completely inaccessible. Italy, however, was the ideal destination for the educated and enquiring tourist, with its classical past and its Renaissance splendours. (2011: 126)

Exposure to great works of art and architecture was considered enriching and edifying for both human intellect and moral character; it helped spread culture and so advance the general progress of Western civilisation.

Another aspect of the education provided by the Grand Tour was a reinforcement of the traveller's own identity, in this case his Englishness, and sense of superiority over cultural 'others'. In fact, strong stereotyped images of European countries emerged in Tour accounts, as Whitfield notes: "the effeminate French; the sturdy peasant Swiss; the avaricious Dutch; the lazy, decadent Italians; the cold, militaristic Germans" (2011: 179). Although travellers worshipped Italy's classical past, many clearly disparaged the country they were visiting, an ambivalence which is conveyed in the numerous letters and journals circulated at that time, as well as in the published accounts of the Grand Tour.²² Reflecting on the contrast between Italy's classical golden age and its contemporary degradation provided scope for writers to outline differing habits of culture and national character for their readers, thus reinforcing stereotypes of 'Others' whilst confirming the avowed superiority of England and the English.

This tension in Anglo representations of cultural difference is further palpable in nineteenth-century travelogues which veered between the poles of poetic praise for continental Europe's glorious cultural heritage and harsh criticism for its modern decay. Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the most celebrated text from this period, is an epic poem which recreates his journey to Portugal, Spain, Greece and Albania (1810-11), then to France and Italy (1816-18) following the Napoleonic wars. An account highly praised by critics for its innovative, even unprecedented, style – the figure of the Byronic hero as rebel and outcast seeking self-

²² Whitfield (2011: 155-58) examines how the conventions of later Grand Tour narratives were influenced by pioneering accounts of the Tour, notably by: Thomas Gray's *Letters of Thomas Gray* (1925); Horace Walpole's *The Letters of Horace Walpole* (1903-18); Richard Lassels's *The Voyage of Italy* (1670); Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) and *A Letter from Italy* (1709).

understanding through travel is given birth here and shaped through the poet's dramatic and emotional language – its content closely mirrored that of conventional travelogues by offering reflections on the culture and history of foreign locales, replete with local details.²³ Byron's cultural meditations reveal both the centrality of classical learning to the nineteenth-century mind and a deep lament at finding Greece, the home of classical beauty and knowledge, under Muslim rule, causing him to reflect on the violence and transience of human history. Seeking a refuge from the corrupt world of men, Byron finds solace in the beauties of nature which also offer an arena for his passionate longing to live life more intensely; as Whitfield notes: "[*Childe Harold*] is archetypal romantic nature poetry, offering a paradigm for all future travel writers" (2011: 182).²⁴ Byron initiates the subjective turn in travel writing through his merging of the self with the landscape: the life of the mind and the life of the senses brought together through the trope of 'escape' to a green world which offers the promise of holistic living.

In the late-nineteenth century, Romantic interests gave way to commercial ones as the "habit of flux" was born: people began to move around with unprecedented ease with the advent of railway lines and steamships to assist colonial and trade expansion, leading to the development of a highly mobile class of cosmopolitan writers in the English-speaking world (Ford, 1983: 9). Mapping out the evolution of travel writing in the modern era, Carr (2002) notes that in the nineteenth century, travel writing was more manual than memoir whilst in the twentieth century these styles were inverted. She identifies three stages in the evolution of modern travel narratives: first (1880-1900), the realist instructive tale of heroic adventure produced by missionaries, explorers, scientists, ethnographers, colonial administrators and soldiers whose writing is overtly complicit with imperialist values; second (1900-1914), the emergence of a more subjective and impressionistic, less didactic style by modern expatriates whose texts "register a new consciousness of cultural heterogeneity, the condition and mark of the modern world"; third (1914-1940) the serious work of interwar poets and novelists which marked the development of travel writing as a more literary and autonomous genre (2002: 74).²⁵

After the social upheavals of the First World War, widespread disenchantment with the Western

²³ See Whitfield's analysis (2011: 181).

²⁴ Whitfield further notes that unlike the eighteenth-century cult of the sublime which presented staged scenes of natural beauty, nature as the picturesque – 'the roaring chasm', 'the fading gleam' – "Byron's merging of the self with the landscape, his heart-on-sleeve histrionics, are things of a different order, still rhetorical no doubt, but they have what the Gothic novelists lacked, namely passion" (2011: 184).

²⁵ In particular, Carr singles out two groups of early-twentieth century expatriates – writers and artists who adopted a foreign metropolis as home (Hemingway, Pound, Rhys, H.D. Barnes, Stein, Eliot, Joyce) – and those who went further afield, often to Britain's colonies (Conrad, Kipling, Stevenson, London, Maugham). She notes that in imaginative and nonfiction forms, both groups produced writing marked by a "consciousness of cultural heterogeneity" (2002: 74).

civilising mission reached a peak. Consequently, a shift occurs at this time in both imaginative and nonfiction narratives: the move from the detailed, realist text with a moral or didactic purpose to a more impressionistic style concerned with the writer's own consciousness and subjective responses to foreign place. The return of the Romantic hero, a rebel and outcast seeking communion with the classical past and with nature through travel, is present in D.H. Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy* (1916) and *Sea and Sardinia* (1921) as well as Norman Douglas's *Siren Land* (1911) and *Old Calabria* (1915), exemplars of the subjective shift in post-WWI travel narration. Looking out over Lake Garda, Lawrence writes: "I sat on the roof of the lemon-house, with the lake below and the snowy mountain opposite, and looked at the ruins on the old, olive-fuming shores, at all the peace of the ancient world still covered in sunshine, and the past seemed to me so lovely that one must look towards it, backwards, only backwards, where there is peace and beauty and no more dissonance."²⁶

This nostalgic longing for the ancient past, projected as a world of beauty and harmony immune from the dissonant march of history, is further evident in Lawrence's disenchantment with Western narratives of progress as he reflects:

Yet what should become of the world? There was London and the industrial counties spreading like a blackness over all the world, horrible, in the end destructive. And the Garda was so lovely under the sky of sunshine, it was intolerable. For away, beyond, beyond all the snowy Alps, with the iridescence of eternal ice above them, was this England, black and foul and dry, with her soul worn down, almost worn away. And England was conquering the world with her machines and her horrible destruction of natural life. She was conquering the whole world. (*Twilight in Italy*, 53)

In the early phase of his resettlement, as he immerses himself in the new world of southern Europe and settles into a new life at Lake Garda, Lawrence sings the praises of Italy with the ardour of a neophyte. Filled with Adamic wonder, he claims "it [Garda] was beautiful as paradise, as the first creation" (*TII*, 52) and pits its iridescent beauty against the blackened image of an England tarnished by war and industrialisation. Yet beneath such effusions is a lament for the decaying lemon groves of Garda, which bear witness to the twilight of a way of life centuries old, and the inexorable march of progress. It is only when he later travels south to Sardinia that Lawrence finds the spontaneity of a society as yet untouched by the effects of industrialisation.

²⁶ *Twilight in Italy* (1916: 53). All subsequent citations are to this edition and are presented with the abbreviated title, *TII*.

The movement towards greater subjective awareness in travel writing persisted during the interwar period, which Hulme and Youngs (2002) identify as the period in which travel memoir gained a new prestige from the standing of its authors, novelists and poets who were foremost *travelling* writers as well as *travel* writers. They note that as writers in the 1930s turned their focus simultaneously outward to the world of politics and inward to the world of the unconscious, the body of writing gained status as a serious genre, as “travel literature” (2002: 8). Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, George Orwell, W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice are interwar writers who brought a new seriousness to the genre, yet Hulme and Youngs note that their travel books “were still seen as adjuncts to and illuminations of the authors’ main craft of prose or poetry” (2002: 8).

After the Second World War, the advent of mass travel and tourism made previously isolated locations less remote and readers less dependent on travelogues as a way of accessing cultural difference, yet the popularity of the genre persisted. The post-war period saw the publication of Patrick Leigh Fermor’s *Mani* (1958) and *Roumeli* (1966) about his sojourns in Greece, and Lawrence Durrell’s *Prospero’s Cell* (1945) and *Bitter Lemons* (1957) about his time in Corfu and Cyprus respectively. The persistent tension between competing cultural norms and practices is evident in these works, which draw attention to the formal ambiguities of the genre in a more self-conscious way.²⁷ Although he deliberately avoided the typical colonial spaces where the British lived in Cyprus and sought to integrate himself into local life,²⁸ Durrell describes his compatriots with a mixture of irony and affection which reveals a profound ambivalence:

[They] were decent, civil folk who had been brought here not by any desire to broaden minds cumbered only by the problems of indolence and trade, but by a perfectly honourable passion for sunlight and low income tax. How sad it is that so many of our national characteristics are misinterpreted! Our timidity and lack of imagination seem to foreigners to be churlishness, our taciturnity the deepest misanthropy. But are these choking suburbanisms with which we seem infused when we are abroad any worse than the tireless dissimulation and insincerity of the Mediterranean way of life? (*Bitter Lemons*, 35).

By offering a sympathetic rendering of British expatriates and disparaging Cypriots for their “tireless dissimulation and insincerity”, Durrell falters in achieving a critical distance from

²⁷ Hulme and Youngs (2002) cite four post-WWII authors and texts at the fore of travel writing’s experimentation with form: Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonia* (1977); Paul Theroux’s *The Old Patagonian Express* (1979); Peter Matthiessen’s *The Snow Leopard* (1978); Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks* (1980).

²⁸ Papayanis notes that Durrell deliberately chose not to live with other expatriates and undertook the exhaustive restoration of a Turkish villa in a small relatively remote Greek village from which he was required to travel a great distance to get to work (2005: 61).

culturally-determined truths, reproducing, instead, the stereotype of Mediterranean dishonesty and cunning. Papayanis suggests that, paradoxically, “he seeks to be confirmed in his Englishness at the same time he seeks to distance himself from the Englishness of home by being, somehow, the Englishman who is more Greek than the Greeks!” (2005: 62-63).

This indeterminate and complex subjectivity is one aspect of the subjective turn in twentieth-century travel narration addressed by Whitfield (2011) who points to a “paradigm shift” in the past century as formal reasons for travel – science, exploration, religion, trade, politics, colonialism, anthropology – gave way to subjective explorations and self-discovery. Youngs (2013) maintains that self-exploration is not a modern innovation per se, signalling the pilgrim’s quest for self-knowledge through millennia as an indication of the long history of subjective quests. However, he claims that a focus on “the divided self” and on “self-interrogation” linked to developments in psychoanalysis, as well as Anglo-cultural “self-questioning” arising from the end of empire in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries led to a greater focus on individuation in travel writing (2013: 102-103).

In the second-half of the twentieth century, in particular, the focus shifted to spiritual, existential and subjective journeys, with writers seeking to “evoke what it truly *feels* like to be in a foreign environment, an alien culture or landscape” and how the experience of displacing oneself might also help to displace sedimented notions and “transform the accepted picture of the world we inhabit, and the sense of our own selfhood” (Whitfield, 2011: 243). As travel has become accessible to the masses, travel writing has developed as a more variegated genre with its authors deriving from a range of racial, ethnic, gender and class backgrounds. Contemporary travel writers often draw attention to diverse and multiple subjectivities as a central feature of their narratives, sometimes producing what Holland and Huggan (1998: 47) call “countertravel writing” which challenges racist and sexist hierarchies by destabilising fixed notions of self (white/male/Western) and other (non-white/non-Western) through performative identities.

Indeed, encounters with ‘others’ facilitated through travel and tourism afford opportunities for individuals to engage in the modern project of (re)forming personal identities.²⁹ Appiah (1994) and Hall/du Gay (1996) suggest that identities are dialogically constructed through difference, that is, one defines oneself based on the recognition of what one is *not* in relation to the other. The expression of dialogical subjectivities deriving from long-term residency abroad is apparent

²⁹ See Desforges (2000).

in Lawrence, in Durrell, and in the transnational trio of writers who follow in their footsteps and provide the focus of this thesis. Long-stay travellers and expatriates develop multiple and, at times, conflicting identifications which problematise self/other and foreigner/local conceptual divisions, resulting in identities that are dynamic, contested, and contextualised as opposed to essentialist or natural. Relocation narratives draw attention to the process through which selves are (re)constructed in places and in place-specific practices by recounting experiences of inter-subjective and intra-subjective transformations. The section below maps out *who* these contemporary travellers are that relocate to Italy and the aesthetic motivations behind their choice to build new lives abroad.

1.2 Lifestyle migrants in search of the good life

‘Lifestyle migration’ is the sociological term used to identify a privileged form of migration wherein people voluntarily relocate to foreign locales in search of a better quality of life.³⁰ Benson and O’Reilly (2009: 609) note that this form of mobility involves relatively affluent individuals of all ages relocating either temporarily or permanently, on a part-time or full-time basis, to countries and areas that offer the potential for an enhanced lifestyle, often to ‘places in the sun’ and/or rural locales with a better work-life balance, with greater opportunities for personal self-realisation, lower property prices and a more affordable cost of living. They are distinct from refugees, labour migrants (those who are pushed to leave home and seek work elsewhere from economic necessity) and from professional expatriates (those who voluntarily relocate to a new country for a work opportunity) in so far as the search for a better lifestyle is their primary motivation for voluntary migration.³¹ While it can be said that all migrants search to improve their quality of life, lifestyle migrants are more motivated by this ‘pull’ factor than by economic ‘push’ factors; the search for a better lifestyle (rather than economic imperative) is the primary impetus for their voluntary relocation.

Lifestyle migration to Italy in the 1980s and 1990s forms the context in which the nonfiction stories of relocation under investigation emerge. Benson and O’Reilly observe that lifestyle migration appears to be “a historical continuation of earlier mobilities including the Grand Tour, adventure travel, and voluntary, temporary, and ‘love’ migration” (2009a: 609) yet its actual dimensions remain under-conceptualised in contemporary migration literature. They suggest

³⁰ See O’Reilly (2007); Benson (2007); O’Reilly and Benson (2009).

³¹ O’Reilly notes that lifestyle migrants are often but not always “later-life migrants, and often partially or fully retired.” However, she adds, “Younger and working migrants are also moving but still the move is not motivated by the search for work – work is the means to an end” (2007:3).

that although this pattern of relocation is a growing sociological phenomenon which signals the importance of ‘lifestyle’ in the contemporary era, it is by nature difficult to define and delimit; consequently, it remains poorly understood as a phenomenon in its own right (2009a: 608).

Lifestyle migration cuts across groupings by age, gender, occupational status and geographical points of origin, and thus is generally not covered by standard migration typologies. Instead, it tends to associate itself to wider phenomena using umbrella concepts such as retirement migration, second-home ownership, intra-European migration, leisure or seasonal migration, and counter-urban migration which are neither wholly inclusive nor mutually exclusive of it. Benson and O’Reilly note that the category of lifestyle migrants is generally overlooked in studies on migration since a policy focus tends to exclude relatively affluent migrants who “do not fit the stereotypical idea of a migrant in the given destinations, do not compete for jobs, and tend not to be racialised as other immigrants” (2009a: 609). A predominantly culturally-oriented form of migration, lifestyle migration warrants further study because of its international scope as well as its economic and cultural impact on both ends of the migratory chain.

Lifestyle migrants tend to move from more economically-developed areas to less economically-developed areas where their financial capital can secure them a better standard of living. In Europe, the migratory flow generally follows a North-South and West-East axis: for example, from northern Europe to rural areas in southern France, Spain and Italy, or from Western Europe to Romania and Croatia.³² In addition to motives associated with a better cost of living, lifestyle-induced migration is also fuelled by the ‘lure of the local’³³: a counter-urban search for peace and security, community, green space and a simpler, less hurried lifestyle. O’Reilly (2007) observes that the counter-urban or anti-modern impulse of lifestyle migrants represents a new variation on the old migratory theme of the rural idyll, noting: “When once the countryside was marketed as offering a way of life, a refuge from modernity, as well as hearth and home, now increasingly distant lands are meant to provide the same meanings; they are being constructed in the same ways” (2007: 5). Today, rurality is actively sought as an antidote to urbanisation by middle-class migrants attracted by an “idyllic rural vision of a healthy, peaceful and natural way of life” (Little, 1987: 186).

³² O’Reilly (2007: 2) cites other non-intra-European migratory flows, such as North American second-home owners in Mexico and Costa Rica, Europeans in Marrakech, Europeans and North Americans in Australia and New Zealand, and Quebecers (snowbirds) in Florida, as further examples of the international dimension of the lifestyle migration phenomenon.

³³ Lippard (1997).

This rural retreat, motivated by a strong counter-urban impulse, which equates urbanisation with the erosion of ‘quality of life’, is a well-established subject of sociological study.³⁴ The movement of people away from urban centres and the frenzy of city life in the late-twentieth century is a reaction to the perceived loss of simplicity, social stability, personal security, privacy and well-being associated with rapid urbanisation. The desire for more security and tranquillity, a slower pace of life, greater leisure time, closer community ties, and more contact with nature through a retreat to the countryside signals that the quest for ‘the good life’ today is defined by the search for a rural idyll (O’Reilly 2007). The contemporary retreat to the countryside reverses the process of rural-urban migration that characterised Western industrialised societies in the nineteenth century, and is part of a broader restructuring of urban-rural relationships in the late-modern period (Swaffield and Fairweather 1998).

The recent fin-de-siècle revival of a rural idyll is a direct consequence of globalisation. In the late-twentieth century, budget airlines made intra-European travel more affordable and previously isolated locales more accessible; the rise of the affluent pensioner and the strength of US and UK currency exchange made Mediterranean sojourns more routinised; a boom in housing equity made second-home ownership overseas and retirement migration more accessible to the middle class.³⁵ As the world has become compressed through fluid mobilities and border-crossing cultures, the quest for the good life is unfolding along an ever-expanding horizon. The contemporary rural idyll is a renewed form of anti-modern primitivism in which a simpler, more authentic way of living is pursued through relocation to rural or semi-rural areas, at times beyond one’s own borders.³⁶

According to Benson and O’Reilly, the search for idyllic places today generally conforms to three typologies based on characteristics of the destinations sought: first, sun seekers who choose coastal resort areas like the Algarve in Portugal, the Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol in Spain, and ‘islands in the sun’ like Malta and Lanzarote; second, back-to-the-landers who move to the countryside in places like the Dordogne, the Lot, and Provence in France, or Tuscany and Umbria in Italy; third, bourgeois bohemians who seek out places like Deía, Mallorca, Goa,

³⁴ See, for example, Gustafson (2001); King et al. (2000); Swaffield and Fairweather (1998).

³⁵ Reporting in the *Guardian* (18/11/2006) Phillip Inman cites a November 2006 report by the accountancy firm, Grant Thornton, with Lombard Street Research, that found overseas home ownership by UK nationals had risen over 300% between 1995 and 2005, with 300,000 UK nationals (2% of the population) owning a property overseas, and the majority owning a ‘second home in the sun’ in Spain (35%), France (24%), and Italy (10%).

³⁶ Researchers for the Lifestyle Migration Hub (<http://www.uta.fi/yky/lifestylemigration/people.html>) analyse lifestyle migration and residential tourism development across the globe. They are currently examining the impact of the global recession triggered by the banking crisis in 2008 on these forms of mobility. See their working paper: <http://www.uta.fi/yky/lifestylemigration/papers/Financial%20Crisis.doc>

India, or Mykonos, Greece, which attract writers, artists and musicians because they support alternative lifestyles (2009a: 611-613). In all three cases a tension exists between reality and illusion: these locales may objectively conform to their corresponding typologies or may not; what is important is that they are *perceived* to and are, consequently, constructed as idyllic places which satisfy the personal preferences of those searching for a better quality of life.³⁷

Previous studies on lifestyle have largely emphasised its link to consumption, arguing that the search for a better life within contemporary society in the late-modern, late-capitalist period is primarily constructed through consumer choices which enable individuals to give concrete shape to their self-identities.³⁸ Lifestyle migration can be viewed as a form of self-expression related to a model of consumption wherein middle-class consumers satisfy their taste for the exotic, for what is different and novel, for what is ‘more authentic’ with a lifestyle makeover acquired through migration. O’Reilly states: “The search for a better quality of life, for utopia, the rural idyll, escape and the opportunity to start again are nothing new. However, tourism constructs these ideals in actual places, markets them and makes them possible as lifestyle choices” (2007: 6). Indeed, lifestyle migration is a clear example of what Williams and Hall (2002) call “tourism-informed mobility” since it unfolds within the context of tourism practices. O’Reilly suggests that what tourists would once have sought through a holiday abroad – escape from routine, a place in the sun, a taste of the exotic – is now available to affluent migrants as a way of life.³⁹

Relocating to a place that promises a better lifestyle is a means of expressing individual preferences and cultivating ‘distinction’ in Bourdieu’s (1984) sense of a social process in which people distinguish themselves from others through the exercise of particular ‘tastes’. This process of distinction through lifestyle choices is partly shaped by one’s belonging to what Bourdieu describes as “class habitus”, an embodied class-culture, in which lifestyles emerge as the result of particular material circumstances and class dispositions. The different aesthetic choices people make about how they live their lives are all ‘distinctions’ or choices made in

³⁷ Halliday and Coombes (1995) observe that the attributes and characteristics of places sought do not always coincide with what is intrinsic to the places themselves, but rather reflect the interpretations and meanings of place refracted through a range of media. Benson and O’Reilly note that the rural idyll, for example, is not limited to the countryside per se; instead, rurality “can be constructed, sought or created elsewhere.” (2009a: 615)

³⁸ See, for example, King *et al.* (2000); Williams and Hall (2002); Beck (2002); Bauman (2001); Giddens (1991); Featherstone (1991); Jameson (1983).

³⁹ O’Reilly (2007) explains that lifestyle migration is supported by tourism practices in several key ways: many moves abroad start off as holidays to destinations which tourists later return to as migrants; infrastructure developed for tourism subsequently supports second-home ownership and permanent resettlement; the flow of tourists to a given area provides entrepreneurial opportunities for new migrants in the delivery of goods and services to both tourists and migrants.

opposition to those made by others. Transnational relocation is a decisive choice; one through which middle-class migrants differentiate themselves from others – including tourists in their adopted homelands and compatriots back home – through a migratory process motivated by the search for an enhanced quality of life.

In an age of globalisation, middle-class tastes have turned away from mass-produced and globally marketed products towards a preference for what is local, artisanal, home-made, home-grown – in other words ‘particular’ – not generic the world over. ‘Authenticity’ has become associated with the particular and the local, with traditional practices and slow lifestyles. MacCannell defines the search for authenticity as a “desire to share in the real life of the places visited, or at least to see that life as it is really lived” (1999: 96). Fundamentally, this is a desire to experience a foreign locale not as a tourist does but as a local does. A taste for authentic products and the belief that more meaningful and authentic ways of living can be found in less developed locales are characteristics of lifestyle migration, a late-modern social movement toward naturalism in which middle-class travellers exercise distinction by deliberately choosing slow lifestyles. Relocation memoirs seek to represent the particularities of place by detailing everyday local practices through the autobiographical accounts of those who have deliberately chosen to migrate for lifestyle motives.

Although expatriates cultivate distinction by choosing to relocate abroad, the choice of migrating to a new country and building a new life there cannot be reduced to a mere act of consumption: tranquillity, security, community, and green space are not merely ‘goods’ which middle-class consumers seek on an ever-widening international market. Such a prescriptive reading reduces migrants and their motivations to market forces, viewing them as uncommitted agents with extensive freedom of choice but without reflexivity. While the *dolce vita* cinematic protagonists Rubino and Gambardella are exemplars of a touristic model of consumption – free-floating agents moving from one taste of the exotic to another in a constant search for ‘sweetness’ that is never satisfied – lifestyle migrants are, by contrast, highly reflexive and selective: they settle on a particular version of the sweet life and, consequently, resettle their lives in alignment with it. They constitute a unique subgroup of the modern bourgeoisie, seeking distinction through engagement with pre-modern practices associated with traditional ways of life: rural environments; manual labour; face-to-face interactions in close-knit communities; participation in seasonal and folkloric festivals.

Giddens argues that the lifestyle choices people make “give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity” which reflects who they are and who they want to be (1991: 81). The lifestyle migration project is about self-transformation and self-realisation through reflexive engagement in a global-local nexus of relationships. Although transnational relocation unfolds within the context of tourism performances, migrants’ self-identification as settlers not tourists suggests that their engagement with foreign locales is driven by more than just consumer forces. Central to this differentiation are migrants’ perceptions of what constitutes ‘an authentic life’ – integration in a traditional rural community wherein everyday interactions unfold on a human scale and close to nature – and their own efforts to search out places which seem to promise a better quality of life along those lines.⁴⁰ Whilst Urry (1990) posits that the quest for authenticity can only occur *outside* everyday living and working through leisure practices such as tourism, lifestyle migrants challenge this notion by seeking everyday authenticity through integration in real embodied communities and everyday local practices.⁴¹ Lifestyle-induced relocation is a deliberate search for a more authentic way of living, and migrants make the striving for everyday authenticity a defining feature of their resettlement experiences and the new identities they construct.

The narratives of self-identity which they fashion are narratives of self-transformation which are continually unfolding. Benson and O’Reilly note that lifestyle migration is not a single act but an ongoing process “intrinsic to the lifestyle trajectories of individuals, a part of their reflexive project of the self or the search for a potential self” (2009a: 615-616). They claim that “by encapsulating this form of migration within the term lifestyle, we shift the focus from the movement itself to the lifestyle choices inherent within the decision to migrate. [...] The initial migration therefore emerges as one point of the journey *en route* to a better way of life” (2009a: 615). This lifestyle-mobility model is not exclusively about consumption, about *getting* a new life through consumer choices, but about trying to *get at* authenticity through gradual accommodation to the structures of everyday life elsewhere. This explains why the ethnographic accounts of lifestyle migrants collected by sociologists and anthropologists indicate their engagement in a life-long search for authenticity and an ongoing process of self-

⁴⁰ In her ethnographic study of British residents in rural France, Benson (2013) notes the desire for authentic (rural) living underscoring their decision to migrate, with more nuanced understandings of authenticity developing through foreign residency. She reveals that migrants’ claims to the authentic are equally claims to distinctiveness, and should be read within the context of the continual processes of social distinction in which these migrants engage.

⁴¹ O’Reilly (2007) also notes that lifestyle migration challenges the dominant theoretical frameworks of the anthropology of tourism from the last 30 years since it breaks down many of the distinctions (leisure/work, home/away, every day/holiday) upon which its models rest.

transformation.⁴² It also explains why the stories which capture these migration experiences in narrative nonfiction form are predominantly multipart, often taking the form of a trilogy of travel memoirs which trace the unfolding process of cultural accommodation over time.

Lifestyle migrants seek to integrate in their adopted homelands by practicing the art of everyday living through place-based practices which are seen as ways of accessing authenticity.

1.3 Everyday life in Italy

For some transnational writers, like Frances Mayes, Italy is a second home, whilst for others like Tim Parks and Annie Hawes, it is their main address, pointing to transnationalism as a spectrum of mobilities encompassing sojourn and settlement.⁴³ Gustafon (2001) identifies three ideal-typical transnational lifestyles – translocal normality, multilocal adaptation, and routinised sojourning – with concomitantly different ideals of mobility, forms of place attachment and ways of managing cultural difference. Variations in time spent in Italy and degrees of immersion in local culture lead to rhetorical variations in how transnational writers represent cultural differences in their texts, as outlined in the section below and made explicit through close readings of Hawes, Mayes and Parks in the chapters that follow. Notwithstanding these distinctions, the precondition for relocation writing remains a deep immersion in place over time, a commitment to place which enables a representation of Italy as something more than incidental setting or picturesque backdrop to cosmopolitan stories of cultural accommodation.⁴⁴

In a world in which globalisation has created a levelling of difference and has spread a culture of sameness worldwide, place matters and local culture matters terribly. Tim Cresswell (2004: 8) notes that it is “commonplace in Western societies in the twenty-first century to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalization have eroded local cultures and produced homogenized global spaces.” A sense of place matters especially to any reading of Italy, a country whose dynamic internal geography has been the focus of study by social scientists who have examined its north/south, urban/rural, regional and local differences in an attempt to

⁴² For example, see Michaela Benson (2007) and (2013).

⁴³ In addition to the trilogies under investigation, a partial list of contemporary home-abroad narratives on Italy would include: Vida Adamoli's *La Bella Vita* (2001); Isabella Dunsin's *Vanilla Beans & Brodo* (2002) and *Bel Vino* (2004); Peter Chiarella's *Calabrian Tales* (2002); Harry Clifton's *On the Spine of Italy* (1999); Joan Marble's *Notes from an Italian Garden* (2001); Ferenc Maté's *The Hills of Tuscany* (1999); Axel Munthe's *The Story of San Michele* (2004); Eric Newby's *A Small Place in Italy* (1994); Elizabeth Romer's *The Tuscan Year* (1984).

⁴⁴ Contemporary stories which use Italy as a picturesque setting are also numerous. According to Giulia Ziino (2007), 274 books were published between 2000-2007 in which Italy was central to the setting or plot. These include works of fiction, such as John Grisham's *The Broker* and *Playing for Pizza*, Dan Brown's mega-bestsellers *The DaVinci Code* and *Angels and Demons*, with the spin-off of 'literary tourism' to the novels' dramatic settings, popular detective series by Donna Leon and Michael Dibdin, as well as works of nonfiction such as Robert Harris' *Pompeii*.

explain various phenomena, including its political culture, economic rebirth and civil society.⁴⁵ The well-known Italian *amore di campanile*, love for one's native town (literally for one's bell tower) signals the extent to which localism still prevails as a key determinant of social identity in Italy. This sense of *campanilismo*, of local pride and community identification, is part of the 'lure of the local' that draws people away from metropolitan centres to Italy's rural outposts.

Late-twentieth-century sojourners seek escape from the processes of commercialisation and administrative regulation which alienate them from life's natural rhythms and from genuine social relationships. Unlike their modernist precursors in the early-twentieth century who sought decadent sophistication and experimentation in Europe's fashionable cultural capitals, these late-twentieth century expatriates are explicitly drawn to traditional lifestyles in rural locales; these less-developed areas are perceived as utopian bulwarks against the homogenizing forces of globalisation which bring sameness and blandness with modernisation. Motivated by the desire for a simpler life, rural Italy figures in contemporary transnational writing as a new Arcadia where realising the dream of the 'good life' still seems possible in late modernity.

Commenting on how Arcadian ideals motivate people to migrate to the countryside, Swaffield and Fairweather (1998) note that perceptions about the attractions of rural life, notably its associated values of "wealth and security, beauty, peace and quiet", have remained consistent for two and a half millennia (1998: 121) and that these ideals "have long been important in western culture. They underpinned projects for colonial settlement and continue to be manifest today in urban perceptions of rural lifestyle throughout the English speaking world" (1998: 111). Swaffield and Fairweather identify a "rural sentiment" underpinning the desire for contemporary lifestyle properties; this counter-urban sentiment sees rural living through a nostalgic lens and associates various lifestyle advantages with the countryside, including: privacy and the opportunity for personal expression; picturesque settings and a natural environment; recreation opportunities; community life; and the opportunity to raise children in a safe and wholesome environment (1998: 112). They further observe that taken together "these elements constitute a structure of feeling described by Williams (1975) in his classic study *The Country and the City* as 'pastoral' and the environment thus created can perhaps best be described as Arcadian" (1998: 112).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See, for example, Banfield (1967), Ginsborg (1990), and Putnam (1994).

⁴⁶ Williams (1975) observes that the idealisation of the countryside as a symbol of a past golden age is a dominant theme in pastoral writing. This nostalgic longing for a 'golden age' also informs the contemporary rural sentiment in relocation writing.

It is worth pausing here to briefly unpack the terms ‘pastoral’ and ‘Arcadia’ in order to establish a context for the re-emergence of a rural sentiment in contemporary relocation accounts. The emergence of the ‘pastoral’ as a structured sentiment dates back to classical Greece with Theocritus whose *Bucolics* (3rd century BCE) are the first example of pastoral poetry celebrating the uncomplicated virtue of the shepherd’s rural life as distinct from the complexity and corruption of city life. This tradition passed from Greece to Rome and was further developed by Virgil in his *Eclogues* (37 BCE) which maintained the earlier theme of a rural retreat whilst transferring the setting from Sicily, Theocritus’s birthplace, to Arcadia in the Greek Peloponnese, which then became the symbol of a pastoral paradise.

Virgil’s pastoral poetry exerted a powerful influence on Renaissance poets such as Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, as well as on Spenser whose *Shepherd’s Calendar* (1579) brought about a vogue for the pastoral mode in England and influenced Sidney, Marlowe, Donne, Raleigh, and others. The pastoral theme was also taken up in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century drama by Lyly, Jonson, and most famously by Shakespeare in *As You Like It* (1623), and in English romance novels in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The pastoral mode reached its neoclassical apogee in the poetry of Herrick, Marvell and Milton in the seventeenth century, after which English Romantic poets and authors, including Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Clare, Hardy and Arnold, sometimes added realistic elements to the idyllic rustic scenes. The pastoral elegy is the only poetic mode to have thrived into the modern period though pastoral themes are present in much modern literature.

The pastoral pull of Italy is not new nor is the literary tradition of travelogues recounting sojourns in the *Bel Paese*. Setting out to record his Italian journey after a lifetime of longing, Goethe begins with the words, “*Et in Arcadia ego*”, ‘I too in Arcadia’, repeating a phrase from Virgil’s Fifth Eclogue. Parkins notes: “Italy has a long literary history of functioning as an idealized site outside modernity (for non-Italians) where the self can be rediscovered and refashioned” (2004: 258). Montaigne, Stendhal, Goethe, Byron, the Shelleys, the Brownings, Keats, Ruskin, Henry James, Edith Wharton, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, Mary McCarthy – all were attracted by the potential for self-renewal offered by the Italian countryside. The ‘Tuscan Dream’ is a contemporary re-invention of the Arcadia myth in which Tuscany and, more generally, rural Italy functions as a pastoral idyll, holding out the promise of simplicity, authenticity and conviviality through close connection with the land and with traditional

communal life.

Ross (2010: 122-3) observes that Tuscany, the cradle of the Renaissance, has clear associations with the notion of ‘rebirth’ and ‘renewal’, a trope further developed through the focus on home renovation in Tuscan farmhouse settings which is central to much relocation writing. Restoring a ‘ruin with a view’ by hand using traditional materials; learning to cook local dishes with seasonal ingredients; participating in local rituals and folkloric festivals; interacting with locals in traditional close-knit communities; buying handicrafts from local artisans – these everyday objects and practices which are highlighted in relocation narratives signal a deep desire to return to a ‘golden age’ when humans lived in harmony with nature and convivially in close communities. Addressing the function of nostalgic places and times in the development of pastoral art and literature, Bryan S. Turner (1987: 147) has noted that “Arcadia played a major part in the iconography of Western imagination” and that the life of the shepherd has been associated with “the *vita contemplativa* and therefore with tranquillity, leisure and rural retirement”.⁴⁷ Contemporary home-abroad narratives often portray Italy in such an iconic light: the impulse to escape the modern world by retreating to an uncorrupted place, a *locus amoenus*, motivates the discursive construction of rural Italy as a new Arcadia, a utopian space where aspects of the ‘good life’ are still attainable.

Italy initially figures in Hawes’s and Mayes’s memoirs as a utopian space where life can be enjoyed along simpler lines through close connection with the traditional practices and everyday pleasures of rural living. Reflecting on the different rhythm of her days in Cortona, Mayes observes: “Sweet time, exaggerated days, getting up at dawn because when the midsummer sun tops the crests across the valley, the first rays hit me in the face [...] In San Francisco what wakes me is the alarm at seven, or the car pool horn blowing for the child downstairs, or the recycle truck with its crashing cascade of glass” (*UTS*: 268). This passage is illustrative of the way relocation stories tap into a collective desire to escape the malaise of metropolitan living, to let ‘holiday’ merge with ‘every day’ in the enjoyment of a slower life in the countryside. At the outset of her own relocation journey, Hawes reflects on whether to take a risk and buy a hillside *rustico* and build a home in Italy, musing: “Attach yourself to a certain shack up a certain hill near a certain village, and then see what you can make of it. It would certainly eliminate vast swathes of the paralytically endless possibilities of life” (2001: 43). Her decision to buy the

⁴⁷ Turner (1987) further notes that nostalgic metaphors have been used to describe human alienation in both the natural and social worlds, an alienation that represents a form of “ontological nostalgia” which is a central preoccupation of contemporary moral philosophy and social theory.

rundown farmhouse and live on the land in San Pietro is thus articulated as a decisive bid to escape modern life with its dizzying choices and uncertainties. Alù notes that within contemporary women's travel writing which presents Italy as an idealised home, "the foreigner is eager to 'possess' the novelty: a new way of living characterised by rhythms and values which seem to belong to another epoch" (2010: 292). The eternal return is at play here: for postmodern subjects, 'novelty' is related to a rural idyll which makes desirable a traditional way of living.

David Scott (2004: 2-3) has noted that this utopian impulse in travel writing is a nostalgic longing for an "integrated semiotic system" in which signs still have a motivated or sacred connection with their objects, a link that is strengthened and preserved through a group's social organization and ritual activity. He traces this longing to the early modern period when travel writers, in the wake of Enlightenment rationalism and scepticism, saw in so-called primitive societies the attractiveness of such integrated epistemic models. This attractiveness still persists as contemporary travel writers seek a "re-enchantment of the world" through the experience of human society bound both to itself and the natural world by a unified and integral symbolic order (2004: 5). This ontological longing is at the heart of the contemporary transnational quest to live out the pastoral dream in Italy, a dream motivated by the desire to connect with life's simpler, more natural rhythms through authentic, everyday objects and practices: seasonal produce, regional wines and culinary dishes, folkloric festivals, hand-made products by local artisans, a rustic house restored with authentic materials, a garden planted in the traditional way. These everyday artefacts of material culture function as 'signs' that promise the possibility of connecting with other 'significations', namely a more authentic life based on simplicity.

Yet this Italian-style 'simplicity' is anything but simple conceptually. It is one of the ways in which Italy functions as a construct, which Engle (2003: 4) defines as "a supplely subjective projection born in fact and cliché, and shaped by personal and artistic needs", in the literary representations of transnational Anglophone writers.⁴⁸ In home-abroad accounts, Italy is often posited as a place outside modernity and insulated from its anxieties and influences; however, long-term residency and engagement in local life challenges this preconception by revealing the tension between reality and illusion in such a construction of the 'good life'. One aspect of this tension is a confrontation with the past as, most often, the new lives contemporary transnationals build are ones rooted in traditions associated with the past, or soon-to-be past.

⁴⁸ John Engle (2003) uses this definition in describing France as a construct in recent American writing.

Urbanites transplanted into rural or semi-rural settings, Parks, Mayes and Hawes then reconstruct (often with humorous self-deprecation) their confrontations with aspects of a pre-industrial way of life, including manual labour, the seasonal cycle of food and festivals, and face-to-face interaction in close-knit traditional communities.

As their trilogies unfold, the writers' sensibilities migrate from nostalgic constructions of coherent and uncontaminated space, to settlers' understanding of place as ambiguous and complex. This hermeneutical development points to how Italy is often "pre-understood" by travellers as a place existing outside real time and supposedly immune to the contaminations of the historical present, a touristic pre-understanding which is challenged through long-term residency and sustained engagement with place.⁴⁹ Places are, of course, dynamic, as Massey (1994) has insisted, and ideas, associations and actions about place change over time; transnationals writing about Italy in trilogies that span two decades must take into account such flux.

This reconceptualised notion of place involves moving away from a nineteenth-century conception of the nation state as the primary scale for establishing individual and group identity. Recent human and cultural geography has focused on "place" in terms of a topological space in which diverse geographical scales (international, national, regional, local) come together or are mediated through networks of internal (locale) and external (location) affiliations which vary in social characteristics and cultural practices over time.⁵⁰ Put another way, Italy is a place where various local cultures and transnational public spheres operate and shape social identities. Even in Italy, *campanilismo* is not all-consuming; as Bruce Robbins (1999: 250) reminds us "no localization can be assumed to determine absolutely."

1.4 Migrating sensibilities: colonial and cosmopolitan visions

The shifting ways in which Italian authenticity is constructed by transnational writers requires further analysis. Strategically, home-abroad writers draw little attention to the ways in which the globalising processes which make their sojourns abroad possible simultaneously undermine the local authenticity that has drawn them there in the first place. In fact, the global/local dialectic which shapes both the contexts of production and reception of their texts is almost completely elided in the promotion of 'the Italian dream' as one which promises authenticity through

⁴⁹ In his analysis of the discourse of tourism, Dann (1996) identifies 'pre-tour narratives' as pre-understandings of place based on how destinations are marketed by the tourism industry which, in part, shapes the popular imagination.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Agnew (2002).

localism.⁵¹ My analysis will address the fundamental tension that runs through the tradition of expatriate settlement narration – the dialectic relationship between the cosmopolitan worldview and the search for the good life in what is authentically local and particular – and how this shapes the rhetorical strategies used.

Postcolonial theory has rightly pointed to the problems of cosmopolitan privilege, particularly when cosmopolitans decide to speak for locals in travel writing.⁵² In seeking to render reassuringly real accounts of the ‘foreignness of foreigners’ in an effort to entertain and educate an audience back home, cosmopolitan accounts of cultural difference have often reduced or denigrated others, or failed to provide a context for interpreting particular local differences. Indeed, theorists sometimes question whether any discourse exists which avoids the kind of colonial rhetoric inherent in traditional models of describing and interpreting cultural difference given ethnography’s embeddedness in colonial/neo-colonial practices. Spurr (1993: 12) draws attention to the ordering impulse common to both the coloniser and the writer; drawing on Foucault, he asks whether it is “possible to create a discourse that avoids the violence of the letter and thus the imposition of power?” Similarly, Clifford (1988: 54) claims that the “textual embodiment of authority” is such a recurring problem in ethnography, even for contemporary experiments that replace traditional models of ethnographic description and interpretation, that any coherent presentation in itself “presupposes a controlling mode of authority”. The case does not look very promising for settlement writing, rooted as it is in ethnographic descriptions of others, to offer a way out of such rhetorical strategies of domination. Even contemporary travel narratives which experiment with generic conventions seem to reproduce some variant of self /other logic.

A brief example here will help shed light on contemporary travel writing’s complicity with colonial discourse. Paul Theroux’s description of a Mexican garlic seller in *The Old Patagonian Express* is infamous for its deployment of rhetorical strategies that depict non-Western locals as inferior to Western cosmopolitans.

The garlic seller was the personification of Latin America. He was weedy and wore a torn shirt and greasy hat; he was very dirty; he screamed the same words over and over. These attributes alone were unremarkable – he too had a counterpart in Cleveland. What

⁵¹ For an analysis of the interplay of “localism” (territorially bounded cultures involving face-to-face communication) with “cosmopolitanism” (transnational cultural networks), see Featherstone (1990).

⁵² See, for example, Clifford (1988), Holland and Huggan (1998), Kaplan (1996), Lisle (2006), Pratt (1992), Said (1978; 2004), Spivak (1994), Spurr (1993).

distinguished him was the way he carried his merchandise. He had a garland of garlic cloves around his neck and another around his waist and ropes of them on his arms, and he shook them with his fists. He fought his way in and out of the crowd, the clusters of garlic bouncing on his body. Was there any better example of cultural difference than this man? (*OPE*, 51)

Assigning derogatory attributes to the Mexican through the choice of adjectives such as “weedy”, “torn”, “greasy”, and “dirty”, Theroux enacts a strategy of “debasement”⁵³ – a defilement or repudiation of the Other centring on the notion of his ‘uncivilised’ appearance. This debasement is further extended in the choice of verbs used to describe the garlic seller’s actions: “screamed”, “shook” and “fought” construct his behaviour as wild or savage. The use of the past tense throughout the passage works as a strategy of temporal distancing, isolating the garlic seller in some kind of implied pre-modernity. This isolation is further achieved through the complete lack of vocalisation in Theroux’s description: the absence of dialogue or any reference to the actual words the garlic seller reportedly screamed over and over.

In fact, from the very first line, the garlic seller is not individuated but instead presented as a “personification”: the term literally means the embodiment of something else, here of a geographic region; this deliberate use of synecdoche allows Theroux to elide individuation, erasing the ‘person’ by association with the group. “Personification” also carries a second connotation as a literary device through which human attributes are assigned to inanimate things. Both levels of meaning combine here to depersonalise the garlic seller and achieve a particular rhetorical effect, one Spurr (1993: 63) calls “classification” – a ranking of states on a hierarchical scale ranging between two poles of ‘civilisation’ and ‘savagery’ wherein race and ethnicity are used as determinants of social and moral inequalities. Theroux does not individuate the Mexican by engaging with him as a subject or by contextualising his world because his stylistic concern is to construct the Other as inferior in order to legitimate the hierarchical relationship between the USA and Mexico, countries whose political, cultural and economic differences are further exemplified by the image of the border which figures later in the same passage. Theroux deliberately uses cultural difference as a straw construct to reify a self/other logic in order to advance a particular political position.

To borrow from Theroux’s rhetorical punch-line, yes there *are* better examples of cultural difference, and within travel writing too, though post-colonial critics are perhaps reluctant to see

⁵³ Spurr’s study (1993: 76) of colonial discourse in different forms of writing identifies twelve rhetorical modes, one of which is “debasement”, that have defined Western thinking about the non-Western world.

this literary genre as capable of producing representations that avoid Theroux's neo-colonial figures and tropes. At this point it is important to note several significant changes in travel writing over the past fifty years, changes which are reinvigorating the genre and allowing for a way out of conventional rhetorical forms. First, cosmopolitans today are no longer such a homogenous group of élite travellers with the traditional trappings of power and privilege associated with early modern expatriates. Second, rather than positing a universalising subjectivity and totalising authority, contemporary cosmopolitan accounts often foreground the subjective standpoints of writers more self-consciously as filters through which cultural and social differences are interpreted. Third, long-term residency and deep immersion in foreign cultures is changing the cosmopolitan/ local dynamic and the way their social interactions are reconstructed in travel narratives.

In her analysis of the current renaissance travel writing is enjoying in an ever-rapidly globalising world, Lisle (2006) identifies two simultaneous strategies operating in travelogues: a 'colonial vision' which seeks to alleviate the anxieties of globalisation by reproducing the logic of Empire through voyeuristic accounts, and a 'cosmopolitan vision' which focuses on the harmonising effects of globalisation by framing encounters with others in terms of empathy, recognition of equality in difference, and shared values and sensibilities.⁵⁴ I wish to turn now to a consideration of how relocation writing can achieve a cosmopolitan orientation which recognises "equality in difference" with an example drawn from Hawes.

The passage below, taken from the second memoir in her trilogy, *Ripe for the Picking* (2003), depicts Annie Hawes's interaction with Salvatore and Francesca De Giglio, her boyfriend Ciccio's parents, as she is gradually taken into the family fold over the course of her much-speculated-about relationship with their eldest son.

At the beginning of this rather puzzling story, I had my face composed in an expression of sympathy for one who had suffered the hardship of eating nothing but cheese for a week. Got the whole thing back to front, as usual. Cheese was a luxury item as I ought to have remembered [...] What did you normally get to eat then? I ask. The bread, of course: the two flat round loaves, spiced up with as much chilli as he could get, and if he was lucky a dash of olive oil and a slice of raw onion. [...] I'm having a very strange reaction to this story. It's making me want to cry. Here are Salvatore and Francesca sitting in this modern G8 world before a table groaning with food – no shortage of cheese on it, thank goodness – carrying around in their heads another life where hardship and hunger and child labour are just part of everyday life. The little pile of fresh chillies

⁵⁴ Debbie Lisle is scathingly critical of the Theroux passage quoted above, and unpacks its geo-political agenda in detail (2006: 6-7).

at Salvatore's right hand, which he still adds to almost every mouthful of food, bears witness to it. Meanwhile I, like most of my generation of Europeans, only conceive of such things as immensely distant in place or time. Little goat-herd boys far away in India or South America, yes: or a century or two ago in my own land. (*RFP*, 237)

Hawes's initially contrived facial expression of sympathy for Salvatore's bygone days as an exploited child goatherd high in the harsh Aspromonte mountains of Calabria, gives way to real empathy once she adjusts her cultural and generational lens and is able to understand his story of privation and suffering. Her use of the location device and the present tense, "here are", introduces Salvatore and Francesca with an immediacy and an authenticity that forces the reader to recognise them from the outset as complex individuals who inhabit this particular place and time but who are inhabited by memories of another place and time. They are not faraway Others (like the imagined child goatherds in India or South America) but *real* people, with *real* names, and *real* stories. This sense of *being* is further developed by Hawes's choice of the continuous verb form throughout – "I'm having", "it's making", "sitting", "groaning", "carrying" – which constructs an active though indefinite time, aptly conveying the sense that these unfolding actions carry the memory of others in a completed past: "cheese *was*", "bread *spiced* up", "as much chilli as he could *get*".

The specification of the little pile of chillies at Salvatore's "right hand" is a detail that further individualises him through the attribution of a personal habit or idiosyncrasy. Moreover, here, unlike in Theroux, the chillies are personified as "witnesses" but Salvatore remains a real embodied person. His presence is further established through vocalisation in a form of reported speech, which gives us access to his words albeit not through direct dialogue. Hawes uses a stream of consciousness style to report Salvatore's story: the question tag identifies her as the speaker; his response as interlocutor is identified through the personal pronoun 'he' as well as by the idiom used, the self-confident "of course" which characterises Salvatore's speech pattern throughout the text. This discourse marker also serves to establish her relative ignorance before his certain knowledge, an epistemological division further supported by the self-deprecating tone which frames the extract. Hawes's posture as speaker does not presume ultimate authority or totalising certainty but, instead, demonstrates an active listening capacity and an ability to revise and correct her perspective as the encounter unfolds.

The level of engagement Hawes demonstrates through her willingness to listen attentively and revise her own misconceptions in order to achieve a more nuanced understanding of Salvatore's story and a reconstruction of it which respects its integrity exemplifies a cosmopolitan

orientation. Describing ‘cosmopolitanism’ as “a willingness to engage with the Other [...] an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences,” Hannerz goes on to say that cosmopolitans derive a ‘cultural competence’ through their engagement with others: “an ability to make one’s way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting [...] a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings and meaningful forms” (1990: 239). Hawes demonstrates this intercultural ability in her treatment of the encounter with the De Giglios described above. She corrects her initial misconception, listens closely and reflects on Salvatore’s story, internalises the knowledge gained by linking it to what she knows of her own country’s goat-herding history then renders a meaningful account of this encounter by reconstructing it with empathy in a way that demonstrates shared values and sensibilities.

Drawing on Bauman’s (1990) theorisation of the “culture zone” as a site for “mis-meetings” between locals and cosmopolitans, I will consider the Italian localities depicted in settlement writing as “culture zones” for cross-cultural encounters.⁵⁵ My analysis seeks to evaluate how responsibly expatriate writers reproduce these encounters. Do they self-consciously address the identity/difference logic underpinning their narratives? What metaphors of place and time do they deploy in their representations of difference? Do they rely on autobiographical story frames or represent intercultural communication through other rhetorical strategies? Drawing on Spurr’s (1993) typology of colonialist discourse, I will investigate how successfully Hawes, Mayes and Parks move from colonial to cosmopolitan orientations over the span of their trilogies.

My analysis also draws on Papayanis’s (2005) account of the ethics of expatriation and her claims that contemporary expatriate writers’ concerns are not only aesthetic but ethical as well, underpinned by the question “how should I live?” The expatriate quest for the good life is fundamentally an ethical project which seeks the articulation of value in the face of disenchantment with the modern world. Papayanis (2005: xiii) states that “the desire to be elsewhere and the desire to be ethical are not incompatible.” I would add that the desire to *describe* elsewhere and the desire to be ethical are also not incompatible. The act of expatriation requires re-thinking the familiar figures and tropes of literary modernism’s anti-modernity – romance of place, organicism, hedonism, escapism, exoticism – using a different set of interpretive strategies which measure writers’ ethical engagement with the people and places

⁵⁵ Bauman (1990: 143). Similarly, Featherstone (1990) uses the term “global ecumene” to describe a region of cultural interaction and exchange while Appadurai (1990) uses the term “transnational public sphere” to indicate the same.

described. The role played by Mayes, Hawes and Parks in the representation of “Italianness” for global readers (the process of its translocation and transadaption to an Anglophone readership worldwide) will be assessed through an examination of the rhetorical strategies they use in representing difference.

This requires an evaluation of how successfully they produce ‘situated readings’ of place. Landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn (2000: 4) has said that “reading landscape deeply requires local knowledge. On foreign ground, one needs an interpreter.” Reading accounts of foreign places and practices requires a guide who can interpret the lay of the land, someone who has spent time there. Agnew (2002: 6) reminds us that “people invest meaning in the places they inhabit” and it follows that those who have inhabited the places they describe can render more meaningful accounts. This presupposes two kinds of knowledge about place: explicit knowledge of the details of a locale and implicit knowledge of the contexts for situating such details within a broader frame of reference. By rooting themselves through long-term residency in a foreign place, contemporary transnational writers can produce both kinds of knowing through ‘situated readings’ of place. Focusing on the everyday authenticity of life in their adopted homelands, their accounts convey explicit details of place that render them more reassuringly real to readers. In addition, long-term dwelling enables them to acquire the lived experience of place, the broader socio-politico-cultural contexts which reveal the values and sensibilities contained within these explicit details.

Conclusion – local/global dynamics

Recognising the potential for settlement narration to produce deeper epistemologies of place, my argument calls for the recognition of an engaged form of cosmopolitanism. Building on Hannerz’s claim that cosmopolitanism is “not a way of becoming a local, but rather of simulating local knowledge” (1990: 247), I will demonstrate that contemporary relocation writers are particular types of cosmopolitans whose cultural competence derives not from travelling around the world building a storehouse of transnational experiences through which they *simulate* local knowledge, but rather from their ability to *assimilate* local knowledge through sustained engagement with one place. The cosmopolitan as a free-floating cultural connoisseur has given way to a new kind of engaged cosmopolitan in the late-twentieth century: a settler who chooses to live in a foreign place and participate in the everyday rhythms of local life through sustained engagement over time, recording these experiences for global readers.

This commitment to place is an example of what Robbins (1992) calls “situatedness-in-displacement”, a particular kind of mobility whose modalities have not been sufficiently conceptualised in contemporary theory. Robbins expresses the need for more work to go into imagining a “modest cosmopolitanism” which allows for a mode of representation without the presumption of ultimate totalizing certainty (1992: 173). Recognising a new form of engaged cosmopolitanism in contemporary settlement nonfiction calls for a more complex understanding of standpoint and a more generous reading of expatriation than postcolonial theory generally accords. It requires taking into account the narrative dialogism of settlement writing which is rooted in the evolving standpoint of transnational writers who simultaneously participate in and record everyday life elsewhere as both insiders and outsiders.

In today’s age of global interconnectedness, when travel has become accessible to the largest public in history and the Internet has made exotic locales a virtual presence for many, travel memoirs still have a surprisingly wide readership. Why do readers enjoy others’ accounts of life abroad when they can easily go there themselves, or go online and find out everything about a place without the inconvenience of leaving home? The popularity of relocation narratives perhaps lies in the fact that they stand as reminders that local cultures still exist and that their authenticity can be experienced through the accounts of transnational writers who have lived there and engaged with them first-hand. Who better to make the unfamiliar familiar than cosmopolitans with their “density of overlapping allegiances”⁵⁶ and their ability to translate local differences for global readers?

Sociological studies on migration have posited that the more individuals engage in border-crossing activities and transnational social networks, the more likely they are to adopt cosmopolitan attitudes.⁵⁷ The cosmopolitan orientation involves “a willingness to engage with the other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity” (Held 1995: 103). Euben (2006: 15-16) reminds us that knowledge about what is unfamiliar is produced comparatively by way of “nested polarities” – self/other, us/them, male/female, Western/non-western, white/non-white, cosmopolitan/local – which are so pervasive in our conceptual models of reality that they seem unavoidable.⁵⁸ Yet, it is clear that such dialectical logic has not helped writers produce

⁵⁶ Robbins (1999: 250).

⁵⁷ See, for example, Hannerz (1990); Kwok-Bun (2011); Robertson (1992); Roudometof (2005).

⁵⁸ Roxanne Euben’s study of Muslim cosmopolitanism in Western and non-Western travel writing is optimistic about the cosmopolitical possibilities of the identity/difference logic in the discourse of subjectivity (2006).

knowledge about what is unfamiliar in a way which recognises equality in difference; the mythologizing structures and exoticist tropes with which travel writing has traditionally constructed ‘foreignness’ serve as proof. What then might be a way forward?

Commenting on studies of ‘everyday life’ and the potential for new readings and representations which look for a way out of dialectic thinking, Ben Highmore (2002: 2-3) states:

Everyday life can both hide and make vivid a range of social differences. But it should be remembered that the production of recognisable difference initially required the manufacture of a sense of commonality. [...] So the everyday (as a theoretical and practical arena) has the potential ability of producing, not difference, but commonality. It might be that this is where its generative ability lies. If ‘everyday life’ is going to provide a re-imagining of the study of culture [...] then it might need to put on hold the automatic explanatory value placed on accepted cultural differences. [...] If everyday life is going to challenge us into new ways of thinking and new ways of perceiving, then it will need to practise a kind of heuristic approach to social life that does not start out with predesignated outcomes. In its negotiation of difference and commonality it might, potentially, find new commonalities and breathe new life into old differences. But to do this will mean putting on hold some of the familiar conventions of contemporary studies of culture.

It seems clear that the heuristic approach needed for the study of culture is one which moves beyond nested polarities in its representational models. My argument proposes that engaged cosmopolitanism is an orientation which, potentially, moves beyond dialectical conceptual models through more dialogical ways of thinking about and representing subjectivity and place.

Bakhtin’s study of the dialogic or “polyphonic” form of novels is helpful here in understanding the range of identities and identifications that emerge in societal relations and are reproduced in narrative, revealing how the use of discourse can disrupt the presumed authority of any single voice or perspective in a literary work. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984), Bakhtin analyses the use of a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” in Dostoevsky’s novels, contrasting this “polyphony” of voices and perspectives – which he likens to the disruptive or “carnivalistic modes” present in classical, medieval, and Renaissance culture – with more monological depictions, such as in Tolstoy, in which characters’ voices are subjected to the authoritative voice and controlling purpose of the author. Underpinning this dialogical narrative mode for Bakhtin is a recognition of the “unfinalizable self”, which posits that a person can never be fully known or labelled because s/he can always change; moreover, a person’s subjectivity is formed relationally through contact with others and, therefore, contains a polyphony of influences which disrupt the authority of a single, unified perspective.

This understanding of subjective indeterminacy and multivocality aptly reflects the multiple standpoints expressed in relocation narratives by transnational writers who seek an accommodation with cultural differences through a dense layering of perspectives and allegiances. Bakhtin's concept of formal "dialogism" (1981) applies to the genre of travel writing as well as to the novel: like novelistic discourse, travel discourse emerged in diversity and continues to criss-cross generic boundaries as it evolves. A sampling of critical references signals this generic hybridity: Thompson (2011: 1-2) refers to travel writing's "bewildering diversity of forms"; Holland and Huggan (1998: xiii) to it as "this most hybrid and unassimilable of literary genres"; Kowaleski (1992: 7) to its "dauntingly heterogeneous character"; Forsdick (2009: 58) to its "generic indeterminacy"; Korte (2001: 9) to its "generic hybridity and flexibility"; Raban (1987: 253-4) famously refers to it as a "raffish open house" of easy virtue; Thouroude (2009: 389) to it as a genre whose "hybridity is constitutive of it".⁵⁹ Relocation narratives offer a striking example of travel writing's generically constitutive heterogeneity, manifesting its hallmark hybridity through the explicit tension between global and local interests which defines both its form and content.

Indeed, Hawes, Parks and Mayes are most successful in rendering situated readings of Italy when they move beyond nested polarities (self/other, home/away, global/local, past/present) and offer a super-imposition of standpoints through a thick description of self and place. Such narrative dialogism offers a bridge between local and global perspectives, enabling a form of intercultural and intracultural understanding that can serve as a harmonising model for contemporary social relations.

⁵⁹ All citations are taken from Youngs (2013: 1-7).

Chapter 2 – Frances Mayes's Tuscan Idyll

"First of all, let's get one thing straight. Your Italy and our Italia are not the same thing. Italy is a soft drug peddled in predictable packages, such as hills in the sunset, olive groves, lemon trees, white wine, and raven-haired girls. Italia, on the other hand, is a maze. It's alluring, but complicated. It's the kind of place that can have you fuming and then purring in the space of a hundred meters, or in the course of ten minutes. Italy is the only workshop in the world that can turn out both Botticellis and Berlusconis."

Beppe Severgnini, *La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind*

Introduction

Frances Mayes is a writer loved by general readers yet disapproved by critics. The former enjoy her luscious descriptions of Italian rural living which offer a touristic escape into the everyday rhythms of *la dolce vita* in her adopted Tuscan hill town of Cortona; the latter dismiss this as 'lifestyle writing' that is both formulaic and reductive of the host culture presented.⁶⁰ Whilst many readers identify with her personal story of seeking a fresh start following a midlife divorce (a storyline exploited in the film version of *Under the Tuscan Sun* but more subtly drawn in the book) and building a new home with her new partner, as well as her desire to take a risk and move to a new place in order to find balance and renewal away from professional pressures in California, critics find the contemporary self-help *cogito* underpinning her story – eat, pray, love, and home-renovate then decorate your way to personal happiness – trite and the self-focus of her narratives cloying.

Criticism of the commercial discourse running through Mayes's Tuscan trilogy is well-founded and will be addressed in detail below. Still, it is hard not to envy her lifestyle. She is one of a privileged generation of baby-boomers to have had the good fortune of getting tenure when the academic job market was more secure and acquiring a second home in the sun in the early 1990s when the property market for homes abroad was still in its infancy and the USD-Lira exchange rate favourable. Moreover, the commercial success of her Tuscan books made it possible for her to retire early from academic life and focus full-time on her writing.⁶¹ Upon its

⁶⁰ See for example Alù (2010); Ross (2009); Russo Bullaro (2005); Saggini (2005); Folks (2004); Parkins (2004); Sarup (1994).

⁶¹ Until her retirement in 2001, Mayes was professor of Creative Writing at San Francisco State University where she also directed the Poetry Center. She and her partner, Edward Kleinschmidt, acquired a country house near Cortona in 1990. In addition to her Tuscan trilogy of memoirs and Tuscan décor books, she has published five volumes of poetry and a novel.

release, *Under the Tuscan Sun* (1996) dominated the *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list for 162 weeks and was followed by a popular film version, directed by Audrey Wells and starring Diane Lane and Raoul Bova (Touchstone 2003), which shifted the storyline away from lifestyle makeover through home renovation to self-transformation through romantic love.

On the coat-tails of this commercial success, Mayes published two glossy, table-top books promoting a Tuscan aesthetic, with tips on interior decorating and photo inserts of her own house and furnishings,⁶² as well as two more memoirs, *Bella Tuscany* (1999) and *Every Day in Tuscany* (2010). Along with other bestsellers such as Peter Mayle's Provence books which emerged in the 1990s, Mayes's popular Tuscan trilogy helped define relocation narratives as a contemporary subgenre of travel writing and redefined the profit-making potential of travel memoir for publishers. Although paving the way for infamously formulaic 'farmhouse literature', Mayle and Mayes also helped to stretch the literary genre in a new direction by presenting settlement accounts more concerned with day-to-day experiences of life in a new land from a settler's perspective than with picturesque accounts of place from a traveller's passing gaze.

Escape from a modern, urban lifestyle in California motivates Mayes's search for a new life in Tuscany. She states at the outset: "The language, history, art, places in Italy are endless – two lifetimes wouldn't be enough. And, ah, the foreign self" (*UTS*, 25). The allure of a foreign place is partly about imagining new possibilities for selfhood there, what it would be like to "be extant in another version" as Mayes puts it (*UTS*, 28). This is also what makes relocation writing so compelling to readers: the chance to experience what it means to live a different kind of life, albeit vicariously. Offering a touristic escape to armchair travellers longing to gaze on fields of sunflowers and sun-baked olive groves, Mayes's books also satisfy the penchant for gazing into interior spaces and the mundane details of domestic life elsewhere through the personal accounts of those, like her, who 'go native' in a foreign locale.

By downshifting to a slower lifestyle in rural Italy, Mayes seeks to realign her life with a 'slow living' philosophy which is aesthetically expressed in the material objects and practices that define her everyday environment. The lifestyle makeover she acquires in Italy centres on one particular object which acts as the primary interface between foreign place and self – the house – and which provides her with a new lease on life. Mayes's three-hundred-year-old stone villa,

⁶² *In Tuscany* (2000) and *Bringing Tuscany Home* (2004) focus on interior design.

located beneath the ancient city wall of Cortona in the hillside area of Torreone, had stood abandoned for decades until she acquired it in 1990. “A house and the land it takes two oxen two days to plough” (*UTS*, 34) – this archaic legal description, noted in the deed of sale, is an early indication of the cultural exoticism the foreign house embodies. The ancient house is both material object and a figurative construct which represents a neo-Romantic escape from modernity and the promise of a better quality of life in the Italian countryside.

2.1 Confrontation – the Tuscan dream

Writing in a journal which forms the basis for the eventual book *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Mayes questions her early bravura in pursuing this Italian dream: “Now, what am I thinking of? Buying an abandoned house in a place where I can hardly speak the language” (*UTS*, 28) yet, in reviewing its concrete advantages, she is reassured of the reasonableness of her decision.

On the other hand, a dignified house near a Roman road, an Etruscan (Etruscan!) wall looming at the top of the hillside, a Medici fortress in sight, a view toward Monte Amiato, a passageway underground, one hundred and seventeen olive trees, twenty plums, and still uncounted apricot, almond, apple, and pear trees. Several figs seem to thrive near the well. Beside the front steps there’s a large hazelnut. Then, proximity to one of the most superb towns I’ve ever seen. Wouldn’t we be crazy *not* to buy this lovely house called Bramasole? (*UTS*, 26)

Meaning ‘to yearn for the sun’ (*UTS*, 15), Bramasole’s name aptly captures the impulse which draws Mayes to its doorstep: both a literal longing for sunshine and a metaphorical desire for a better quality of life. Is this a touristic impulse or whim? Or is it something deeper, something life transforming: “the desire to surprise your own life” (*UTS*, 199)?

Guided by Rilke’s maxim, “You must change your life” (quoted in *UTS*, 199), and Dante’s question posed at the outset of *The Inferno*, “What must we do in order to grow?” (quoted in *UTS*, 97), Mayes pursues her deep-seated longing for change, noting that “life must change from time to time if we are to go forward in our thinking” (*UTS*, 12). Becoming a part-time resident in another country gives her a chance to reinvent her life, a prospect both exciting and daunting: “I am seven thousand miles from home, plunking down my life savings on a whim. Is it a whim? It feels very close to falling in love and that’s never really whimsical but comes from some deep source” (*UTS*, 20). Seeing relocation as a way of concretising her desire for a lifestyle transformation, she states: “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” (*UTS*, 25).

Noting that “the waiting house [is] all potential”, Mayes finds in the abandoned country house and its overgrown garden a material setting to actualise her longing for a mid-course adjustment at midlife (*UTS*, 281). Reflecting on this ontological longing for change, she writes:

The house is a metaphor for the self, of course, but it also is totally real. And a *foreign* house exaggerates all the associations houses carry. Because I had ended a long marriage that was not supposed to end and was establishing a new relationship, this house quest felt tied to whatever new identity I would manage to forge. [...] I had the urge to examine my life in another culture and move beyond what I knew. I wanted something of a *physical* dimension that would occupy the mental volume the years of my former life had. (*UTS*, 25)

Her belief that “houses are totally anthropomorphic” (*UTS*, 49) leads her to envision personal renewal through the restoration of a ruin with a view; the house offers a material stage upon which she can enact the Socratic exercise of self-examination. Critics have noted that the restoration of Mayes’s house parallels her own process of identity (re)formation as she accommodates to Italian rural life.⁶³ Others have analysed the role of the house as both “lived experience and the image of an episteme, something produced through and producing subjective experiences of time and space”.⁶⁴ Mayes herself observes that restoring Bramasole is an act of mutual creation: “Seamlessly, in such a place, you create what in turn creates you” (*EDT*, 63). Her quest to transform Bramasole from a ruin into a home and the entwined process of becoming ‘at home’ in a foreign landscape is centred on two key *topoi* – a temporal shift to slowness and a spatial shift to nature and the outdoor world – which concretise the novelty of her new life by providing daily reminders of cultural difference.

The temporal motif unfolds across the trilogy as Mayes settles into a different pace of life in Tuscany. Initially dividing her time between Cortona and California, she spends summers, holidays and sabbatical periods in the former while maintaining her professional life in the latter. Early on she claims: “I know the appeal to me [of Cortona] is partly the balance it restores to my life in America. I’m not about to leave there [United States], even if I could. [...] I can best develop my thinking there [US] – it’s my culture, my rough edge, my past” (*UTS*, 87-88). In the first book of her trilogy, Mayes repeatedly calls upon her urban life in San Francisco as a counterpoint to her rural life in Cortona: the household objects and practices which characterise her Tuscan life gather meaning in opposition to those associated with her American life. This difference is tangibly rendered upon a return trip to San Francisco: “Lamps, rugs,

⁶³ See, for example, Alù (2010); Ross (2009); Russo Bullaro (2005); Saggini (2005); Folks (2004); Parkins (2004).

⁶⁴ Larson, Saggini and Soccio (2012: 1).

chests, quilts, paintings, tables – how amazingly comfortable and cluttered this looks after the empty house seven thousand miles away. Bookshelves crammed, the glass kitchen cabinets lined with colourful dishes, pitchers, platters – so much of everything” (*UTS*, 101). The signifiers ‘cluttered’ and ‘crammed’ signal a strikingly different aesthetic to the pared-down simplicity of her Tuscan home.

With its “dark beams, white brick ceiling, white walls, waxy brick floors”, Mayes’s Tuscan house seems simple, homey and inviting. She says: “To my eye the rugged textures and the strong color contrasts of the typical Tuscan house create the most welcoming rooms of any architectural style I know. Fresh and serene in summer, they look secure and cozy in winter. [...] The architecture seems natural, as if these houses grew out of the land and were easily shaped by the human hand” (*UTS*, 284). This natural, hand-crafted quality is further exemplified in details of her home furnishings: “the hand-printed labels for the house’s olive oil, thin linen curtains pulled across the shutters for siesta, jars of plum jam on the shelves, a long table for feasts under the linden trees, baskets piled by the door for picking tomatoes, arugula, wild fennel, roses, and rosemary” (*UTS*, 30). These lines paint a Tuscan still life that is as picturesque as the exterior landscapes of rolling hills and cypress-lined drives familiar to readers and tourists alike.

Mayes’s aesthetic of everyday living in rural Tuscany emphasises simplicity and authenticity: the notion of ‘simple abundance’ is implied above in the rows of home-made preserves and garden herbs; the concept of ‘slow living’ is suggested through references to siestas, to hand-printed labels and hand-picked produce. The notion of ‘downsizing’ as a virtue is also expressed in her Tuscan kitchen reno:

We have bought cleaning supplies, a new stove and fridge. With sawhorses and two planks we set up a kitchen counter. Although we must bring hot water from the bathroom in a plastic laundry pan, we have a surprisingly manageable kitchen. As one who has used Williams-Sonoma as a toy store for years, I begin to get back to an elementary sense of the kitchen. [...] I think with amazement of my kitchen in San Francisco: the black and white tile floor, mirrored wall between cabinets and counter, long counters gleaming white, the restaurant stove big enough to take off from the San Francisco airport [...] Here, the determined spider in the fireplace keeps me company as she knits her new web. (*UTS*, 35-6)

Mayes herself is like the spider knitting a new web of connection to place based on a pattern of intricate simplicity. In these snapshots of her Tuscan kitchen, she evokes ‘slow living’ practices which create an aesthetic that is pared-down and essential.

This Italian simplicity contrasts sharply with American abundance and variety back in San Francisco:

Stopping for groceries after work, I see that the organic store has added a masseuse to the staff. I could pause in a little booth and get a seven-minute massage to relax me before I begin selecting potatoes. I'm temporarily overwhelmed by the checkout rows, the aisles and aisles of bright produce and the tempting cakes at the new bakery just installed in the front of the store. Mustard, mayonnaise, plastic wrap, baking chocolate – I buy things I haven't seen all summer. The deli has crab cakes and stuffed baked potatoes with chives, and corn salad and tabouli. So much! I buy enough 'gourmet takeout' for two days. I'm going to be too busy to cook. (*UTS*, 102)

Not only are the food items different there, but also the routines they imply: the seven-minute massage for people on the go who have much stress but little time; the variety of gourmet take-away for those with no time to cook; everything from tabouli to bakery goods available to one-stop shoppers under a single roof. These snapshots of San Francisco reveal Mayes's overscheduled, metropolitan lifestyle and processed domesticity. Contrarily, in Italy, she enjoys "the spill of free days" (*UTS*, 268) which characterises a slow lifestyle: "What is this happiness that keeps coming in waves? Time, the gift of time, the free running of time – and Italy owns so much of it" (*BT*, 21). She further observes: "At home in California, I operate *against* time. My agenda, stuffed with notes and business cards, is always with me, each day scribbled with appointments. Sometimes when I look at the week coming up, I know that I simply have to walk through it. To be that booked-up, blocked-in feels depleting" (*BT*, 21).

Whilst her overflowing American life leaves her feeling trapped and "depleted", a succession of days, weeks, and years spent restoring Bramasole and its land, days filled with nothing but hard, physical labour – "seven to seven, seven days a week" (*UTS*, 110) – are exhausting but oddly restorative: "Restoration. I like the word. The house, the land, perhaps ourselves. [...] Our lives are full" (*UTS*, 95). This fullness comes from learning how *not* to rush through life, how to take the time needed to enjoy simple pleasures:

In Tuscany, I learned to *take time*. [...] Time – that's what it takes for the slow tomato sauce, stirred until reduced to an essential taste of summer sun, for tying the lavender in bunches and hanging them from beams to dry, for learning the imperfect tense, for checking the reddening of pomegranates every day as they ripen, [...] Living well in time means *taking back* time from the slave-masters – obligations, appointments, the dreary round of details that attach like leeches in a stagnant pond. (*EDT*, 63)

Reflecting on how time feeds pleasure, Mayes notes: "Flannery O'Connor talked about pursuing pleasure 'through gritted teeth.' I sometimes must do that at home but here pleasure is natural"

(*UTS*, 201). The here vs. there distinction is prevalent in Book One as Mayes is struck by Italians' capacity for *jouissance*, for playfulness and spontaneity, and is drawn to their unique ability "of taking great satisfaction in the everyday" (*EDT*, 284) by balancing work and leisure. Whereas she sees Americans "fighting time" by constantly clocking themselves, feeling that they should always be *doing* something, Italians seem to feel they "are doing what they need to do by *being*" (*EDT*, 284). Mayes observes that for them, time is like a river they float on, not one they swim in against the current.

Of course, this fluid sense of time has its drawbacks, notably in the length of time required to complete the renovations at Bramasole. Mayes notes, "I think most Italians have a longer sense of time than we do. What's the hurry? Once up a building will stand a long, long time, perhaps a thousand years. Two weeks, two months, big deal" (*UTS*, 45). In hindsight, she glosses over the delays, and the relentless labour required which, like the labour which "ensures the continuance of the human race" (*UTS*, 130), is forgotten in the retelling of the birth saga. Yet, Mayes's initial disappointment is sharp when, upon her first Christmas visit, she is forced to stay at a friend's house because work has not progressed in her absence and there is no central heating. Her contractor proves unreliable, she is miles away and cannot oversee the project, and discovers upon her arrival signs of "carelessness apparent everywhere" (*UTS*, 105), including a message scrawled in black felt-tip pen by a workman directly on the frescoed dining room wall. But in spite of a "waterfall of problems" with permits, plumbing, financing, with language barriers and long distance flights back to America, the slower rhythm of her days in Tuscany, the joy of everyday pleasures, the feeling of "moving into a larger freedom" (*UTS*, 201) lead her to assert that, overall, living in Italy has "no downside" (*UTS*, 200).

In fact, no downside is apparent in her relocation accounts since her reconstruction of everyday life relies on a Tuscan 'slow living' idyll free from the dreary grind of workaday routines experienced by most people every day. Parkins's critique of Peter Mayle also rings true for Frances Mayes: "Mayle's account is charmingly free from the realities of everyday life, like earning a living: the only drudgery he and his wife seemed to experience was cleaning up after household guests and sweeping up after tradesmen" (2004: 259). The dramas of the home renovation represent the difficulties of building a new life in a new land, but in so far as these are mostly minor irritations and delays, the idyll of the 'good life' remains intact.

Beyond having more time to enjoy life's small pleasures, Mayes's quality of life is enhanced by

the reconnection to nature she experiences in Tuscany: “Here, I am restored to the basic pleasure of connection with the outdoors. The windows are open to butterflies, horseflies, bees, or anything else that wants to come in one window and out another. We eat outside almost every meal. [...] One end of the house is built tight against the hillside. An omen of reconnection?” (*UTS*; 98). From the house’s seventeen windows, Mayes enjoys varied vistas overlooking wild irises, roses, lilacs, feathery pine trees, an orchard of fruit trees and olive groves; the exuberant abundance of nature which thrives at Bramasole and requires her care contrasts sharply with the “attractive low-maintenance flower beds on a drip system cared for by a gardener” at her flat in San Francisco: “there, my feet are three stories off the earth. When I leave my house, concrete separates my feet from the ground” (*UTS*, 97). Instead, at Bramasole, Mayes feels, “*Intimacy*. The feeling of touching the earth as Eve touched it, when nothing separated her” (*UTS*, 278).

Connected to life’s ‘circadian rhythms’, Mayes rediscovers in Tuscany the feeling of being at home in nature for the first time since childhood:

In my early Italian years, the natural renewal I experienced came largely from being at home in nature again, playfully as in childhood. As we began hacking brambles from the land and planting gardens – a rose garden, an herb garden, a vegetable garden, a shade garden – I realized that the blistering work, the aches and sweat and scratches of restoration were, like writing, where work and play became the same. As an adult, my feet were accustomed to concrete. Sleeping with the door open, waking with the splendiferous Tuscan dawns, listening to the bees mining the linden, lying in the grass at night watching the falling stars, walking to town instead of driving – all realigned me with my love of the natural world. Circadian rhythms usurped the clock. (*EDT*, 99)

The restoration work at Bramasole is equally restorative for Mayes, connecting her via nature and sensory experience to memories of her childhood in the South; she says: “Choice is restorative when it reaches toward an instinctive recognition of the earliest self” (*UTS*, 97). Her choice to live at Bramasole and close to nature returns her to this earliest sense of self: “Late in the afternoons [in Tuscany] I take long soaks in the hip bath filled with bubbles, washing spiderwebs out of my hair, grit from my nails, necklaces of dirt from around my neck. I have not had a necklace of dirt since I used to play Kick the Can on long summer evenings as a child” (*UTS*, 37). Sitting on the stone wall at Bramasole eating watermelon under a scorching sun, Mayes sees how far she can spit the seeds like she did when she was seven. Similarly long lunches under the linden trees at Bramasole evoke memories of meals in the shady garden of her childhood home in Fitzgerald, Georgia.

The way memories resurface at times surprises her and even her dreams reconnect her to her

past: “I dream my mother rinses my tangle of hair with a bowl of rainwater” (*UTS*, 268). Reflecting on how time collapses at Bramasole and how place realigns identities past and present, Mayes notes: “It is paradoxical but true that something that takes you out of yourself also restores you to yourself with a greater freedom” (*EDT*, 8). Recalling Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Mayes feels close to his sense of the house as a shelter for dreams and a tool for analysis of the human soul:

Bachelard pushed me to realize that the houses we experience deeply take us back to the first house. In my mind, however, it’s not just to the first house, but to the first concept of self. Southerners have a gene, as yet undetected in the DNA spirals, that causes them to believe that place is fate. Where you are is who you are. The further inside you the place moves, the more your identity is intertwined with it. Never casual, the choice of place is the choice of something you crave. (*UTS*, 96)

Bramasole is for Mayes a kind of Ur-house symbolising both her primary sense of home and of self; as such, it is a potent tool for her self-analysis across the trilogy.

Claiming that “Italy always has had a magnetic north pull on my psyche” (*UTS*, 17), Mayes’s craving to taste life anew is satisfied by living in Italy where she is freed “from a life I knew how to live into a challenging space where I was forced – and overjoyed – to invent each day” (*EDT*, 8). Bramasole, in fact, satisfies Mayes’s twin cravings for exploration and rootedness, concepts which seem at odds but which converge in the experience of building a home abroad. Her rural farmhouse is both the crux and crucible that enables her to explore a new space and set down roots there over time, forging a new identity which is ‘at home’ in Tuscany: “I begin to notice, here at Bramasole, that my skin fits perfectly over my body, just as this house sits so serenely and naturally on this hillside” (*EDT*, 19).

Clearly, Bramasole is “more than a house” (*EDT*, 61) for Mayes. She states: “The house becomes my icon. The luminous apricot-rose façade, shuttered windows open to the southern sun, profuse geraniums, clematis, lemons, and lavender burgeoning in the garden – all this exuberant beauty symbolizes not the life I was given but the life I made with my own two hands” (*EDT*, 2). Feeling so completely at home there, she says, “I move through this foreign house I’ve acquired as though my real ancestors left their presences in these rooms. As though this were the place I always come home to” (*UTS*, 267). Speaking of her house anthropomorphically, as a living thing, Mayes describes it as a beloved and lists its admirable attributes. At other times, it is a manifestation of her inner-most self, its rooms like her own singular “fingerprints” (*EDT*, 2).

Bramasole is a ‘good’ house in Bachelard’s sense that it shelters dreams, dreams of communion with the natural world.⁶⁵ His sense that a deeper dwelling is achieved when humans renew their relationship with time and nature away from technologically-mediated practices is actualised by Mayes in her rural retreat. On her patch of Tuscan hillside, she embraces this philosophy of slowness, resolving to take long walks and “observe something of the natural world every day, and write it here. I know all the boar tracks, fire lines, and cart tracks on my side of Monte Sant’Egidio, where like St. Francis’s followers, I roam and observe” (*EDT*, 98). Through this close engagement, she learns the lay of the land in her adopted home. Her imagination is also nurtured by this close connection with nature: “At home [California] I dream of former houses I’ve lived in, of finding rooms I didn’t know were there. [...] Here [Tuscany], I don’t dream of houses. Here, I am free to dream of rivers” (*UTS*, 97-98). Mayes suggests that her rural home enables her to realise a harmonious alignment of outside place and inside space.

This intimacy with nature also feeds Mayes’s artistic projects whose themes are closely aligned with nature and Romanticism. She evokes the tradition of early modern literary travellers in Italy, and self-consciously places herself on its continuum: in Florence, she writes about “dipping my hand in the boat-shaped fountain just outside [Keats’s house], thinking Keats had dipped his hand there” (*UTS*, 153); near Cortona, she notes, “Henry James records walking this road [...] I take the same stroll” (*UTS*, 166-7).⁶⁶ Inspired by Thoreau’s notion, “It’s not what you look at that matters, it’s what you see”, Mayes focuses on “the density of things to see in Tuscany” (*UTS*, 169) and endeavours to render this density in words. She feels close to the sense of home conveyed in Thoreau’s ironic statement, “I have travelled far in Concord” (quoted in *EDT*) since she feels a similar connection to Cortona and the largeness of life within its walled perimeter. The rhythms of village life are not constraining but are reassuring to her – “*Campanilismo*, a condition of being. When you live within the sound of the campanile, church bell, you belong to the place” (*EDT*, 15) – and offer a density of experiences to live and to record.

2.2 Negotiation – Italians, Tuscans and others

Once she has completed the renovation work on Bramasole and established her hillside homestead, Mayes directs her energy into exploring the surrounding area, stating: “We live here. Now we can begin the forays into the concentric circles around us” (*UTS*, 168). Whilst the

⁶⁵ Bachelard (1958).

⁶⁶ Youngs (2013: 184) refers to the ‘footsteps’ genre of contemporary travel writing in which author-protagonists journey in the steps of earlier travellers.

first memoir focuses mainly on the house and its renovation, Mayes also devotes many pages to detailing the restoration of her land as well as her initial touristic visits to other Tuscan locales. Part DIY manual, part guide book, part recipe book, *Tuscan Sun* is filled with her early impressions of the place and its people rendered through accounts of the locals and local customs she encounters by exploring material and artistic culture in Tuscany.⁶⁷

Mayes uses objects of material culture – her house, local foods – as portals towards greater understanding of local traditions and greater integration in social life. Learning to shop for seasonal ingredients and to prepare authentic Tuscan dishes is central to her narrative of integration in the everyday life of Cortona and, more generally, in Italy. Presenting recipes, restaurant reviews, wine recommendations, and notes on the seasonal rituals of planting and harvesting, all three of her memoirs reconstruct local food experiences for global readers eager to taste ‘Made in Italy’ authenticity. The conceptions and constructs of foreign authenticity which gather around her table reveal the interplay of commercial and ontological discourses in her narrative, raising some important questions: Is her story of becoming Italian bite-by-bite merely an exercise in social distinction which appropriates Tuscan culture and packages it for global tastes? Does Mayes use culinary tourism as a way of consuming difference in a cursory performance of cosmopolitanism, or are her Tuscan food forays a way of encountering Otherness on a more meaningful level? By exposing this fundamental tension in her narrative of identity (re)formation, food and cooking play a pivotal role in the construction of a cosmopolitan identity and an intercultural competence.

Mayes’s culinary education begins with her realisation that the word ‘seasonal’ takes on an unimagined immediacy in her new home; her first spring, she learns that the Sant’Anna string beans which were in season *last* week are no longer available *this* week; it is the cannellini which are in season *now* (*BT*, 272). Fresh ingredients, not just seasonal but literally of the moment, are the staples of Italian cooking, enabling a “simplicity [that] is liberating”; she reflects that in Tuscany, cooking is not a matter of “technique” but of simply “doing”, and observes that “here we no longer measure, but just cook” (*UTS*, 134). She notes how her entire shopping list changes with the seasons: “In winter here there is no asparagus from Peru, no grapes from Chile. What’s available, primarily, is what grows locally, though citrus comes up

⁶⁷ This travel-settlement-travel pattern in her narratives is reflected both within the Tuscan trilogy and more broadly in her works. *A Year in the World* (2006) was published following the Tuscan texts and details her sabbatical-year adventures in Spain, Portugal, France, Greece, North Africa, Turkey, and the British Isles. A similar publishing pattern is also evident in Annie Hawes’s career whose travelogue *A Handful of Honey* (2008) followed her Ligurian trilogy.

from the south and Sicily” (*UTS*, 229-30). Mayes suggests that learning to eat in harmony with the seasons involves a re-education of the palate, and that holiday meals such as at Christmas take on an exciting dimension of novelty: “One pleasure of the cook is that now and then you learn all over again” (*UTS*, 229).

The desire to ‘live life anew’ which led Mayes to Cortona, is actualised in her Tuscan kitchen where food functions as a metaphor for self-transformation: learning the art of seasonal cooking offers a measure of her lifestyle makeover and an index of her cultural integration. Her culinary re-education goes a step beyond cooking and eating to include *growing* her own food. Fruits from trees she has pruned, vegetables and fresh herbs from a garden she has planted and tended, olives and grapes ripe for the picking on her terraces: the abundance of fresh ingredients is intoxicating, and Mayes marvels at the daily ritual of foraging in her garden for dinner. The joy which this simple abundance bestows is conveyed in her giddy description of the tomato harvest: “Every day, a heaping basket of perfect, absolutely perfect, red, red, tomatoes. I look on these brimming baskets with more pleasure than I felt when I saw my new car last year” (*BT*, 273). Juxtaposing two iconic cultural objects, the Italian tomato and the American car, it is clear where Mayes locates pleasure. Here, the material tomato acts as a symbol of the cultural values (slow living, organicism) which displace her previous identifications (metropolitan lifestyle, American consumerism), revealing her increasing hominess with a Tuscan way of life.

The symbolic boundaries drawn by food reinforce not only differences between cultures, but also distinctions in status and social position in Bourdieu’s sense (1984). In describing the cosmopolitan orientation of openness to other cultures, Hannerz refers to an attitude of “risk-taking” that can be symbolised through the bodily act of eating foreign foods; whether eating cockroaches or eating escargots, he claims, “the more conspicuously is surrender abroad a form of mastery at home” (1990: 240). The culinary knowledge one acquires by travelling abroad and eating foreign foods is a form of intercultural competence through which one displays ‘distinction’ through mastery. Germann Molz suggests that “food figures prominently in the ongoing symbolic struggle to distinguish oneself as a ‘traveler’ rather than a ‘tourist,’ with the former searching out the spiciest and most exotic (to them) new tastes, whereas the latter searches out bland and familiar (to them) foods abroad” (2007: 87). She further suggests that culinary tourism often becomes a form of “gazing with the tongue” that involves a cursory engagement with foreign foods as symbols of diversity (2007:88).

Yet, in pursuing a sustained engagement with Tuscan foods and culinary traditions over two decades of foreign residency, Mayes distinguishes herself as something more than a ‘traveller’ or a ‘tourist’ in search of novel tastes; she is, in fact, an ‘aspiring local’ who gradually acquires insider knowledge by apprenticing herself to local culture over a sustained period in Tuscany. Such ‘insider’ knowledge is conveyed in the following passage describing an olive-oil tasting:

Nine growers’ oils are lined up along the table in the piazza, with pots of olive trees around for ambiance. ‘I couldn’t have imagined this, could you?’ Ed asks me as we try the fourth or fifth oil. I couldn’t. The oils, like ours, are profoundly fresh with a vigorous element to the taste that makes me want to smack my lips. The shades of difference among the oils are subtle. I think I taste that hot wind of summer in one, the first rain of autumn in another, then the history of a Roman road, sunlight on leaves. They taste green and full of life. (*UTS*, 212)

Mayes displays knowledge of different varieties of extra-virgin olive oil and tries to identify the subtle differences in flavour with her evolving palate, though her allusions are more poetic and synaesthetic than they are gastronomic. She does not flaunt her culinary mastery here in an obvious way, but instead uses hedging statements (‘I think I taste’) which signal her role as apprentice to local culture.

Whilst Germann Molz maintains that “culinary adventures into another culture are less about a sustained engagement with that particular culture than they are a way of underlining a symbolic distinction that raises the tourist’s status back home” (2007: 87), Mayes’s gastronomic forays are both: they *are* a sustained physical engagement with another culture’s foodways and the narrative reconstruction of these adventures *are* a way for her to display local culinary connoisseurship for global readers. The way food is generally mobilized according to Germann Molz – eating to feel at home (eating familiar foods to feel connected to home whilst away) or eating to feel displaced (trying strange or unfamiliar foods to feel ‘exotic’ whilst at home)⁶⁸ – is rendered more complexly in Mayes. She consumes authentic Tuscan food (grows, cooks and eats it) as a way of ‘becoming’ more Tuscan and of increasing her sense of belonging there, then she reconstructs these authentic food experiences to enable her readers back in the US to feel deliciously displaced through vicarious tastings.

By including recipes in all three of her memoirs, Mayes seeks to display her insider knowledge of local Tuscan cuisine for global readers by presenting collectible, consumable experiences of difference: “Food materializes a cosmopolitan sensibility toward the world. Indeed, we might

⁶⁸ See Germann Molz (2007) on how foods and foodways create belonging or estrangement.

think of foods as cosmopolitan objects that travel” (Germann Molz 2007: 90). This ‘travelling’ of material culture involves a process of transculturation in which Mayes acts as interpreter for readers who lack her intercultural mastery. In her first memoir, *Under the Tuscan Sun*, she devotes a chapter to “Summer Kitchen Notes” and another to “Winter Kitchen Notes”, with a chapter on “Spring Kitchen” appearing in the second book *Bella Tuscany*; each of these culinary chapters presents a dozen or so of Mayes’s favourite Tuscan recipes organised according to the Italian meal cycle of *antipasti* (appetizers), *primi* (starters), and *secondi* (main courses) with comments on how to adapt these recipes for American kitchens. She uses imperial measures (ounces, cups, quarts) instead of metric units, and provides cooking temperatures in Fahrenheit not centigrade. Moreover, she notes that “Italians wouldn’t consider risotto or pasta a main course, but for *us* often it is” (*UTS*, 135).⁶⁹

Mayes’s telling use of the inclusive pronoun ‘us’ here, in the first memoir, signals a strong identification with American customs still; by her second book, this pattern of identification has shifted as she develops a more locally-defined perspective, stating: “Anselmo’s idea of tomatoes is my idea of tomatoes” (*BT*, 273). By her third memoir, *Every Day in Tuscany*, recipes appear randomly scattered throughout the book, often at the end of chapters but not necessarily linked to that chapter’s theme. Mayes appears confident her readers have, by now, vicariously absorbed enough local culture to have educated their palates; they no longer require recipes to be framed by chapter headings organised into seasonal offerings, nor by commentary providing cultural insights on different food protocols.

A more conspicuous display of cosmopolitan ‘distinction’ is conveyed in her references to Chez Panisse and Oliveto’s, restaurants in San Francisco and Oakland, California, where she is on a first-name basis with star chef Paul Bertolli. By engaging in some obvious name-dropping, Mayes flaunts her personal connection to Bertolli in statements like: “Anything Paul cooks I will eat”; “He knows I’m somewhat squeamish”; “I was allowed to assist him in the kitchen a few times”; “He was one of our first guests here [Cortona] and helped us set up our prototype kitchen” (*BT*, 162-3). Furthermore, she prefaces a recipe for “Paolo’s Fennel Fritters” with the claim, “this is his recipe, just as he handed it to me” (*BT*, 163), which suggests a lack of contrivance, an unmediated authenticity. It is unclear, though, why she feels compelled to perform a transliteration of his name (from Paul to Paolo), unless the affectation is intended to lend Italian ‘authenticity’ to an imported recipe. Clearly, this is an instance of “staged

⁶⁹ Italics do not appear in original; emphasis is my own.

authenticity” (MacCannell, 1999) in which the otherness of a foreign culture is sampled by eating exotic foods; for her readers, Mayes’s recipe provides a chance to *imaginatively* ingest ‘authentic’ Tuscan flavours through vicarious travelling and tasting.

Through her non-celebrity references to Anselmo’s *cucina povera* or simple, peasant tradition of Tuscan cooking, as well as her name-dropping displays of Bay Area connections, Mayes seeks cosmopolitan distinction in both senses: locally (Tuscany) and globally (California). These divergent symbolic associations reinforce the notion that food is both culturally placed (a site of dwelling) and displaced (a site of flux), as suggested by Cook and Crang’s (1996) concept of “displacement” which emphasises the interconnections between place and mobility, between dwelling and travelling. They view foods as “not only placed cultural artifacts, but also dis-placed, inhabiting many times and spaces which, far from being neatly bounded, bleed into and indeed mutually constitute each other” (1996: 138).

Mayes, in fact, mobilises food in both ways to achieve ‘distinction’ in a layered sense. Folks is critical of the way she appropriates cultural difference in service of her quest for an identity makeover, claiming that “Mayes’s persona is on a sort of raiding expedition – the countryside is the site of forays in search of gourmet foods, wines, crafts, and decorative items to buttress her sense of personal gratification” and suggesting that her ‘food fixation’ is a bourgeois exercise in controlling the senses (2004: 103-4). He further observes that she presents her Tuscan lifestyle as “a consumable intended for conspicuous display”, only pretending to valorise cultural difference, “all the while ruthlessly exploiting its own economic advantages” (2004: 103). To the extent that her readers perceive her Tuscan recipes as ‘authentic’, food grants a non-touristic status to Mayes; however, this culinary performance is somewhat contrived. As Alù (2010: 292) notes, foods function in her texts as “souvenirs” offering traces of authentic experience.

Mayes’s journey of becoming ‘at home’ in Italy involves moving beyond her immediate domestic sphere of home renovation and culinary exploration, and engaging with place through a local-global nexus of social relations. In the twenty-year span chronicled in her trilogy, her status shifts from an intermittent resident whose initial engagement with local culture is touristic, to a more permanent fixture in the community whose engagement moves toward the dialogical. After several years in Italy, Mayes begins to see and understand events unfolding around her, leading her to claim: “Now that I know this one place a little, I read with doubled perception” (*UTS*, 152). In *Bella Tuscany*, she claims: “It’s a lifetime quest, finding out who

‘the other’ is, and how life is lived outside your own thin skin” (BT, 203). Although Mayes becomes more adept at reading place and understanding differences over time, her initial readings of Tuscans and of Tuscany are limited, offering a monological interpretation of cultural difference.

Her idealising and essentialising of Italian Others is displayed in the following description of Cortonese market vendors:

It is a miracle to see Pompeii, Machu Picchu, Mont-Saint-Michel. It is also a miracle to wander into Cortona, see the young couple at their fruit and vegetable shop. She arranges a pyramid of lemons in a patch of sunlight. She wipes each leaf with a rag so that it gleams. She’s fresh-faced and young in her pink-striped apron, probably trying hard to look like a proprietor. Her long and delicate neck gives her the air of having just landed after flight. He looks like the flute player on the wall of an Etruscan tomb – curly black hair, cherubic face. He sets out the baskets of peas he has picked this morning in his mother’s garden, then halves a watermelon and tips it up in the window so anyone can see how ripe and delicious it is. She places her sign above the cash register – all the vegetables for minestrone can be ordered a day in advance and prepared by her at home. Each customer is lavishly greeted. If you want three pears, each one is selected and held out for your inspection. I have entered for a moment daily life in a place I don’t know, and the red pear held out to me in a work-hardened hand will come back in memory over and over. Immortal. (BT, 207-8)

Mayes’s picturesque portrait of the couple is decidedly detached; her position is clearly that of observer recording details of an encounter mostly in an impersonal narrative voice. Although she projects herself into the scene with the line, “I have entered for a moment daily life in a place I don’t know”, her primary role is not as an engaged participant, and the overall effect of the passage is static. She quite clearly does not *know* the place or people yet. The nameless couple appears passive and flat as though framed in a still-life tableau. They are given no vocalisation through dialogue; the personal pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she’ create distance, treating them as generic rather than individual.

This static quality is further accentuated by isolating the man in time through the use of similes and adjectives, “He looks like the flute player on the wall of an Etruscan tomb”, and by presenting disembodied images of the woman’s “long delicate neck” and “work-hardened hand”. They are portrayed in an active service role – polishing the fruit, arranging the baskets, greeting each customer – yet the overall effect of the construction is passive. Parkins (2004: 262-3) notes that in Mayes’s portrayals, “Local Tuscans embody eternal verities but are mostly encountered through service transactions rather than closer interpersonal relationships [...] The

‘strange’ subjects she encounters serve as exemplars, heuristic devices, not subjects with whom to connect in community”. This insight is an accurate reflection of Mayes’s depiction of the Cortonese market vendors who function as exemplars of idealised Tuscan life; like their market items, they are polished purveyors of local authenticity, poetic images not real people.

This idealising strain is further evident when Mayes seeks to convey Italian uniqueness in both aesthetic and behavioural terms:

On one boy, I spot a Dante nose. The red-gold hair of one girl falls in Botticelli curls. They look so charming, classical poets reincarnated and walking among us. The lovely La Primavera’s friend suddenly laughs, mouth wide open, head back. I can see his molars. How they talk with their bodies! They bend, gesture, smack each other on the back. Their responsive faces are lit. What’s that spark in the DNA and why don’t other cultures have it? If I had another life, I’d definitely want to be an Italian student with that Renaissance hair. (*EDT*, 35)

The boy with the Dante nose, the girl with the Botticelli curls, the vivid gesturing and talking that is part of Italian DNA – these are cultural stereotypes masquerading as essential truths in Mayes’s representations. She looks for cultural essence in disembodied parts (nose, hair, molars) and substitutes aestheticisation (‘La Primavera’s friend’) for intimacy; she seems less interested in real connection with Italians and more in rendering poetic images which serve her artistic purposes. Whilst purporting to envy their beauty, grace and gusto, her descriptions actually reify the distance between self and other, thus gesturing toward but falling short of valorising cultural difference.

A further example of this essentialising tendency is evident in Mayes’s initial description of her neighbour, Placido, who appears episodically across her trilogy:

I have begun to idealize his life. It is easy for foreigners to idealize, romanticize, stereotype, and oversimplify local people [...] – but what I idealize is that Placido seems utterly happy. Everyone in town likes him. ‘Ah, Placi,’ they say, ‘you have Placi for a neighbour.’ He walks through town to greetings from every door. I have the feeling that he could have lived in any era; he is independent of time there in his stone house on the olive terraces with his peaceable kingdom. To reinforce my instinct, he has appeared, my Rousseau paradigm neighbour, at our door with a hooded falcon on his wrist. [...] This sport certainly does nothing to subtract from my impression that Placido lives across time. I see him on the white horse, falcon on his wrist, and he in en route to some medieval joust or fair. (*UTS*, 198-9)

According to this impression from her first memoir, Mayes perceives the person more as a paradigm than a flesh-and-blood man; what makes him individual is less apparent than what

makes him iconic. Placido initially exists for Mayes outside of time and is paradigmatically a-modern: a kind of ‘noble savage’ who communes with falcons and horses, lives in a stone hut and appears perennially “happy” in his peaceable kingdom. Commenting on literary travellers’ depictions of Italian ‘Others’, Parkins notes: “The representation of the exotic everyday in this literary tradition, especially as embodied in the essentialized figure of the peasant ‘other’ [...] positioned Italy as an Arcadian backdrop against which the existential dilemmas of modernity could be illuminated and explored by subjects from elsewhere” (2004: 258).

Indeed, whilst Mayes acknowledges the impulse in travel writing to “idealize, romanticize, stereotype, and oversimplify local people”, she nonetheless gives way to this touristic tendency then seeks to justify her own idealisation with a qualifying phrase (beginning with ‘but’), suggesting that her use of essentialisms is somehow acceptable. This treatment is indicative of the way characters in her texts function as heuristic devices: for Italy to remain a utopian idyll removed from the strains of modernity, it must be populated by ‘happy peasants’ like Placido who live in bucolic settings and do not suffer the existential anxieties of modern life. Mayes does not go beyond the reified rays of her Tuscan sun to reveal the multiplicity and complexity of Tuscans; instead, as Folks suggests (2004: 103-5) she treats locals as “Disneyesque figures of modern bourgeois imagination” and surrenders to a “Mediterranean myth” that posits Tuscany as “a dream-world of charming expatriate experience – dinners on the veranda, shopping for local crafts, encounters with warm-hearted locals” (2004: 103). This sentimental treatment masks an insidious materialism and complacent dream of bourgeois self-gratification which render her interactions predominantly self-referential and superficial.

The tension between reality and idealisation in Mayes’s narrative style is characteristic of travel writing, in general, which seeks to educate and entertain readers by portraying the foreignness of foreigners through depictions which rest on an identity/difference logic. Ross observes that Mayes’s actual engagement with Italian society is limited and, in consistently representing Italian ‘Others’ in a one-dimensional way, her texts reiterate standard colonialist stereotyping of the native (2009: 45). Indeed, in setting up a binary relation between herself (and her readers) as sophisticated urbanites and Tuscans like Placido as uncultured peasants, Mayes enacts a distancing gesture which Spurr (1993: 76) identifies as a strategy of colonialist discourse designed to call into question the civility of ‘Others’. Even though Mayes here attaches a positive value to Placido’s uncultured simplicity, to his uncorrupted, ‘natural’ way of being outside modernity, this conceptual construct closes off the possibility for complexity in his

representation.

In striving to capture the essence of Tuscan life, Mayes is ready to sacrifice realism for a poetic image of Italian authenticity. Toward the end of *Tuscan Sun*, she asks: “Doesn’t everything reduce in the end to a poetic image – one that encapsulates an entire experience in one stroke?” (*UTS*, 264). This rhetorical question signals her narrative *modus operandi*: her search to capture the essence of a thing in a poetic image; to render experience paradigmatic. By striving for representations that distil the essence of Tuscan life, Mayes ends up producing neo-colonialist depictions of ‘Others’; whilst this narrative impulse runs throughout her trilogy, it is more prevalent in the first book.

This tendency to idealise the past is also apparent in her reflections about time and how it operates in Tuscany. She says, “I was drawn to the surface of Italy for its perched towns, the food, language, and art. I was pulled also to its sense of lived life, the coexistence of times that somehow gives an aura of timelessness” (*UTS*, 268). It is not that time stands still there, nor that all Tuscans are a-modern, but Mayes notes how layers of time coexist in Italy in a way they do not in North America:

In these stony old Tuscan towns, I get no sense of stepping back in time that I’ve had in Yugoslavia, Mexico, or Peru. Tuscans are of this time; they simply have had the good instinct to bring the past along with them. If our culture says burn your bridges behind you – and it does – theirs says cross and recross. [...] Present and past just coexist, like it or not. (*UTS*, 159)

She is obviously one who ‘likes’ this multi-layered sense of time and finds it one of the great strengths of Italian culture, yet in seeking to capture its essence in narrative form, her representations tend to fix characters in the historical past or freeze them in ahistorical time. A case in point is her claim: “Qualities those of us with northern blood envy – the Italian insouciance and ability to live in the moment with gusto – I now see came down straight from the Etruscans. All the painted images from the tombs seem charged with meaning, if we only had the clues to read it” (*UTS*, 187). In attempting to praise contemporary Tuscans for their ability to ‘seize the day’ and live in the moment, she summons up their Etruscan past and places them on an uninterrupted continuum from antiquity to the present, creating an effect of timelessness which distances them from her and her readers (‘we’), who presumably lack a framework of reference, the necessary cultural clues “to read” time on such a protracted scale.

This tendency to associate characters with the historical past is further evident in her portrayal of one of the labourers who helps her with the grounds maintenance at Bramasole:

To our joy, Francesco Falco, our caretaker of the olives, joins us. He's the quintessential olive picker in his rough wool pants and tweed cap, basket strapped to his waist. He sets to work like the pro he is, picking more than we're able to. [...] We pause for a coffee but he keeps picking. [...] At seventy-five, he has the stamina of someone half his age. The same stamina, I suppose, that gave him the strength to walk home to Italy from Russia at the end of World War II. (*UTS*, 209-210)

Mayes's description freezes her character in time through a focus on traditional habits of work and dress which are presented as "quintessential" of an Italian way of life. Falco is depicted in terms which are collective ('olive picker', 'war veteran'), not individual, and as representative of a generation that eschews the bourgeois valorising of *la vita lenta* (with its coffee breaks) for an older tradition of hard work on the land. Alù observes that in recent expatriate travel narratives, Italy is "not only thought of as a space to see and explore, but is also conceived as a place wrapped in its own past. Faces, customs and landscapes are very often discerned as frozen in an unchanging, reassuring, temporal and spatial dimension" (2010: 289). She further notes that by participating in traditional rural events (folkloric festivals) and practices (olive picking, grape harvest) as well as recording older inhabitants' memories of the Second World War, foreign writers seek to adapt to place and adopt its collective history and memory; in other words, foreigners seek to enact cultural belonging through "iterated performance" (2010: 293). By depicting her Italian characters as timeless and unchanging, Mayes seeks to stabilise her own identity by positioning it within an idealised place where space and time function in a protective way, insulating her from the anxieties of modern life through connection to the past.

Generally, Mayes's narrative style tends towards static representations which suspend time as illustrated through her repeated invocations of the *genius loci* of Bramasole and, more generally, of Cortona in her representation of Tuscan spaces across the trilogy. She refers repeatedly to *la nonna* – an imaginary figure of her own confabulation, a kind of Ur-granny who acts as a presiding spirit over Bramasole and symbolises its present owner's link to the past. Mayes muses: "I'm sure she [the original *nonna*] gathered wild fennel, dried the yellow flowers, and tossed the still-green bunches onto the fire when she grilled meat" (*UTS*, 77), and later she adds: "The fennel flowers I've been drying on a screen go in a painted tin I found in the house. Perhaps the *nonna* I've grown fond of kept hers here, too" (*UTS*, 287). Mayes's routine invocation of the old woman's presiding spirit is an attempt to connect herself to the history of the place, a place she has no blood connection to nor cultural claim on. Parkins notes that the

nonna “represents an Italian feminine essence that Mayes attempts to embody anew in the house, signalling an innate connection with the place that transcends mere ownership” (2004: 261). By projecting herself into an imaginary ancestral line and projecting the approval of the imaginary *nonna*, Mayes endows her ownership of Bramasole with a contrived historical and cultural legitimacy.

She also projects the presence of other Tuscan *genius loci* such as Luca Signorelli, the Renaissance master and one of Cortona’s native sons. On a cosy first-name basis with this exemplar of Tuscan culture, she greets his painted self-portrait in a café in piazza Garibaldi, calling out ‘Buongiorno Luca’ to the spirit that “always presides over my morning coffee libations” (EDT, 14), adding, “he’s an old friend by now. [...] I could offer Luca a *caffè* if he would just open the door and with a toss of his yellow hair, stride in. He’s here; he never left” (EDT, 15). Like Signorelli, a local magistrate who presided over the rhythms of piazza life in Cortona, Mayes is drawn to its core, claiming, “The piazza, for a Roman, for Signorelli, for me, for that baby in the red stroller, exists as a great old savings bank of memory. It *is* a body; it *is* a book to read, if you are alive to its language” (EDT, 15). Projecting herself into an imaginary timeline of Cortonese ‘alive to the language’ and able to *read* local culture, Mayes anoints herself here with an insider’s perspective; through an imaginative act of will, she achieves a cultural legitimacy she could never aspire to in genuinely authentic terms.

The qualities Mayes so admires in Signorelli’s art – “the life-force he infuses into form, and, most of all, his passion for individual faces [which] gives him a visceral energy” (EDT, 186), each face unique, each “so revealed; [...] so close an observer was he that you see his locals in the piazza today” (EDT, 186) – are sadly lacking in her own writing. Her artistic representations of Tuscans do not succeed in channelling Signorelli’s “visceral energy”; her characters remain faceless, more iconic than real. The propensity for producing archetypal representations of Italians, one of her stylistic signatures in the Tuscan trilogy, comes from her nostalgic longing for connection with tangible relics of recorded history. Her obsession with the Roman well on her property, with the stone wall that dates back to the Etruscans, with her house’s other ancient features – not to mention the pages she devotes to itemising the artistic holdings of various museums in Tuscany – indicates a deep desire for the past. Not only the historical past erased by modernity, but also the “lost origins” which many Americans experience, that is, their perceived lack of a cultural connection to the recorded past in comparison to Italians’ sense of layered

history.⁷⁰

Mayes's commitment to the 'poetic image' which distils Tuscan life to an essence derives, in part, from her belief that archetypes are a "means of life" (*UTS*, 187), timeless representations which reveal lessons from the past in order to teach us how to live in the present. She states:

It's a deep wish of philosophers and poets to search for theories of eternal return and time past being time present. Bertrand Russell was closer when he said the universe was created five minutes ago. We can't recover the slightest gesture of those who chopped out this rock, not the placing of the first stone, the lighting of a fire to make lunch, the stirring of a pot, the sniffing of an underarm, the sigh after lovemaking, *niente*. We can walk here, the latest little dots on the time line. Knowing that, it always amazes me that I am intensely interested in [...] how everything matters intensely even as it is disappearing. (*UTS*, 175)

This is the clearest articulation of Mayes's narrative impetus – her commitment, even against her own better sense, to seek out continuity between past and present, her nostalgic need for an integrated semiotic system in which signs ('olive picker') still have a motivated connection to their significations ('pre-modern way of life'). Hers is arguably the dilemma of all postmodern subjects who attempt to anchor their personal identities in traditional places and practices which, although already disappearing, are construed as timeless and immutable; Parkins notes that such nostalgic investment signifies "the fragility of cultural identity and belonging for contemporary postmodern subjects" (2004: 267). In narrative terms, it results in Mayes's failure to render the complexity of Italy and Italians in favour of essentialisms which serve her self-interested poetic purposes.

A shift in narrative sensibility and style is demonstrated in Mayes's later work when she re-introduces Placido, this time in terms which give a more rounded impression of the man. Not only is he Mayes's nearest neighbour in Torreone, but along with his wife, Fiorella, and daughter, Chiara, the Cardinalis are her dearest friends, her "Italian family" (*EDT*, 26). She adds:

When we first bought Bramasole, we'd hear their [Cardinalis'] parties, the singing long into the night, hoots of laughter. From the window I could smell smoke rising from the grill, count cars parked all along the road. We'd wonder if ever two foreigners might be included in such an evening. Hundreds of shared dinners later, the Cardinali family still symbolizes the most profound reasons we love this place. (*EDT*, 28)

⁷⁰ Silvia Ross comments on how possession of a Tuscan farmhouse is a way of appropriating "lost origins" and a cultural history that provides roots to a place not otherwise accessible to expatriate American writers (2009: 55).

The Cardinalis' legendary hospitality, their convivial natures, their easy neighbourliness are traits she comes to appreciate close up as a participant, not just an observer on the edges of community life in Cortona. The sense of alarm she experiences when Placido falls from his horse and spends several months in hospital recovering is real and palpable; she worries about the man, not the image. Upon seeing him again, she finds him "thinner, with a crease on either side of his smile, but he's [still] Placido" (*EDT*, 28). His creased smile is a significant shift in detail from the previous straw portrayal of an "utterly happy" Rousseauesque figure and marks a post-lapsarian turn in Mayes's text: Placido becomes humanised through suffering.

Later, Mayes notes: "In the months of his illness, we faced how unbearable it was to imagine Cortona without Placido. For us, he's a great love and the essence of Tuscan life" (*EDT*, 28). The unthinkable loss of her friend helps Mayes render a more human portrayal of the real man who is loved for his personal qualities *and* for being iconic of a way of life she idealises:

Every morning, all year, he's having coffee at Banchelli's, often a second with another group of friends. He's a husband, in the old sense, to his land and animals, tending his falcon, horse, chickens, rabbits, and guinea hens. With his friend Lucio, he combs secret areas to find more porcini mushrooms than anyone. He makes archery shields and pouches out of leather. [...] Always on his porch there's a bird or owl he's rescued. The cages he makes for their recoveries are works of folk art. A *merlo*, blackbird, with a crushed wing has lived in a jolly yellow and red house for fifteen years. It whistles as Placido passes. (*EDT*, 28)

The qualities of the 'slow life' are clearly evoked here through Placido's everyday way of living: convivially in a close-knit community; as a husband to his farm; as a forager who knows the land; as an artisan who crafts objects of great beauty; as a modern day St. Francis who lives close to nature and whom the creatures praise in song. This passage displays how in her later writing Mayes begins to present less reductive portraits of the people and places she comes to know through sustained residency. Although his portrayal is more layered here than in her earlier constructions, Mayes cannot quite resist the tendency to idealise and romanticise Placido, rendering him symbolic of Tuscan authenticity; he still functions as a heuristic device, as an embodiment of essential Italian verities. Tending toward paradigmatic representations of Italians, Mayes' narrative style remains less fully dialogical than Hawes's or Park's.

Her failure to render the complexity of Italy and Italians is strikingly apparent in an episode of 'misreading landscape' in rural Tuscany in the second book in her trilogy. Describing the countryside in terms of comfort, repose and aesthetic pleasure, Mayes says: "I can rest here

marveling over the hummocky hills, cypress-lined road, cerulean skies with big baroque clouds that look as if cherubs could peer from behind them” (*UTS*, 54). Clearly, bucolic Tuscany serves Mayes’s artistic purposes as a poetic image – in opposition to hyper-modern California – but this picturesque portrait does not scratch the surface of the region’s complex culture. Tuscany is not just a rural idyll for transnationals seeking escape from modernity in uncontaminated landscapes; it is a real place in which traditional and modern practices intersect, and where postmodern subjects interact. This tension is made explicit when Mayes confronts an aspect of the Tuscan landscape at odds with her poetic idyll:

In this blissful landscape we are suddenly stunned to see a tall African woman, dressed in tight striped pants and a revealing red shirt, standing on the roadside. Around the next bend we see another, this one equally statuesque and curvaceous. She stares. Every few hundred feet these women are stationed along the road. They stand or sit on wooden crates. One eats a bag of potato chips. Then we see a parked car, with no woman near her crate. This is surreal. Prostitutes out in rural Italy. [...] Bizarre and disturbing because this makes no sense in the Arcadian valley of the upper Tiber, which appears in the backgrounds of paintings, this dreamy route known as the Piero della Francesca trail. (*BT*, 90-91)

It would have been easier for her to ‘make sense’ of real cherubs peeking out from baroque clouds in the Tuscan sky than to comprehend the presence of African prostitutes along a rural Tuscan road. She is unable to theorise the full dynamics of globalisation in this region: how global flows of people and capital result in both her own presence there as an affluent American second-home owner as well as the presence of African sex-trade workers.

More surprising is her refusal to acknowledge that her construction of the ‘good life’ in Arcadia is an idealised one shaped by a selection of white, middle-class influences and preferences (including Piero della Francesca – early Renaissance painter from Arezzo in Tuscany). She sees the prostitutes as intruders who disturb the bucolic integrity and peaceable authenticity of the Tiber valley, as though it exists as a place outside time. For Mayes, rural Tuscany must remain a retreat from modernity and its influences; the presence of African prostitutes subverts her construction of it as an idealised site inhabited by coherent and homogeneous locals (whom she counts herself among) in contrast to postmodern society’s heterogeneous influences.⁷¹ Mayes here falls prey to the pitfalls of cosmopolitan mobility which Hannerz (1990) warns of in critiquing those who experience cultural difference merely as a reflection of the self in a kind of solipsistic loop, achieving the illusion of mastery with no new cultural knowledge gained.

⁷¹ Doreen Massey analyses the idealisation of place and the desire for fixity and security of identity (1994: 146).

Her difficulty in reconciling reality with idyll in her Tuscan accounts is further highlighted when a threatening incident at Bramasole blurs the opposition she has projected between peaceful Tuscany and violent America. Upon her regular returns to Cortona following periods in San Francisco, Mayes notes a general ebbing of tension: “Three weeks after my arrival, I realize I’ve let down some guard that is so instinctive to me, living in an American city, that I don’t realize I have it. Literally, my pulse slows” (*UTS*, 88). However, when a stranger leaves a hand grenade on her lawn at Bramasole, her Tuscan idyll explodes and the binary construct which underpins it collapses. Her retreat to a country villa near Cortona no longer offers peace and solace from the “craziness and violence and downright surreal aspects of America” (*UTS*, 88) since rural Tuscany is also contaminated by the anxieties of modernity.

Although the grenade is disposed of and no one is injured, Mayes suffers an existential crisis as she is forced to confront crime and its implications on her own doorstep. She manages to ignore the prostitutes in the countryside by avoiding the particular rural road where they work; she is not able to ignore this problem: Bramasole is no longer the shelter or refuge she had imagined as it too is vulnerable to contemporary problems. When Mayes subsequently discovers that the motivation behind the thwarted attack was personal – a local inhabitant’s grudge against her for opposing the construction of a public swimming pool along the road near Bramasole – her projection of Cortona as an “ideal community” of like-minded, convivial locals is further challenged.⁷² The grenade incident so disrupts her idyllic construction that she considers leaving Tuscany altogether; her ‘peaceable kingdom’ feels hostile and inscrutable, and she lacks the ability to interpret the complex layers of community life and of local history to make sense of the reality around her.

Her decision to stay marks a defining moment in her twenty-year process of acculturation; henceforth, she divides her Italian life in two periods: *before* (the grenade) and *after* (the grenade). These are also useful tags for charting the development of a cosmopolitan consciousness in her social interactions – *before* (tourist/outsider) and *after* (settler/insider). The event marks a dramatic shift not only in how she perceives her environment but also in how she is perceived by it. Taking stock of her situation, she must account for the way her intermittent

⁷² See Iris Marion Young (1990: 300) on the dream of an ‘ideal community’ which expresses “a desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort”. Young points out two main problems with this dream: first, that it tends to erase differences; second, that it privileges a rural model of social organisation and negates the city and the potential for transformative politics in mass urban society.

residency as well as her fame as an international bestselling author have conditioned her social interactions in Cortona. In this process, she discovers that suffering creates solidarity and cements her acceptance in a real community, not just the idealised one she had been imagining (*EDT*, 89-90).

Neighbours, friends, and Cortonesi who were strangers act in a solicitous, sympathetic and reassuring way following the incident. A barrier seems to come down as Mayes is taken into their fold: she too is now the victim of local bigotry and petty squabbling. Mayes notes:

What became clear over the ensuing months was that our relationship to the town changed. From the day we arrived, we were overwhelmed by friendliness and hospitality. We'd always felt totally welcome. But while we'd felt a belonging before, we got the sense that the people just now knew we really belonged, that we were here to stay, and that since we knew the worst, we could become not just *residenti eletti*, elective residents, but familial. '*Cari, siete cortonesi.*' My dears, you're of Cortona. [...] Previously, I'd often been pulled aside and told a personal story. 'You can write about that,' the teller would say proudly. [...] *After* – the level of confidences didn't double, it cubed. I didn't even know I was on the outside looking in until I was suddenly on the inside looking out. (*EDT*, 90)

By experiencing community on a completely different level, she realises that, "Learning from another culture is one of those mysterious movements of the psyche [...] you learn what you need to unlearn" (*EDT*, 282-3). After spending her adult life in San Francisco learning to be "monumentally self-reliant" (*UTS*, 274), Mayes must learn to be part of a community in Cortona, its cycle of obligations and favours. This shift requires her to move from a position of disengaged observation to a position of engaged participation in Beck's sense of cosmopolitanism as a practice of the "dialogical imagination" (2002: 18).

2.3 Accommodation – everyday life

Over time, Mayes builds a sense of belonging in Cortona, a place which she claims is both home and "more than home – bull's eye, heart's needle, center of my private universe" (*EDT*, 1). Her sense of rootedness there leads her to proclaim, "I don't need a celestial paradise; I'll take my immortality here" (*EDT*, 62), a statement which signals her long-term investment in Tuscany, foreseeing it even as her final resting place. Bramasole, she says is like "a living thing" because it "evolves, changes, remains itself at core" (*EDT*, 66). This is also an apt metaphor for Mayes's narrative perspective across her trilogy: it evolves and changes over time, becoming more adept at deciphering the particularities of place, yet it is not capable of rendering the full complexity of place since an essentialising core remains intact. Identity, for

Mayes, is something stable, like the fixed point her house occupies; this perspective signals the limits of her cosmopolitan engagement.

Whilst an index of change is revealed over the twenty-year span of her three memoirs, it is both modest and incremental; Mayes's engagement with place remains mainly touristic. She learns local practices such as how to plant and pick by the moon (*UTS*, 202); how to garden, not just decorate with floral arrangements; how to cook without measuring (*UTS*, 134); how to improvise her days instead of making incessant lists. She claims that "real life" (life in the US) "feels remote" and that she has "gone native" in Tuscany (*UTS*, 132-3), indicating a shift in her own sense of belonging. Living on the land in rural Tuscany, she learns to "bury the grape tendril in such a way that it shoots out new growth" (*UTS*, 12), an obvious metaphor for the way her own transplanted life is renewed in Tuscan soil. Yet, even in her third memoir, Mayes's narrative style maintains a self-referential focus rather than a dialogical engagement with community. The extent to which the knowledge she gains of rural Tuscany is actually internalised rather than merely appropriated remains questionable. This static quality is apparent across her trilogy: a tension exists between a commercial discourse and a cosmopolitan discourse but, in the end, her narration tends toward 'lifestyle writing' that produces idealised portrayals of place rather than dialogical encounters with difference.

This is exemplified when Mayes and her partner consider renovating Bramasole after twenty years of residency there then opt, instead, to purchase a second Italian home, Fonte delle Foglie, a mountain house high on Monte Sant'Egidio above Cortona. Initially viewing it as an investment property to lease out to summer guests, Mayes becomes so "fatally attracted" to its "lonesome beauty" that she cannot ever imagine giving up this remote outpost that offers a refuge from ever-encroaching modernity (*EDT*, 4-5). Not surprisingly given her nostalgic leanings, the mountain refuge has roots dating back to the 1200s and is a "holy spot" associated with St. Francis of Assisi whose hermit followers lived nearby on the mountainside in caves; that it is surrounded by an old-growth chestnut forest home to wild boar, pheasants and "five kinds of owls"; that a Roman road crests the mountain above the stone house (*EDT*, 5) – all this is to be expected given her penchant for possessing relics of history.

The motif of 'escape' persists into the third memoir, along with the symbolic value of the mountain house as a green-world retreat: "This [Fonte delle Foglie] is where I came for comfort when we experienced at Bramasole our own private terrorist incident. This is where I come now

for the pure joy of loving a place so purely itself” (*EDT*, 119). The aestheticisation of Italy as a rural idyll thus continues well into Mayes’s twentieth year of foreign residency, as does her artistic inclination to associate Tuscan objects and people with the past. Her statement, “I have the joy and the hell of having restored to itself something so ancient, and the luck to become friends with deep-country Tuscans” (*EDT*, 6), indicates that her quest for authenticity in 2010 remains largely unchanged from 1990. She now turns to “deep-country” Tuscany as a refuge, presumably because other areas (like Cortona) have become too touristic since the 1990s due, in part, to the ‘Tuscan Sun’ effect produced by her own presence there, which she neglects to account for.

There is no self-conscious reflection in her trilogy about the problems posed by her quest for ‘authenticity’ in local culture framed by a nostalgic association with the past. The accoutrements of the ‘authentic’ Tuscan lifestyle which insulate her from modernity (objects, artifacts, people) derive cultural value from their embeddedness in traditional *local* culture which, in fact, is accessible to postmodern transnational consumers like Mayes only through processes of globalisation. Her lack of critical commentary on the local/global dynamics underpinning her lifestyle, and her own privileged position within this system, is a significant oversight in her writing, one which undermines the credibility of her cross-cultural observations, rendering them more superficial than insightful. After twenty years in Italy, her primary focus remains interior arrangements rather than the layered and textured world outside her two stone villas.

Mayes’s constant striving to reduce complexity and incongruence to simplicity is captured in her comment: “Simplicity, an elusive goal, feels within reach as I arrange three pecorino cheeses on grape leaves I’ve cut from abandoned vines, as I roast a pan of knotty pears, or lay my three porcini on the hearth for grilling” (*EDT*, 59). In this snapshot of her Tuscan table, she evokes an aesthetic that is spare, essential, and ordered. For her, ‘simplicity’ is not unbridled, unadorned nature, but something more considered and contrived: the three cheeses arranged just so atop the hand-snipped grape leaves exemplify a carefully-arranged composition, a well-wrought minimalism. Seeking to shut out modernity with all its confusions and complexities by creating a domestic idyll based on ‘simplicity’, Mayes pursues her slow living ethos mainly through interior design and décor.

The emergence in the late-twentieth century of a new cult of domesticity – an obsession with domestic spaces and practices, with cooking and eating, with home renovation and décor, with

‘cocooning’ and ‘slow living’ – in reaction to the increased dematerialisation, detraditionalisation and dehumanisation associated with globalising processes, has invested the house and private domestic practices with heightened value.⁷³ Cullens (1999: 219) points to the “sacralization of the domestic” and Cieraad (1999) to the “emotionalization of domestic space”, concepts which are palpably at play in Mayes’s description of the everyday rhythms and rituals of her Tuscan life.

At Bramasole I learned to iron with my hands. Fold and smooth, fold, then smooth, fold, smooth [...] Folding laundry, sun in my hair, the basket stacked – the ritual of preparing the clothes seems like an offering to the household gods. Warm laundry, carried aloft, distributed among the rooms, brings a particular solace. All’s right with fresh towels, snowy underwear, and a bed that welcomes the body. (*EDT*, 58)

In California, Mayes’s “all-consuming job” makes her feel that “housework is a nuisance”, a “waste of time” (*UTS*, 95), whereas in Cortona, she learns to “take pleasure in polishing a pane of glass to a shine” (*UTS*, 98). Hand-folded sheets, sun-warmed towels and the rhythmic motion of mundane household tasks are nostalgic consolations which evoke a sense of comfort and solace, reinforcing the notion of home as shelter from the dislocation of urbanised, mechanised living.

This contemporary focus on ‘lifestyle’ is also evident in the general proliferation of shelter publications and television shows devoted to interior home design and renovation over the past two decades. Cullens (1999: 204-5) analyses the trend, citing popular periodicals such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, *House and Garden*, *Interiors*, *House Beautiful*, *Architectural Digest*, interior design spin-offs of the fashion magazines *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Marie Claire*, as well as glossy books on interior design by publishers such as Taschen, Stewart Tabori and Chang, and Rizzoli. In addition, recent home renovation and relocation shows such as *Get a New Life* (BBC2), Channel 4’s *A Place in France*, *Relocation Relocation*, *A Place in the Sun: Home or Away?*, as well as *Escape to the Country* (UKTV Style) focus on lifestyle makeovers through property acquisition and renovation (often with images of ‘before’ and ‘after’) at times set in foreign locales.⁷⁴ These televisual narratives of relocation, like the printed textual versions, are stylistically hybrid – part travel reporting, part property market analysis, part DIY, part reality-

⁷³ This trend of “domestic sentimentalism” is a recent reconfiguration of the old cult of domesticity that arose in the late-eighteenth century as an attempt to revalorise the private domestic sphere and women’s role in the home in the wake of rapid industrialisation as well as political and social upheavals. See Cohen’s analysis of the “home as refuge” theme in the literary tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novel and the current domestic sentimentalism – Martha Stewart, Frances Mayes – which connects it to the new bourgeois culture of consumption (2005: 654-58).

⁷⁴ For further analysis of these televisual narratives of relocation, see Saggini (2005: 4) and Ross (2009: 53-54).

TV – and tap into the popular penchant for gazing into other people’s homes and lives by presenting mundane domesticity in a dramatised light; the storyline of personal transformation through home remodelling provides a narrative hook.

Viewed together, contemporary shelter publications and television programmes promote a common narrative of identity formation based on consumption: ‘lifestyles’ are acquired through the purchase of first a house then household furnishings. Studies on lifestyle emphasise its link to consumerism, suggesting that the search for a better life within contemporary society is primarily constructed through consumer choices that enable individuals to give concrete shape to their self-identities. Alù notes (2010: 286):

Travelling abroad – but also merely moving to the countryside – the modern (middle-class) individual hunts for vestiges of traditional living and unspoilt places where s/he can invest in the art of lifestyle by purchasing a property. The aestheticisation of life continues in the act of writing through which reality is transformed into images. Once the new traveller-settler has found the place of his or her wishes, s/he displays his or her experiences in a memoir in which a fantasy scenario is made desirable for the reader-consumer.

Displaying the aesthetic choices one makes about one’s house, furnishings and household practices is a way of cultivating ‘distinction’; clearly for Mayes, home-making and identity-making are interrelated processes across her trilogy. The attributes of slow living that guide her choice of home décor and household practices – a domesticity which she then displays for readers in texts promoting a Tuscan lifestyle – can be interpreted as markers of ‘distinction’.

Frances Mayes does for Tuscany what Martha Stewart does for New England: by elevating domesticity on an aesthetic pedestal, she invests everyday household objects and practices with special meaning and desirability. Detailing her own Tuscan lifestyle choices, she contributes to the branding and marketing of ‘Tuscany’ through an aestheticisation of the everyday.⁷⁵ Mayes describes the rustic minimalism of her Cortona home: “The fourteenth-century hermits who lived on this mountain still might approve of our white rooms so far: beds, books, bookcases, a few chairs, a primitive table. Big willow baskets hold our clothes” (*UTS*, 92). Of her remodelled kitchen she says: “it looks as though the kitchen always could have been this way [...] the floors are waxed brick, the walls white plaster, and the ceiling has (oh, Ed’s neck and back!) dark beams. [...] The baskets from the market hold utensils and staples. [...] The *signora* who lived

⁷⁵ For an analysis of the aestheticisation of the everyday, see Alù (2010); Cohen (2005); Cieraad (1999); Cullens (1999); Massey (1994); Parkins (2004); Sarup (1996).

here a hundred years ago could walk in now and start to cook” (*UTS*, 123). Mayes conjures the approval of imagined figures from the local past to lend ‘legitimacy’ to her position as a foreign homeowner there and ‘authenticity’ to her interior renovation and design choices.

Remarking on Mayes’s home furnishings, Parkins asks: “But why antique Tuscan sheets? Why not – for Mayes – traditional American quilts? What is the significance of the nostalgic investment in the cross-cultural object?” (2004: 267). The answer resides in the fact that whilst all domestic objects and practices are indexical of specific social status and cultural tastes, *foreign* domestic objects and practices are rarer and so imbued with cultural cachet and high desirability. In a way, foreign domestic objects function as ‘souvenirs’ which, according to Susan Stewart, are objects that speak in a language of longing as they arise not “out of need or use value” but from “the insatiable demands of nostalgia”.⁷⁶ Parkins similarly notes: “Cultural objects, such as furniture and cookware and even the farmhouse itself, become indexical of high status and cultural value through their age and wear – their *patina*” (2004: 261). The coveted ‘patina’ is one that has been authentically faded through age and the elements. Upon her return to Cortona following a period of absence Mayes comments: “The house looks as if more sun soaked in during these months I’ve been gone. The finish that faux painters all over creation are trying to perfect, the seasons have managed admirably” (*UTS*, 51).

Mayes is eager here to convey to readers that her house is art, not artifice; its patina is not *faux* but authentically-aged through long-term exposure. An authentic ‘finish’ is a special marker of distinction for those (like Mayes) who can afford it, but a distressed look – often labelled ‘vintage’ or ‘shabby chic’ in lifestyle magazines – can also be acquired through cheaper reproductions available through mass-market merchandising, including Mayes’s own line of Tuscanesque home furnishings.⁷⁷ She is not opposed to reproductions; in fact, when a friend gives her a second-hand wrought-iron patio table and chairs – “the Moravia table” – she applies “a fresh coat of that blackish green paint you see on park furniture in Paris” (*UTS*, 92). Although the ‘Parisian park patina’ comes from a tin, it is oddly at home in her Tuscan garden setting since its aesthetic attributes are complementary: the finish distances the object itself from modernity by investing it with special value through nostalgic associations with times past as well as places (Paris) and people (Moravia) of considerable cultural cachet.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Quoted in Alù (2010: 293).

⁷⁷ Mayes has a line of Tuscan-style furniture for Drexel Heritage, a collection called “At Home in Tuscany” that includes reproductions of antiques from her personal collection.

⁷⁸ Appadurai (1993: 22) addresses “the subtle shift of patina from object to its owner” and how this “transposition of temporality” works to ensure legitimacy.

In keeping with Scott's (2004) theory of nostalgic longing for an 'integrated semiotic system', these patinated objects act as 'signs' which seek to connect consumers to nostalgic 'significations' – to traditions and rituals that have been lost (or nearly lost) in contemporary society. Mayes admits to an American preference for 'old things' versus the Italian taste for novelty, and remains incredulous upon discovering a Roman well on her property that "anyone is allowed to own such ancient things" (*UTS*, 23). In a comment aimed at Martha Stewart but equally applicable to Frances Mayes, Cohen notes: "Martha sells nostalgia, whose very definition is that there is no going back. Kitsch [...] is ultimately the art of happiness in a world without transcendence. It is grounded in everyday material existence and cannot be imagined without the purchase of Omnimedia-like props" (2005: 670-1). The cross-cultural objects and domestic practices associated with Mayes's Cortona home are, in part, nostalgic props that enable her to promote the fantasy of escaping modernity.

Conclusion – too much Tuscan sun?

Mayes's evolving sense of belonging as charted in her accommodation process across three memoirs is signalled in her statement toward the end of the third book: "I came to Italy for the art, the cuisine, landscapes, history, architecture, wine, and the ineffable beauty. I stayed for the people" (*EDT*, 179). Sadly, her trilogy spends much time cataloguing all the lifestyle advantages of Tuscany and arrives only belatedly to 'the people', seeking more direct participation and membership in communal life in Cortona only after the grenade incident recounted in her third memoir. Throughout her narrative reconstruction, her self-transformation is enacted mainly by way of accoutrements of *la dolce vita*, namely the house and household practices through which she constructs an Italianate self.

Ironically, Mayes fails to realise the self-referential nature of her own writing and criticises D.H. Lawrence for his incessant complaining about the inconvenience of travel in Italy in *Etruscan Places*, appreciating his observations only when "he totally disappears from the text and just writes what he sees" (*UTS*, 182); this statement is a supreme example of the pot calling the kettle black, signalling Mayes's lack of self-criticism and inability to escape her own narcissism. Lawrence's Mediterranean accounts are not merely extensions of the self, but as Folks observes, "a meeting of self and place" (2004: 105) which give voice to a critical reflection that does not surrender to the myth of the Mediterranean. Mayes, by contrast, is unable to go beyond a narcissistic treatment of place that serves her own consumer interests. The qualities she so admires in Masaccio's frescoes in Florence – "Masaccio had a powerful

sense of character and narrative and a sharp eye for placing the human in space” (*UTS*, 219) – are qualities she is incapable of reproducing in her prose style: her depictions of Italy and Italians are flattened by an essentialising strain which sacrifices realism in pursuit of idealised representations.

Commenting on the distinction between Lawrence and Mayes, Folks observes:

What draws the reader into Lawrence’s books is the utter sense of candor. Even the inevitable disappointments of travel – the dullness of inconsequential towns or the misery of bad food or bleak weather – claim the reader’s interest, as Mayes’s specious, excessively charming account does not. [...] Lawrence knows the secret that travel writing – all writing in fact, if it is to be any good – is not *about* the place but *of* it. (2004: 106)

The commercial discourse of self-transformation through consumerism running through Mayes’s texts impedes a deeper, dialogical engagement with Italy, one that probes beneath its surface realities. Hers is a touristic construction of Tuscany which seeks, in MacCannell’s words, to “overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience” thus attempting to assuage the feeling of incoherence that afflicts the modern subject in the West (1999: 13). Criticising the anti-modern aesthetic in Mayes, Alù (2010: 299) similarly notes: “For the female foreigner the new domestic space – and its representation in her text – embodies a social desire to express herself through her abode. [...] Through their books, these [foreign female writers] sell a fabrication and fabulation of their experience which, nevertheless, has the power to reinforce the imaginary anchoring of their selfhood.”⁷⁹ Mayes’s attempt to anchor her sense of self in nostalgic domesticity through an idealisation of the past and an aestheticisation of Tuscany and Tuscans produces an airbrushed idyll far removed from everyday reality. By positioning herself *outside* modernity, Mayes fails to produce situated readings of place.

She is an “ideal observer” in Lugones’s sense of a post-cultural subject who, from a privileged vantage point, observes and essentialises other people’s cultures in a totalising vision and remains “pure, unified and simple so as to occupy the vantage point and perceive unity amid multiplicity” (1994: 464-5). Mayes, in fact, demonstrates a limited cosmopolitan “willingness to engage with the Other” in Hannerz’s sense of participating in the host culture with “an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences” (1990: 239).

⁷⁹ For an overview of women’s travel writing on Italy from the Grand Tour to the present and an analysis of shifting textual strategies and methods of representation, see Giorgia Alù (2010).

Parkins notes that “for all her painting, weeding, cooking and shopping”, Mayes essentially remains a tourist in Tuscany; she maintains a home in San Francisco and treats Cortona as a regular health spa, failing to realise the transformative potential of encountering otherness in Italy (2004: 263-4).

After twenty years in Cortona, the narrative persona in her trilogy remains largely fixed and unchanged: a free-floating cultural connoisseur more interested in displaying an Italianate self and the cultural paraphernalia acquired through a transnational lifestyle than in engaging deeply with cultural differences. Parkins suggests that the ‘examined life’ Mayes invokes at the outset of *Under the Tuscan Sun* and the ethical project of ‘learning to live a different life’ which she embarks on, is mostly achieved through “conspicuous consumption and employing the labor of others” (2004: 259). In the end, despite its modest movement towards a more dialogical understanding of difference in Book Three, hers is just another story of house renovation, long lunches, and quirky village characters and customs which seeks a nostalgic evasion of the real world.⁸⁰ Although Mayes self-identifies as a settler, not a tourist, the lifestyle she presents in her texts falls short of real engagement in a genuine community, one which exists as something more than a self-created idyll to suit her poetic interests.

Commenting on Bauman’s (2001: 70-72) two notions of community in relation to Mayes’s Tuscan books, Parkins (2004: 263) identifies Mayes’s treatment of Tuscany as a *carnival community* with “a festive but ephemeral sense of community that reconfirms individual autonomy without connecting [her] to a web of long-term commitments and responsibilities associated with the *ethical community*” which is based instead on dialogical engagement. Indeed, throughout most of her trilogy, Mayes treats local Tuscans in a self-referential way, “as part of the landscape or the payroll”⁸¹, instead of deepening her social bonds through mutual obligation, shared knowledge and respect, and convivial interactions sustained over time.

This failure to develop a cosmopolitan orientation is a problem of privilege. Parkins notes: “Expatriate cosmopolitans like Mayes not only display and embody the cultural capital of global postmodern subjects, but simultaneously – and without apparent contradiction – that of the traditional, ‘authentic’ subjects of their new location, through their acquisition of objects, as well as practices” (2004: 261). Mayes’s form of engagement with everyday life is one of

⁸⁰ Parkins (2004: 259) makes this claim about Peter Mayle whose stories “set the conventions for the many subsequent accounts of life in Italy”, including Frances Mayes’s.

⁸¹ Parkins (2004: 264).

simulating local knowledge by appropriating the attributes of local culture whilst remaining outside and immune to it; though she pursues a slow lifestyle, she fails to become a ‘slow subject’ whose social interactions are based on recognition of equality in difference (Parkins 2004: 264). Although the arc of accommodation to *la vita lenta* her texts map out leads toward greater participation in locality, the potential for integration in an ethical community is largely unrealised; Mayes’ development of a cosmopolitan orientation is clearly a work in progress.

Providing a record of her personal quest for a better life, Mayes’s Tuscan trilogy presents the opportunity to think ethically and creatively about lifestyle choices in late modernity, revealing how new forms of mobility and belonging are reshaping cultural interactions and representations. Whilst Parkins is sceptical about the potential for lifestyle migrants to produce situated readings of place, she claims: “While the economic and cultural privilege that enables subjects to choose slow living (and write books about it) needs acknowledgment, so too does the complexity of affect and desire in our everyday life practices and the contexts of global culture” (2004: 268). Though Frances Mayes does not fully realise a cosmopolitan orientation that addresses such complexity, her trilogy moves in that direction. Hers is a markedly more limited engagement with cultural difference than Hawes and Parks demonstrate in their relocation stories, as will be examined below.

Chapter 3 – Annie Hawes’s Dialogical Depictions

“I hope we shall soon emancipate you from Baedeker. He does but touch the surface of things. As to the true Italy –he does not even dream of it. The true Italy is only to be found by patient observation.”

E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*

Introduction

Annie Hawes’s Ligurian trilogy follows the familiar trajectory of relocation narratives: she moves from London to Liguria searching for a better quality of life; next there is a house to restore, a garden to tend, DIY skills to hone, fascinating locals and local customs to decipher, and local delicacies to consume. Her memoirs fit the pattern of ‘great escape’ narratives which describe escaping to a place in the sun and finding personal fulfillment amongst olives, lemons and sundrenched Mediterranean views, a narrative formula which achieved popular success in the 1990s with an audience of would-be-travellers eager to vicariously taste the ‘good life’ abroad.

Although Hawes’s *rustico* comes with fifty olive trees, goats in the garden, sweeping views of the Mediterranean, and wild mushrooms, fennel and asparagus to forage on her patch of hillside, it is not quite the rural idyll readers might expect. In fact, Hawes is uncomfortable with the label ‘Englishwoman in Italy’ and with being seen to promote Italian rural life as a pastoral paradise.⁸² Her house under the Ligurian sun is not a holiday hideaway but is her primary residence; she is not a tourist but a settler whose relocation tale avoids redeploying touristic clichés about Italians or romanticised depictions of Italy. Her books are populated by locals who are rounded and real, and by everyday situations that reveal the irritations as well as attractions of rural life in a close-knit olive-farming community.

Hawes’s Ligurian trilogy spans a twenty-year period of monumental change in the life of Diano San Pietro, a hillside community in the province of Imperia, two miles inland from the Mediterranean coastal resort of Diano Marina. Beginning with her arrival there in the mid-1980s, she chronicles a series of economic and social upheavals as this hill town, distant enough from the sea to have

⁸² In an interview with Clare Rudebeck in *The Independent* (2003), Hawes claims feeling misidentified as a hawker of dreams rather than a chronicler of real life: “I find the British notion that Italy is this perfect paradise place quite alarming. I don’t like being turned into part of it.”

remained insulated for decades from the economic prosperity and social fashions associated with coastal tourism, undergoes a belated modernisation: shifting from a nearly-defunct agriculture-based economy, to economic revitalisation through tourism and foreign holiday-home ownership, and finally through the “renaissance of the olive” brought on by EU farming subsidies and back-to-the-land tourist tastes. The first two of Hawes’s travel memoirs, *Extra Virgin* (2001) and *Ripe for the Picking* (2003), trace her own process of accommodating to life in Liguria within the context of the aforementioned economic transformation of the area, whilst the third book, *Journey to the South* (2005), charts her visit to Calabria and broader reflections on Italy’s north-south internal divisions.

A subtle people-watcher, Hawes writes with affectionate detail about the place and its people in a warm and easy-going style that rings with humility and self-mirth. She chronicles episodes of everyday life and the kinds of misunderstandings that arise when realities and expectations collide across a spectrum of social practices. She highlights, for example, Italian coffee orthodoxy, English bathing habits, customs involving the use of home remedies, the antics of foreign guests and their not-so-cosy encounters with locals, and her first-hand experience of traditional Ligurian courtship rituals. The moments of connection and mis-meeting these encounters elicit, characteristic of face-to-face social relations in traditional communities, are compelling precisely because of their novelty for urbanites like Hawes (and her intended readers) accustomed to the individual anonymity of metropolitan life. Although her books are filled with anecdotes about quirky locals and their customs, she does not merely reproduce clichés of exotic others but seeks, instead, to contextualise cultural differences and demonstrates that preconceptions work in two directions. Overall, her trilogy is not as much about escaping to a tourist’s paradise as about living everyday life in a different key. She reveals the ‘Italian dream’ to be quite ordinary, in fact, and her focus throughout the trilogy remains an examination of this ordinariness within specific place-based contexts and social configurations.

These shifting landscapes provide Hawes with scope to reflect on the interplay of global and local cultures in different external settings, yet her narrative is driven by a series of more personal transformations which mark her experience of migration. Read together, Hawes’s three memoirs map out an arc of accommodation as she moves from the position of sojourner to settler, tracing the knowledge of self and the knowledge of place gained through a protracted process of acculturation. Predictably, settling in an adopted homeland is not a seamless process: her deeper epistemology of self and other is acquired through a series of upheavals arising from both external change and internal growth as she learns to live on the land in rural Italy.

As a transplanted Londoner in Liguria, Hawes is both a cultural insider and outsider; this liminal position grants her a rich double-perspective through which to decode the local/global dynamics in San Pietro and beyond. Her reconstruction of this interplay is shaped by a narrative dialogism which rescues her account of the everyday from banality. Mining individual moments for their universal import and demonstrating the broader socio-politico-cultural implications of particular events, Hawes is able to translate local experience for global readers by setting the particularities of place in context. In this way, her narratives achieve a nuanced form of cosmopolitanism, one in which ‘Made in Italy’ authenticity is not exoticised but is, instead, presented as multi-dimensional.

As Diano San Pietro undergoes a process of modernisation in the 1990s triggered by the collapse of the local agricultural economy and the growth of tourism, Hawes unpacks the intracultural and intercultural implications of this economic and social transformation through her encounters with ‘others’ which form the basis for her interpretations of Italy, Italians and Italianness. Unlike Mayes whose narrative style tends towards essentialisms and idealisations in depicting Tuscans and Tuscany, Hawes does not presume ultimate authority or totalising certainty in portraying cultural difference; instead, she demonstrates a migrating sensibility and ability to revise her perceptions over time, producing multifaceted representations which do not reduce complexities to clichés.

These situated readings of place underscore a narrative dialogism that runs counter to the univocal inscriptions of otherness that shape the binary logic underpinning travel writing as a genre.⁸³ Hawes sidesteps the tropes and conceptual categories of colonialist discourse, revealing the complexity of the people and places she encounters, as well as her own shifting standpoint in everyday life in Italy. ‘Cosmopolitanism’ has been described by Held (1995: 103) as “a willingness to engage with the other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.” Studies on migration and globalisation suggest that the more individuals engage in border-crossing activities and transnational social networks, the more likely they are to adopt cosmopolitan attitudes and orientations.⁸⁴ Hawes’s cosmopolitan outlook evolves over twenty years; it is an intercultural competence which she develops as she moves from being a tourist to a settler in Liguria.

⁸³ For a recent critique of the colonial/neo-colonial vision operating in contemporary travel writing, see Lisle (2006).

⁸⁴ See, for example, Hannerz (1990); Kwok-Bun (2011); Robertson (1992), Roudometof (2005).

3.1 Confrontation – Italy through touristic eyes

Hawes's initial confrontation with social and cultural differences upon arriving in Liguria is chronicled in her first book, *Extra Virgin* (2001). Beguiled by images of the Italian Riviera, Annie and her sister, Lucy, seek to 'escape to the sun' on a working holiday in Liguria:

No more miserly damp horizons stopping twenty feet away at the nearest office block. Here they stretch up into the misty foothills of the Maritime Alps on the one hand, down into the intense blues vastness of the Mediterranean on the other. The sun shines warmly even at this unlikely time of year [February]; the sky is blue, and I am seeing plenty of both. (*EV*, 5)

Noting that a dreary London landscape is replaced by views of olive trees, vineyards and blue sea, Hawes summarily states, "Shepherd's Bush and Diano San Pietro are just incommensurable, that's all" (*EV*, 251). Although refraining from assigning explicit value to either locale through her guarded choice of the word 'incommensurable', her previous use of the adjective 'miserly' establishes a negative association with London. Initially, Hawes measures the relative advantages of life in Liguria as a tourist would, mainly along meteorological lines.

Liguria also figures in her memoirs initially as a utopian space where life can be enjoyed along simpler lines through close connection with the traditional practices and everyday pleasures of rural living. In reflecting on whether to buy Pompeo's *rustico* and build a home in Italy, Hawes speculates: "Attach yourself to a certain shack up a certain hill near a certain village, and then see what you can make of it. It would certainly eliminate vast swathes of the paralytically endless possibilities of life" (*EV*, 43). Her decision to buy the stone farmhouse and live on the land in San Pietro is presented as a decisive bid to escape contemporary life with its dizzying freedom and uncertainty. A reinvention of the Arcadia myth, this escape to the countryside posits the rural Italian farmhouse as a *locus amoenus*, or uncorrupted place, which seems to offer refuge from modernity through close connection to the land, to life's natural rhythms, and to genuine social relationships.

This rural retreat loses some of its lustre, however, as Hawes settles into life in her Ligurian outpost and comes to terms with what a 'pre-modern' lifestyle actually means. Preconceived notions of Mediterranean beauty and glamour are, for example, shattered: "Glamour, we soon spotted, was not the outstanding feature of the village of Diano San Pietro. As far as the crusty olive-farming inhabitants of this crumbling backwater were concerned, the Riviera, a mere two miles away, might as well be on another planet" (*EV*, 3). Instead of "Mediterranean fleshpots, sparkling seas, bronzed suitors with unbearably sexy accents, wild nightlife" the English sisters find a severe lack "of bright cosmopolitan life, of frivolity of any kind or, indeed, of anyone under forty" (*EV*, 4). In fact, Hawes

must adjust her preconceptions of Italian fashion to accommodate the “hanky-headed” folk of San Pietro whose social behaviour, as signalled by their idiosyncratic dress code, appears to her touristic eyes as acutely anachronistic:

In San Pietro a woman does not wear shorts and a T-shirt. [...] No: she wears an apron, a calf-length tube, ankle socks, and slippers. Her menfolk go for the faded blue trouser held up with a string, aged singlet vest which is not removed in the midday heat [...] but rolled up sausagewise into a stylish underarm sweatband, leaving the nipple area modestly covered while the solid pasta-filled midriff is exposed to the pleasantly cooling effect of any chance bit of *aria* that may waft by. (*EV*, 4)

Hawes’s early impressions as a newly transplanted Londoner are characterised by a tone of derision in depicting Ligurian farmers as ‘backward’.

Claiming that her heirloom copy of the *Blue Guide to Northern Italy*, even though “30-odd years out of date”, is still useful since “things haven’t changed overmuch here since the 1950s” (*EV*, 17), she uses sarcasm deliberately to emphasise the distance between observer and observed thereby deploying an ‘us/them’ opposition. Her deliberate use of negative stereotyping at the outset of *Extra Virgin* deploys a self/other logic that relies on the representation of ‘primitive others’ as exotic. By setting up a binary relation between herself (and her readers) as sophisticated urbanites and Ligurians as uncultured peasants, her early work illustrates the rhetorical mode of ‘negation’ identified by Spurr (1993: 76) as a distancing gesture used in colonial and neo-colonial discourse to call into question the civility and/or civilised sophistication of others.

Though geographically proximate, the social distance between her hillside home and the coast is further highlighted through Hawes’s use of negative adjectives in characterising Diano San Pietro as ‘crusty’ and ‘crumbling’ whilst deploying expressions such as “not”, “instead of” and “lack of” to underscore the apparent absence of any dynamic qualities associated with village life. In stark contrast, Diano Marina is ‘sparkling’, ‘sexy’, ‘bronzed’ and ‘bright’, associations clearly more in line with touristic expectations of the Mediterranean coast. She emphatically notes: “You could easily believe that the level crossing between Diano Marina and the rest of the Diano villages was not a mere level crossing after all, but the gateway to a parallel universe” (*RFP*, 153). Her further claim that an “Olive Curtain” (*EV*, 267) divides the two places signals a clear-cut distinction between centre (Marina) and margin (San Pietro), between urban (Marina) and rural (San Pietro), distinctions rooted in their different economies of scale and their related social norms.

To further underscore this striking contrast between the two locales situated just two miles apart, Hawes uses irony and sarcasm in juxtaposing the economically and socially dynamic Diano Marina with its static counterpart, Diano San Pietro:

Down by the sea Diano Marina folk have consorted openly with visiting strangers ever since the elegant days of Wintering on the Riviera. No terrible retribution seems to have fallen upon them: in fact, a century or so of this wanton behaviour has left them looking rather sleek and prosperous. Up on the hillside though the grimly fascinating folk of Diano San Pietro prefer to meet the eccentric behaviour of strangers with a united front of appalled incomprehension. (*EV*, 3-4)

The phrase “sleek and prosperous” draws attention to the vitality and stylishness of Diano Marina, qualities which derive from its proximity to the Riviera and direct engagement with coastal tourism, whilst “wanton behaviour” is an ironic quip that mimics the village view of the coastal lifestyle. The Mediterranean coast is a transnational social space in which cross-border interactions and transactions have been normalised, resulting in the adoption of a more cosmopolitan outlook of openness to *stranieri*, foreigners.⁸⁵

Consequently, Hawes initially finds refuge there “from the brain-wrenching complexities of village life”, enjoying the freedom of individual anonymity on the cosmopolitan coast: “Here, refreshingly, we are objects of interest to no one, no longer weirdly foreign but generic strangers in a town used to *stranieri*. [...] Down there by the sea we have less of that feeling of living in one of those crossword puzzles where you have to work out the grid as well as the answers” (*EV*, 15). By contrast, transnational interactions are rare in the foothills of the Mediterranean hinterland where Hawes stands out among the ‘grimly fascinating folk’ of San Pietro who have little experience dealing with foreigners. In an ironic reversal of the us (civilised observer) / them (quirky local) dialectic, the observer becomes the observed as the close-knit inhabitants of San Pietro scrutinise Hawes’s every move and quickly label her a “weird foreigner”. This pattern also inverts the ‘escape’ motif in presenting the rural refuge as constraining and its coastal counterpart as liberating by virtue of urban depersonalisation.

Over time, Hawes learns to appreciate the closeness of traditional face-to-face interactions in a remote place like San Pietro, where survival historically depended on everyone knowing everyone else’s business and keeping foreigners at bay. As her summer sojourn stretches on into infinity, Hawes charts not only the “immense strides civilization is making up our hill” (*EV*, 190) as both

⁸⁵ Mau, Mewes and Zimmerman (2008:1-2) state that the extent of one’s *transnationalism* (individual engagement in cross-border mobility, transnational social relations and economic transactions) is a good predictor for the adoption of cosmopolitan attitudes (openness, tolerance and a mediating worldview).

internal and external forces lead to San Pietro's modernisation, but also her own widening and deepening perceptions of the place and its people. Yet, initially, coming to terms with the singular logic of village life is 'brain-wrenching' work as she struggles to 'work out the grid' or decode the intracultural differences between one village and another, as well as the intercultural dimension of her own interactions within these locales.

One aspect of this education involves learning, for example, that even in Diano Marina where she has come to expect greater freedom of movement and individual anonymity, there are still social rules to be followed and boundaries not to cross. At the Bar Sito, for instance, only tourists sit on the terrace facing the sea; locals sit at the roadside patio where they catch up on the day's events amidst clouds of exhaust fumes from passing motorists. Although Hawes prefers the sea-view and clean air, she is constrained to the roadside in the company of her Ligurian friends. There is also the issue of bathing etiquette: though topless bathing is perfectly acceptable in Diano Marina during the summer season, Hawes discovers that bathing of any kind is strictly forbidden before June.

Attempting to go for a swim on a warm March day, she is called back and scolded by a woman in a fur coat who warns her that she is "courting certain death" and advises a shot of *grappa* against the chill (*EV*, 16). Hawes finds such local orthodoxy wearing, stating: "How exhausting is this country? Everybody is so determined to save your life, and so full of fixed ideas [...] How do they think our Island Race has survived all these centuries without their advice?" (*EV*, 33).

Another significant cultural cleavage she confronts at the outset of her stay is Italian food orthodoxy. Lacking "a whole framework of reference" when it comes to how food is served and consumed in Italy – *antipasto, primo, secondo* – she initially makes the mistake of eating too much too early in a meal, never managing to get beyond the appetizer course. Her repeated food *faux pas* – putting salad on a plate with pasta; downing two (sometimes three) espressos in quick succession on an empty stomach; adding lemon to a tomato salad; trying to cook sausages over a flaming campfire instead of over *la brace*, the embers; doubting that Italian dogs actually eat pasta – elicit first the amusement then the concern of locals as they realise the depths of her culinary ignorance. Unable to save herself from many embarrassing admissions, she remains wisely silent about "The Boots Home Wine Making Kit" when questioned about British wine-making practices (*EV*, 245). Over time, she digests enough information about Italian 'proper eating protocol' to save herself from further public embarrassment, but she is struck by the pervasiveness of culinary obsessions.

Hawes comes to understand that not even her younger friends can be trusted to be more open-

minded when it comes to food:

This generation may have broken with tradition in all sorts of ways, be stern critics of small-town hypocrisy, of mindless clinging to tradition in matters like divorce, abortion, leaving home before marriage, drug-use, and practically everything else, but notions of Proper Eating are graven in stone. (*EV*, 145)

She notes that whereas the English have a propensity for being “mealy-mouthed”, wanting to finish their food shopping quickly and simply “get home”, Italians like to engage in an “in-depth discussion in public of exactly how you’re planning to cook whatever you’re buying” (*EV*, 189). This obsession creates a kind of food pressure which Hawes later feels a tremendous release from when she is finally able to cook for herself in private up at the *rustico*: “How refreshing it is to breakfast so far from anxious Italian eyes!” (*EV*, 71). Overall, she tolerates all the food scrutiny and unsolicited cookery advice, viewing it on a continuum with other forms of Italian insecurity masquerading as cultural superiority: “Here in Liguria you are surrounded by life-threatening terrors. Infection is as one with draughts and dampness and sea-bathing out of season and the awful things that will happen to your digestion if you don’t eat your food in the right order” (*EV*, 56). Her note of smug sarcasm betrays a sense of superiority in her own culture’s imperviousness to such perceived threats even though she acknowledges “the power exerted by peasant certainties upon a poor uprooted foreigner, cut adrift from the convictions of her own culture” (*EV*, 103). This fine edge of belonging/not belonging, made explicit through such confrontations with cultural difference, is a cultural fault line which Hawes becomes expert at navigating over time.

Her nascent negotiation skills are put to a practical test during her initiation to Ligurian life when she sees Italian food orthodoxy passing over into restaurant etiquette that confuses foreigners and threatens the success of her friends’ business. Maria, a local restaurateur who insists that customers book a table in advance, treats diners who turn up spontaneously with a measure of hostility, musing: “is it possible that the lives of *stranieri* could be so senseless and chaotic that they are unable to predict from one day to the next where and how they will be eating?” (*EV*, 37). Similarly, Ciccio, the chef, rewards customers who reserve in advance with a separate menu offering a wider selection of labour-intensive dishes not offered to those who appear without a reservation. This practice is, of course, understood by Italians but not by foreigners who fail to book a table then feel discriminated against with a more limited menu. Locals find the “structurelessness” of tourists’ eating habits, not to mention their wine drinking, both “inexplicable and offensive” (*EV*, 148). Putting her mediating skills to work, Hawes translates a printed explanation of the two-menu philosophy into three languages which she posts in the restaurant in an effort to save the tourist

trade. Whereas she can grasp both perspectives, the other parties remain inured in their respective incomprehension: tourists are infuriated with the practice whilst Ciccio and Maria simply cannot fathom their unstructured behaviour.

Another such cultural gap comes into relief over the matter of print culture. Hawes conveys the “horried talk” in San Pietro about the weird habits of foreigners “who come all this way just to sit about beaches and in bars *reading books*” (*RFP*, 161), and explains that “Italy is a nation that (a) is compulsively sociable and (b) buys fewer books than any other nation in Europe [...] reading is a social activity as far as Ciccio and company are concerned, a thing you do in bars, with newspapers” (*RFP*, 161). Hawes’s Anglo-Saxon reliance on print culture as a font of information for everything ranging from DIY advice, to gardening tips, to recipes and travel information is regarded as absurdly naïve by the villagers who view books as repositories of lies and deceit, whereas bars are seen as centres of reliable information. Though Hawes sees things differently, “there are more lunatics and liars in bars than on bookshelves” (*RFP*, 166), she has a hard time convincing others, least of all Ciccio who has a “deep-rooted distrust of the written word” (*RFP*, 283). She is further disappointed to discover that public libraries in Liguria are “archives” with no books in sight, “never mind the profusion of posters and community notices associated with libraries in my own land” (*RFP*, 159). This privileging of oral culture over the printed word is indicative of a society based on traditional face-to-face interactions and the fact that widespread literacy is relatively recent. Socialised outside this system, Hawes is reluctant to cede her view of the printed word as reliable and continues consulting books in private, meanwhile engaging in the local tradition of oral information-swapping in public. This adoption of a dual strategy exemplifies her growing intercultural competence as she learns to reconcile both traditional and modern approaches to knowledge sharing in village life.

The clash of cultural perspectives and practices comes into sharpest focus in Hawes’s narrative retelling of her acquisition of an old stone *rustico*, high up in the hills above San Pietro, with an immediate view of olive terraces and a swathe of blue sea in the distance. She cannot believe her luck in finding such “a seriously beautiful home, short though it may be on mod cons” (*EV*, 44), which she can afford with her summer earnings, no mortgage required. The prospect of so easily becoming a Ligurian homeowner contrasts sharply with her prior attempts at home ownership in London where she was deemed a “Bad Risk” and refused financing. Hawes was resigned that she had “absolutely no chance of getting [...] the home of my dreams” (*EV*, 4) until she stumbled upon a dream house in Liguria. For Hawes, owning a home and feeling ‘at home’ in a place are closely

linked, and she reflects that “San Pietro may correspond hardly at all to any idea I have previously formed of the Italian Riviera but it is undeniably a great improvement on London” (*EV*, 5) in terms of both its cost of living and quality of life.

Extra Virgin is prefaced by a flash-forward account of how Hawes becomes a homeowner in Liguria by falling prey to local *furbizia* or cunning. In a bid for readers’ sympathy, she positions herself in her tale as an unsuspecting outsider, guileless before the “cunning peasants and their machinations” (*EV*, 23), who is duped into spending all her summer savings on a wreck by a local wheeler-dealer named Franco (aka Frank the Knife). Although she deploys the trope of *insider* scheming versus *outsider* gullibility as a narrative hook to frame her story, it is clear that Hawes desires the hilltop ruin with a view and willingly allows Franco to talk her into buying Pompeo’s dilapidated farmhouse for just £2,000. Ironically, both parties feel the price is a steal, and the deal is sealed by mutual incomprehension: “Pompeo is selling fifty olive trees and a piece of arable land which just happens to have a useless rustic building on it. [...] We, on the other hand, are buying a lovely rustic dwelling with a large garden which just happens to contain fifty olive trees” (*EV*, 52). This mutual misunderstanding is the result of a clash between pre-industrial and industrial worldviews: one values the arable land; the other values the rustic abode and scenic views.

Such irreconcilable views become more apparent once Hawes takes up residency at the *rustico* and begins the work of renovating it under the watchful eyes of her neighbours. They simply cannot fathom why someone with no farming experience would *choose* to live alone on an isolated tract of land without running water or other basic amenities instead of lodging in town where life is more sociable not to mention more comfortable. The incomprehension of villagers arises, as Hawes notes, from an engrained cultural perspective: “No local people can see anything at all attractive about such a lifestyle. In the past it was a sign of the most abject poverty to have to live in isolation on your land; you would only do such a thing if you had absolutely no choice left in the matter” (*RFP*, 5). Seeing herself finally through their bewildered eyes, Hawes is forced to recognise the ineffably ‘English’ nature of her rural idyll:

None of them can get their heads around our idea of a country idyll, where you live in a house on your land, your vegetable patch outside the kitchen door, your fields (or, as it were, groves) visible from your windows, nothing but nature all around you. Here in Liguria, you live in a town or village, travel to work on your land as if it is a job. The idea of living alone and isolated up in the country is horrible, and totally foreign to them. English, in fact. On top of this, not a few of them have an alternative idyll where they escape the tedium of small-town Italy and run to London. (*EV*, 43)

Her pastoral dream is not only culturally out-of-place, but actualising it is also highly impractical. Her cavalier plan to “make the place a paradise, turn into old hippies, out-peasant the peasants” (*EV*, 63) comes across as naïve, middle-class, citified posturing given her limited knowledge of rural living. The sisters have no experience of farming, no familiarity even with how to clear their land of decades of overgrowth or how to repair the crumbling terrace walls of the olive groves, no skills either with lighting campfires or cooking over them. In short, Hawes must embrace traditional ways and pre-modern practices both materially and symbolically in order to renovate her Ligurian hilltop house and, by extension, build a sense of belonging in rural Italy. Living out her pastoral idyll in the hills of Liguria represents for Hawes a “decade-long steep learning curve in the matter of customs and lifestyle of an olive-farming community” (*RFP*, 2), one that involves, in part, “working our way through the birth of civilization step by technological step” (*RFP*, 106).

She reveals her complete ignorance of rural life early on when, taken on a tour of the property she is about to buy, she is shown two wells brimming with water and confesses: “as city girls born and bred we’ve no idea what a vital resource we’re being shown. We’ve never met a house without water; we’ve never had reason to consider how impossible a home would be without it” (*EV*, 58). Belatedly she comes to value the luxury of indoor plumbing once she experiences how “absurdly and unimaginable heavy” water actually is through the repeated effort involved in hauling it from the well up to the house several times a day (*EV*, 106). Consequently, Hawes and her sister also learn to appreciate the function of a windlass as something more than a touristic artefact of “ersatz picturesqueness”, as an indispensable technological innovation that would save them “no end of blisters and rope burns” and spare them the back-wrenching work of “heaving our bucket up hand over hand on its rope, muscles screaming as we try to stop the thing banging against the sides and losing half its contents before it gets to the top” (*EV*, 106). This lesson is part of what Hawes labels an “intensive hillside course in Great Technological Achievements of the Last Few Centuries and Why We Needed Them” (*EV*, 190) and is repeated in numerous scenarios as she settles into rural life and develops hands-on experience with the ordinary and tedious tasks of living on the land. In a humorous, self-deprecating style, she chronicles her lack of know-how and her dawning awareness of how vital technology is in saving both effort and time, finally confessing a lack of any qualms about re-conceptualising her rural idyll with some labour-saving ‘modcons’ added in.

As Hawes begins to shed her touristic assumptions about traditional rural living and develops a deeper epistemology of place, she is forced to adjust her preconceived notions about the so-called

backwardness of Ligurian peasants: all of them are, in fact, proud owners of the latest high-tech farming equipment and labour-saving devices. Ironically, Hawes cannot afford these and her earlier words prove prophetic as she is constrained to “out-peasant the peasants” after all, although now necessity has pushed her to overcome her distaste for new technology and her romanticised notions about the ‘picturesqueness’ of pre-industrial farming. Though she resolves to mechanise and “join the late twentieth century” (*EV*, 156), she discovers that strimmers, brush cutters, petrol-driven water pumps, rotovators and mulching machines do not come cheap. Not wanting to use up her savings or return to England to raise more funds, she decides to forego expensive tools in completing her repairs and renovations on the house with a low-cost but labour-intensive approach.

Deciding to make minimal changes and preserve her house’s rustic charm, Hawes reflects: “Our house is not a place to sit and admire the intricacies of the superior craftsmanship of days gone by. Its builders have made no attempts to disguise or civilize its materials, and you can see exactly how everything was made, and from what bits of the surrounding landscape” (*EV*, 72). She and her sister add a slightly uneven staircase, lime-wash the wood beams and walls to keep out insects, clear the land of decades of ‘dirt’, transform a cold storage area into a bedroom, and finally heeding Pompeo’s advice, rig up an *al fresco* shower area outdoors, giving up “the exhausting effort of moving washing water up to privacy” by instead moving “the body-cleaning zone down to the well” (2001: 107). Indoor plumbing is a luxury she cannot yet afford.

These modest changes which make her house liveable by providing basic necessities contrast sharply with the extensive renovations Mayes records in relation to Bramasole whose transformation is presented in a voluptuous account of each material change and its aesthetic value. Folks observes: “At its heart, the relationship of Mayes’s narrator to her subject is inauthentic because the speaker always has one eye cocked toward her potential audience, always with the suggestion that hers is the most enviable of possible experiences. In this sense, expatriation itself is a consumable, intended for conspicuous display” (2004: 103). Hawes’s motivation is the opposite: she does not flaunt her lifestyle makeover in Liguria as a middle-class marker of distinction through an idealisation of rural life, but reveals instead what it really means to live along pre-modern, anti-urban, un-mechanised lines.

Hawes’s Do-It-Yourself skills are further put to the test in a place that has no culture of DIY; she notes that “Ligurian peasants don’t consider themselves ‘non-professionals’ so don’t look for make-it-easy products” (*EV*, 173). Initially she muses: “I wish I was in England. I would go to a lovely

big DIY store and read the backs of all likely products, and I could ring up the manufacturers and ask for help” (*RFP*, 157). Instead of reading a how-to manual or picking up ready-made products, she learns about mixing lime with cement, about using diesel fuel to kill off a beetle infestation and countless other home-remedies from traditional peasant know-how circulated through oral culture. The main source of this ‘wisdom of ages’ is, of course, not any book but the local bar: “Agricultural information network, stock exchange, labour exchange, and Neighbourhood Morality Watch all rolled into one” (*RFP*, 195). And it is in the local bar that she recruits Ciccio, Paletta and Mimmo, local handy-men eager to escape the formality and tedium of Sunday lunches with their own families by helping her with the heavier work up at the *rustico*.

Overall, the reality of living on the land throws into sharp relief the contrast between Hawes’s expectations of an idealised rural retreat and her romanticised nostalgia for a simpler, pre-industrial time. She discovers that rural life actually leaves little time for leisure and quiet contemplation between the endless jobs around the *rustico*, many of which involve back-breaking labour and time-consuming home-remedies in the absence of efficient high-tech equipment or DIY products. Moreover, after many exhausting trips up and down the hill on foot, she finally understands why her neighbours have opted to live down in the village, close to shops and services, and why the tradition of a farmhouse dwelling never took root in the Liguria hillsides. Moreover, she gradually comprehends the wisdom of ages by experiencing first-hand why the motor replaced the mule and why farmers no longer stay over on their land during the olive harvest, preferring to stay in town and visit their groves by car or some other means of mechanised transport.

This dawning awareness of the realities of rural life as distinct from her romanticised projections also informs Hawes’s reading of place through other people’s accounts of the pre-industrial past. When Zio Antonio in Calabria describes waking at night as a child and finding his mother threading figs by moonlight, Hawes at first mistakes this for a pastoral mother-son tableau and not a terrible picture of times so desperate that “as long as there was any light at all to work by [...] she could never allow herself to sleep” (*JTS*, 226). Similarly, whilst she had previously romanticised Salvatore’s early life in the mountains of the Calabrian Aspromonte with a “Heidi-style notion about the child goatherd” (*JTS*, 287), Hawes subsequently sees how this fantasy elides the hardship he endured from long days spent outdoors with little food or basic shelter. By chronicling her own realisation of what actually lies behind the Golden Age allure of an Italian rural idyll, Hawes deftly unveils the fault line of appearance versus reality which she confronts in building a new life in Liguria.

Such considerable attention is directed in *Extra Virgin* towards detailing the renovations to her hilltop home that the book might be mistaken for a how-to manual on Ligurian farmhouse living. Yet, it is clear that the transformation of her wreck into a home must be read as a tale of self-transformation in which the home renovation acts as a metaphor for the process of self-creation she undertakes in building a new life in Italy. Like Bramasole is for Mayes, Hawes's rural farmhouse is simultaneously a material object which roots her to a new place as well as a figurative space which invites and compels her to imagine dwelling within cultural difference. Indeed, she learns to dwell in a foreign place by developing new ways of being and a self-reflexive sense of belonging through simple and authentic everyday practices like cooking, cleaning, weeding, watering, decorating and other tasks which shape her material reality. According to Blunt and Varley, these practices should not be read as merely mundane activities but ones with much wider implications since "situated within a range of complex meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships, geographies of home are important in both material and symbolic terms, and on scales from the domestic to the global" (2004: 4-5). Hawes invests meaning in her Ligurian home by drawing on the symbolic aspects of the material culture around her – house, garden, groves, hillsides, wells brimming with water – which act as strong emotional markers providing familiarity and security in a foreign environment.

Her deep connection to this material reality, to the physical objects and attributes of place, is tested one summer when her two wells run dry during a severe drought, a crisis which undermines her sense of security and of being 'at home' in Liguria:

I'm sick of it. Why don't we just give up this stupid place for good?
 Something's always going wrong, it's just too hard to survive up here. [...]
 I'm seriously demoralized by the no-water situation. [...] I'm giving in, I
 say, it was a silly idea anyway, trying to make a home in a vile parched
 hovel on an eyeball-searing desert of a mountain. (*EV*, 227)

Hawes momentarily loses her sense of belonging when her physical environment loses its familiarity and proves menacing. Whilst she maintains a grudge against the Municipality for mishandling the situation and failing to devise a drought-protection plan, her faith in place is largely restored once her wells are replenished with the next rainfall. Surviving the water crisis with the help of neighbours also reveals another important aspect of place, connection to community and engagement in habitual social interactions which provide individual validation as well as group identity.

Hawes's induction into the traditional web of social relations in San Pietro involves recognising the dualism of belonging and obligation. She observes: "On the positive side of the Belonging business, whenever anything goes wrong, someone we know, or someone who knows someone who knows us, is always there to help" (*EV*, 267). The transformation of her rustic house into a habitable home is symbolic of the heightened sense of belonging she gains as she sets down roots in San Pietro and becomes part of its social fabric. Although her sister departs for Bulgaria and Hawes is left alone on her hillside, her sense of belonging deepens as her social network solidifies. She develops a greater community-mindedness, learning an important lesson in social responsibility when her unkempt land nearly causes a wildfire to spread on her patch of hillside, threatening several properties. Succumbing to the local "cleaning ideal", Hawes dutifully trims back her wildflower beds and excess shrubbery, understanding at last that it is not about conformity to some puritanical hillside aesthetic, but about survival in an area prone to forest fires. Her recognition of the mutual responsibility and interdependence which characterise small communities is a clear sign of her accommodation to place and place-specific practices.

As Hawes's social network expands and her sense of belonging deepens, she learns to negotiate between diverse social realities whilst occupying a shifting standpoint within the nexus of these. The end of *Extra Virgin* hints at Hawes's blossoming romance with Antonio De Giglio, known to everyone as Ciccio, a local restaurateur whose Calabrian family initiates her into a broader sphere of belonging. Her encounters with traditional Ligurian courtship rituals and family life provide fertile ground for her to further explore the tension between appearance and reality and to produce ever more situated readings of place.

3.2 Negotiation – learning the lay of the land

Traditional rural life implies a particular form of social and familial organisation which Hawes begins to decipher as she settles into life in San Pietro as a resident. In *Ripe for the Picking* (2003), she grapples with the implications of her new role as Ciccio's *fidanzata*, girlfriend, which presents numerous occasions for intercultural exchanges with her adopted family and the inhabitants of San Pietro. An early lesson teaches Hawes to adjust her preconceptions of pastoral romance; on their first date, Ciccio takes her to visit the family groves and they spend a few hours repairing an outdoor stone oven using layers of manure and mud. This is not the occasion Hawes was expecting in dressing up for her date, but she learns that being introduced to the De Giglio family's land holdings represents "the stuff of true intimacy" (*RFP*, 71). She also learns the meaning behind the shorthand distinction "father's house" and "mother's house" (*RFP*, 72) – the former signifying the

important agricultural-based holdings owned by a family and the latter the village-based domestic space inhabited by its members – the first of many gendered distinctions which rural family life presents.

As Hawes is taken into the De Giglio family fold, she experiences both the advantages and disadvantages of ‘belonging’: on the one hand, her larder is continually replenished by Francesca, Ciccio’s mother, with home-made delicacies, and Hawes receives useful advice from her regarding gardening and other household tasks. On the other hand, she is pushed around good-naturedly by Francesca, enduring her repeated compliments for being “such a good simple girl” (*RFP*, 145) and is unable to say ‘no’ to small favours asked of her. She wryly notes that in Italian families, *la mamma*’s “role is bigger than the individual” (*RFP*, 193) and lasts a lifetime, with the result that children “go on living at home with their parents into their mid-thirties, or all their lives” (*RFP*, 119) and even when they “get jobs, get married, move into homes of their own, they don’t seem ever to become a separate unit” (*RFP*, 84). The figure of the Italian *padre/padrone* becomes clearer to Hawes too as she gets to know Ciccio’s father, Salvatore, noting that his generation was brought up “with the son under his father’s thumb, however old he was” (*RFP*, 190). She compares Salvatore’s parenting approach to agricultural pruning: “His idea of raising a son was like raising a fruit tree or something. Prune it back hard and you’ll get a sturdier specimen. And a better harvest” (*RFP*, 242). As maternal suffocation and paternal pruning come into clearer cultural focus, Hawes comes to see why living at home and working on the family land may not have been Ciccio’s notion of a rural idyll, and why he opted, instead, to open his own restaurant and move into his own apartment near the coast. His parents cannot understand this desertion, seeing it as yet another example of the erosion of traditional life by the forces of modernisation.

This generation gap is made explicit to Hawes during a series of agricultural seminars on “New Techniques in Oliviculture” sponsored by the *Comune* of Diano with EU stimulus funds for the regeneration of local agriculture in decaying mountain regions. Attracting an inter-generational audience of Ligurians, the elders are scandalised to hear from a young upstart that the traditional way of planting and harvesting olives is all wrong: rows of olive trees are too tightly packed for individual trees to get enough sun or enough water and nutrients from the ground; trees have been allowed to grow too tall, thereby wasting their olive-producing energy; beating trees with sticks to make the ripened fruit fall only damages the bark and makes trees more susceptible to fungal infection. Instead, farmers are advised to remove every second or third tree from each row, are shown a new pruning technique called the “drastic cut” which allows trees to regenerate after three

years and produce twice as much olive oil, and are encouraged to buy a rattling machine for harvesting. The older members of the community reject all this modern advice as “arrant nonsense” while the younger folk are swayed by the common sense and scientific data, viewing their elders as “Luddites” determined to remain ignorant (*RFP*, 296). Whilst Salvatore remains recalcitrant, Ciccio and his sisters are receptive to the innovative ideas and the financial incentives available through EU legislation for the creation of farming cooperatives; they decide to try out the drastic pruning methods on their own groves and to find twelve people with enough hectares to form a cooperative.

Hawes observes this clash of traditional and modern worldviews with wise impartiality as the debate hits so close to home. Given some latitude as a foreigner, she is held to different social standards and not fully expected to participate in the web of belonging and obligation that local culture imposes on its members. Reflecting on this double-edged dynamic, she states:

Of course we [foreigners] think it's great, all the traditional Italian stuff, piazza life, open bars, multi-generational *festa* nights. It's fine for us, we're not part of it and its social sanctions have no power over us. For our friends these are the loci of oppression, places where the smallest deviation will be noted, commented upon by the entire community, and traditionally, if you've embarrassed your family badly enough, punished with threats of removing your future livelihood. (*EV*, 91-92)

The suffocating scrutiny that attends being part of a traditional Italian nuclear family and rural community explains why Hawes's Ligurian friends like to escape to the English-style pub in Diano Marina where the windows are frosted and passers-by cannot see in: “far from prying eyes under the traditionally English low-vaulted ceiling, until the traditionally English closing time of four a.m., you can enjoy several hours of traditionally English anonymity” (*EV*, 92). Her ability to perceive why escaping village life for English-style sociability on the coast is so desirable to her friends is an example of the dialogical perspective she is developing through her deep immersion in place. Hawes's insights into social practices in Liguria are more textured and layered than Mayes's idealisations of rural living in Tuscany, displaying a cosmopolitan orientation which recognises complexity instead of reducing it.

Hawes's cosmopolitan outlook enables her to grasp the divergent worldviews at play in multiple contexts, including intergenerational but intracultural ones like that above, as well as intercultural situations. In her reconstruction of Anglo-Italian encounters, for example, she shows that varying habits of social behaviour elicit mutual incomprehension and reciprocal derision. Whilst she is an ‘outsider’ who initially pokes fun at the “San Peotti” for their sartorial sense and folksy ways, she is

also an ‘insider’ who respects the village dress code and social dictates, leaving her own “slinky holiday gear languish[ing] in [her] bag, untouched” (*EV*, 4). She is mortified by her English houseguests and the *brutta figura*, or bad public image, they create by parading around San Pietro in their beach ware, failing to understand the social norms inherent there: “In the village our friends are creating the effect of calculated rudeness, not unlike walking into someone’s living room and baring your bum at them” (*EV*, 267).

By transposing their modern values and habits into the context of rural village life, Hawes’s London friends express an individualism that is inappropriate in San Pietro where collective adherence to traditional practices is normative. Their behaviour might not attract attention on the coast, but in the villagers’ eyes, Hawes’s female visitors are “semi-naked Jezebels” with long fingernails who are of no use around the house; her male visitors are “limp-wristed and parasitic men” who swill litres of wine in mid-afternoon instead of helping with manual work around the *rustico*. Not only is their behaviour fodder for the “Diano Valley’s gossip and scandal machine” (*EV*, 272), it also reflects badly on Hawes and Lucy, as well as on “any local person who has adopted us as friends, embarrassing them deeply and casting doubt upon their judgement in associating with us in the first place” (*EV*, 267). This is the flipside of belonging, “the web of obligation and respect local culture imposes on its citizens” (*EV*, 267), and Hawes is keenly aware of her responsibility in upholding both ends of the social contract. She is increasingly aware of these differences and adept at mediating between divergent social and cultural realities which are place-based.

Hawes also develops a flexible approach to the seeming inconsistencies in social behaviour and cultural practices in her adopted homeland. Her own shifting views are highlighted through her reaction to the apparent inconsistencies in Italian adherence to structures and rules, for example. Whilst she notes Italians’ social conservatism and compliance in manners of proper eating and bathing, when it comes to official rules and regulations – planning permission for home renovations, school examinations protocol, reporting of income for taxation purposes – she discovers that they are uniformly nonplussed about breaking the rules. In the process of putting a new roof on her house, she learns from everyone that it is “more sensible” to circumvent bureaucracy by doing the job without planning permission and risk paying a fine if caught. This outcome is highly unlikely (unless one does something to upset a neighbour) since the government issues a regular *condono*, or amnesty, in which “you confess to any building sins you have committed and they are simply washed away” (*RFP*, 131). The common Ligurian practice is to do the ‘illegal’ work first, then wait for the amnesty to declare it. Despite this prevailing orthodoxy,

Hawes remains obsessed with “having things in official order” and is reluctant “to enter the fascinating house-of-cards world of local favours-and-obligations” (*RFP*, 275). Noting that such behaviour is on par with Italians’ love for “games of chance” (from lottery tickets to sports betting), she reflects that it is “completely alien to my own country’s mindset” (*RFP*, 318) and sense of probity regarding rules.

Hawes is given an opportunity to reconsider these cultural certainties, however, when she accompanies Ciccio’s younger sister, Annetta, to Rome to sit an official examination. Annetta is armed with her “exam skirt” in which she has sewn a hidden pocket to accommodate her crib sheets. The crib sheets themselves are not home-made but are printed in booklet form and sold in public bookshops. Each purpose-made sheet has a perforated edge: “You tear them off, sheet by sheet, and fold them up concertina-style so they fit perfectly into the palm of your hand” (*RFP*, 202). Annetta demonstrates the technique on the train as they head to Rome and, to Hawes’s amazement, everyone in their car lends a hand folding the sheets while reflecting on the progress in crib sheet technology since their own school days. Annetta explains the cheating orthodoxy: “Everybody cheats....If they catch you, they just tell you off. They don’t even confiscate your cheat-sheet unless you’re unlucky and get a grumpy one” (*RFP*, 202). The Anglo-Italian gulf of understanding is made explicit when Annetta, utterly guileless and trying to be sociable, proudly reveals her perfectly folded crib sheets to a horrified group of English and American students gathered for the exam. Attempting to translate their disparaging reaction, Hawes asks the bewildered girl to imagine a world “where it is actually more normal *not* to cheat than to cheat”, a hypothetical scenario which barely disguises her own cultural condemnation of Italian rule-breaking.

Here, Hawes’s narrative style verges on the rhetorical mode of “negation” identified by Spurr (1993: 76), in which colonial writers ascribe negative values (uncivilised, uncultured, dishonest, untrustworthy) to the Other. Yet, she strategically sidesteps this trope by presenting the issue of cheating from a different perspective, a native’s. Annetta can only imagine how terrible it must be to grow up “in a place where human fellow-feeling and camaraderie hardly exist”, in a nation of “cold-hearted moralists happy to betray their friends, colleagues or (in the case of exam supervisors) their own students, at the drop of a hat” (*RFP*, 208). Hawes subsequently recounts how Annetta puts her cheating skills to altruistic use in acquiring fake documents to assist a migrant friend who was being exploited in his workplace. By shifting the perspective from first to third person, she presents a more rounded picture of a cultural practice she personally condemns. She

then seeks to unpack the cultural context underlying the apparent ‘cheating orthodoxy’ in Italy. She is intrigued that this practice, whether applied to exams or to building codes, has a decidedly communal dimension – everyone knows that everyone else is doing it and turns a blind eye – which she attributes to the “compulsive sociability” (*RFP*, 307) of Italians who prefer to be in company than alone and who act with compassion for others in social life.

Although Hawes details aspects of this sociability which she finds annoying – the instinct to travel herd-like in a close convoy of cars instead of arranging to meet at a destination; the noisy, ten-course meals and incessant visiting that accompany all holidays; the collective conversations on trains with everyone speaking simultaneously at the top of their voices – she resists flat out cultural stereotyping by probing motivations and filling in social contexts, whilst self-consciously questioning her own cultural assumptions including the tendency of Britons to be comparatively unsociable and self-interested in their adherence to the rule of law. Through a dialogism of perspectives, Hawes reveals different value systems at play in these intercultural encounters, each coherent within its own cultural context; in so doing, she avoids reproducing simplistic us/them binary depictions that privilege one side at the expense of the other. Her narrative thus moves away from bounded notions of self and other to a recognition that is more complex, indeterminate and multi-layered.

Hawes also brings her layered lens to focus upon gender roles and their diverse cultural encodings in social interactions. She realises early on in her stay that feminism is not embraced as a concept in the Diano Valley and that conformity to traditional gender roles is a cultural imperative in the village of San Pietro. As two lone women living isolated on their land, Hawes and her sister raise concern over their personal safety; moreover, they learn that their self-sufficiency is a cause for reproach and pity from villagers who interpret it as an instance of *brutta figura*: “Our do-it-yourself-ing is not something to be proud of; on the contrary, it is a tragic admission of our failure as women: of our inability to get ourselves a man to do the job” (*EV*, 259). Once she takes up permanent residency in San Pietro, Hawes notes a subtle shift in how she is addressed, from *signorina* to *signora*, the latter “a courtesy title” for an unmarried woman of a certain age (*EV*, 331). She discovers that cracking the code of gender etiquette is a minefield: she must never invite an unaccompanied male into her house; she must address men not by their nicknames (as men address each other) but by their baptismal names (not easy for a foreigner who cannot tell the difference); and she must get used to becoming invisible when accompanied by a man:

The custom of local men is to address their remarks to him, not to you. To speak to the woman in preference to the man is to imply (I gather) that he's an idiot or a child or an incompetent; or, at any rate, a man undeserving of the respect of other men. (*JTS*, 77)

Women's social invisibility is even more pronounced in interactions between the sexes in Calabria, as Hawes later discovers through Aldo's tendency not to look her in the eyes and not to speak to her directly; whilst intended as signs of respect, this behaviour seems to her a "rude form of politeness" (*JTS*, 196).

The rigid gender code in Calabria is also manifest in the scorn Hawes elicits for "shirking her duties" by failing to prepare Ciccio's morning coffee and, consequently, raising speculation that Ciccio has become "limp-wristed" by dating a foreign female when he unconsciously peels her an apple. Despite her head for business, *mentalità di commerciante*, Ciccio's aunt Annunziata received no formal schooling, "if only she'd been born a man!" (*JTS*, 214) and Ciccio's mother, Francesca, escaped to a better life in Liguria only by accepting an arranged marriage to a man she did not love. Hawes is provoked to comment: "Obviously Women's Liberation has made even less progress down here than it has up North. Which isn't saying a lot" (*JTS*, 110). In comparison to the relatively progressive roles in the industrialised north, the southern gender code is intractable and cuts both ways. Ciccio's cousin, Paolo, must hide the fact that he has a lucrative business selling women's jewellery at the weekly market because the cult of masculinity is such that the shame of selling "women's wares" is greater than the shame of being unemployed.

The fact that different gender norms adhere in different locations is also true right in San Pietro as Hawes uncovers when her attempt to engage sociably with Domenico and Giacò in the local bar is met with awkward silence. Whilst both men have been cheery and talkative with her on many occasions in private, at turns sharing their innermost secrets with her, in this public space they withdraw into seeming unsociability or stoicism. Hawes learns that "mateyness with females" is not done in public in San Pietro (*EV*, 25). As a test, the next time she and Lucy enter the bar, they try a different tactic: "We let our eyes flick, just for a second, in his [Domenico's] direction. He gives us a minuscule nod of recognition. Lucy and I return the brisk, casual jerk of the head we've been practising – more of a tic, really – and swiftly look away. Perfect. We've cracked it. At last we are behaving normally" (*EV*, 27).

Another aspect of normative behaviour in the village is a form of regional chauvinism directed at non-Ligurian Italians. Hawes is warned not to frequent a particular hardware store in town since the

shopkeeper “isn’t a local, or even a countryman, but a city person from Milan or some such place. A lazy Longobardo from high up on the plains, where no one ever lifts a finger. No one here would ever dream of taking his advice” (*RFP*, 156). Ligurians, Hawes learns, have a deep-rooted suspicion of *gente di piania* – “people from Milan and Turin, or any of the other cities of the rich high plains of the North” (*EV*, 38) – whom they consider idle, greedy and arrogant. Given their tendency to think themselves superior to locals, outwitting these northern Italians and watching them make a *brutta figura*, or lose face in public, is considered a local pastime.

Hawes’s process of social integration takes a leap forward when she demonstrates some of this local bigotry by participating in a game of one-upmanship with a Barbour-clad Milanese who pulls in at the local olive mill, “in a big fat shiny so-called off-road vehicle [...] complete with cow-rails and rows of spare petrol canisters and all the survival gear”, and addresses Hawes in “a most patronizing ‘my good woman’ manner” (*EV*, 324). Hawes beats him at his own game by responding in fluent English, mortifying him with the realisation that he has mistaken a “superior Northerner” as a lowly Ligurian peasant. Hawes confesses her prejudice against this “new breed of olive-oil tourist” who drive down from the North at weekends and roam the hillsides in their squeaky clean off-road vehicles, trying out country restaurants, grabbing some wild thyme from the roadside, and picking up a selection of olive oils, a touristic “taste from each valley” to take back (*EV*, 324). These urban consumers are tourists who forage the Ligurian countryside for tastes of local authenticity but do not understand the first thing about the locality. They buy Taggiasca olive-oil direct from the *frantoio* or mill to guarantee its purity and freshness, yet remain clueless about the olive industry and its impact on local lives.

Similarly, they drive down to Diano Marina at dawn to buy freshly caught fish directly off the boats, but know nothing about the predicament of the fisheries. They also fail to realise that the ‘authenticity’ they are desperate to buy is, quite often, manufactured for their touristic tastes. Fabio, a Ligurian fisherman, reveals that the ‘catch of the day’ might have come from a freezer of frozen fish kept in the hold (in case an overnight haul is poor) and cunningly dipped in the sea to acquire a salt-water freshness just before it is sold. Hawes applauds this local ingenuity, showing no sympathy for the “soft-in-the-head Torinesi and Milanesi” queuing up to buy local ‘freshness’ and ready to pay a premium for it (*EV*, 325). When she recounts this episode of local bigotry disguised as cunning, there is no question as to where her loyalty lies.

Ligurian ethnocentrism assumes a particularly aggressive form when directed at German tourists;

the devastating memory of the Second World War and effects of “Nazifascist barbarism” in the Ligurian hinterland have left an indelible mark on collective memory. Hawes reflects that the modern *Tedeschi*, “probably insulated unwittingly by language, money and BMWs [...] just holiday innocently by the sea, without an inkling of what went on round here forty years ago” (*EV*, 114) whilst the locals have never forgotten. Nearly every family in San Pietro had a loved-one in the war and still lives day-to-day with a “parallel vision of these safe and familiar streets and hillsides, once filled with death and danger, hunger and fear” (*EV*, 208); consequently, they bear an irrational grudge against present-day German holidaymakers. Ironically, the collapse of the regional olive industry and need to diversify the local economy by tapping into tourism makes German tourists integral to the economic revitalisation of the Ligurian hillside region.

Franco, the local property speculator who brokered Hawes’s purchase of Pompeo’s *rustico*, heralds a new breed of tourist, “hill-walking German backpackers”, as “harbingers of the future” (*EV*, 45). Not only are these “bare-legged and be-sandalled young tourists” happy to roam the hillsides instead of baking in the ultraviolet rays on the coast, but they are “blessedly unburdened by any depressing grasp of the local economy” and rave on “happily about the beauty of this miserable landscape” (*EV*, 45). Franco’s enthusiasm for making a profit from these unsuspecting “land-hungry *turisti*” (*EV*, 46) signals his understanding that Liguria has no cash-crop left, “Nothing left but a view for *stranieri* to enjoy” (*EV*, 46), and he is eager to sell them that view.

It becomes clear to Hawes that although the area’s economy depends increasingly on investment by foreign tourists and second-home owners, some (like her) receive a welcoming hand whilst others (especially Germans) do not. Even Mario, who happens to be German and is a long-standing member of Hawes’s circle of Ligurian friends, is nicknamed ‘Helmut’ as a marker of cultural difference; moreover, behind his back, he is considered “one of the odious German buyers-up of empty village homes” (*EV*, 120). Hawes notes how German migrants to the area are made into scapegoats for all manner of social ills in the valley: their ‘dirty land’ and ‘neglected’ olive groves are the subject of much local tongue-wagging, with claims that they are “so rich and selfish” they don’t care about their land going to rack and ruin (*EV*, 315). This repudiation of German landowners in Liguria is a rhetorical example of what Spurr identifies as a “symbolic exclusionary tactic” used in colonial discourse to identify a perceived threat to an established social order (1993: 79). Hawes, who shares many “Northern assumptions” about the world with her German neighbours, including a rural idyll that involves living on the land but not necessarily harvesting it, perceives the small-town hypocrisy at play in such condemnations of Germans for their ‘neglect’ of

the land whilst countless groves are left unattended by Ligurian farmers themselves because of the collapse of the olive market and the lack of interest from the younger generation in maintaining the family groves.

The anti-German prejudice reaches a crescendo of absurdity with two specific episodes Hawes recounts. The first involves the *Comune* or Town Council's "Machiavellian scheme" to blame the drought on the German holiday-home owners; Hawes mimics the local sentiment, saying: "It's the Occupation all over again; this time, instead of killing villagers outright, the cunning *Tedeschi* have chosen the sneaky roundabout route of depriving them of their vegetables" (*EV*, 223). By ridiculing this local perception, Hawes distances herself from the xenophobia of locals towards Germans. A second and more personal episode involves her neighbour, Uli, who undertakes an 'illegal' renovation of his farmhouse and is denounced by a Ligurian who maliciously waits for the work to be completed before lodging his complaint with the town authorities. Instead of the building project simply coming to a halt, the completed house has to be demolished and, due to the "manoeuvrings of a cunning peasant", Uli is left with nothing (*EV*, 316). Whilst Hawes previously applauded peasant cunning towards Milanese day-trippers, her sympathies here lie with Uli who has been most unfairly treated. In recounting both these episodes, Hawes reveals the sharp edge of the insider/outsider dynamic in a rural community, exposing the pastoral idyll of perfect harmony as a myth.

The longer she spends in Liguria, the better she becomes at interpreting her local environment and producing a situated reading of place. She uncovers that 'diversity' is not a value which is celebrated in San Pietro. Migrant workers, arriving first from southern Italy then from Eastern Europe and Northern Africa, are disparaged for taking over the traditional work of olive-harvesting abandoned by young Ligurians. Hawes explains: "the price of olives is so low that most of the harvest is being left to fall off the trees and rot. For the third year running" (*EV*, 8) and that "it costs more in petrol to get your olives to the mill than you get back for the oil" (*EV*, 86). Consequently, San Pietro, like many villages in the region, has undergone a process of de-population as its younger generation, seeing no economic future in olives, has left to find work in big industrial cities, a 'brain drain' which is grudgingly accepted. Hawes's dear friends, Domenico and Antonietta, whose two adult children have left Liguria, bitterly note: "Sweat blood to bring up your kids, feed them, clothe them, educate them – and send them off as a free gift to America or Germany...or Milan or Turin...No justice in it" (*EV*, 21). Not surprisingly, in this context, many of the locals react to the arrival of migrants with an entrenched parochialism, a defensive bulwark

against the inevitable forces of economic and social change that are transforming their region.⁸⁶

Not all residents of San Pietro are recalcitrant, however. Luigi, the owner of the local bar and its resident philosopher, has a greater conceptual grasp of the situation and sees a continuum between the early wave of southern Italian migration to Liguria and the latest wave of lifestyle migrants from northern Europe. He understands their common dream of wanting to own a bit of land, and connects the migrants' situation to that of the Ligurians themselves, explaining to Hawes: "Once upon a time Ligurians would laugh at them [migrants] for ignorant backwater folk. Now look. Everyone's reduced to the same sorry state: subsistence farming, or give up the land. [...] These days not even the Southerners want the land. Us Northerners [English and Germans] may as well take over" (*EV*, 41).

These intercultural episodes in the life of San Pietro serve as illustrative examples of how the transformation of social space through migration and cross-cultural contact does not guarantee the emergence of cosmopolitan attitudes. As revealed in the interactions of locals with German migrants, an attitude of openness and tolerance does not necessarily develop from cross-border social interactions; instead, a virulent form of "renationalisation" does. Beck (2002: 29) points out that processes of transnationalisation can be perceived as a threat and cause insecurity and nationalistic reflexes in local populations: "The fundamental fact that the experiential space of the individual no longer coincides with national space, but is being subtly altered by the opening to cosmopolitanisation should not deceive anyone into believing we are all going to become cosmopolitans." Hawes's evolving understanding of this dynamic in Liguria encompasses a growing awareness of how ethnocentric prejudice is directed not only toward foreign homeowners but also toward Italians from other regions, even those like the De Giglios who have been settled in Liguria for over a generation.

3.3 Accommodation – a cosmopolitan consciousness

Hawes's involvement with the De Giglios expands her sense of place and subjectivity as she learns about multiple senses of inclusion and exclusion through their experiences as Calabrian migrants in Liguria, which she recounts in *Journey to the South* (2005). Ligurian xenophobia toward Calabrians living in the region, in many cases for several generations, is first brought to her attention when she starts dating Ciccio and realises "the great rift in the Italian worldview" between North and South.

⁸⁶ Mau, Mewes and Zimmerman (2008:6) further note that "processes of transnationalization may also be perceived as a threat causing insecurity and nationalistic reflexes."

Initially unaware of this gulf, she sees everyone as simply “Italian” without decoding any regional demarcations of difference. These differences are revealed to Hawes, at first, playfully, during a road-trip in an amusing game of cultural stereotyping based on car number plates: the ‘skin-flints’ of Imperia, the ‘tight-fisted’ Genovese, the ‘falsely-courteous’ Piedmontese, and so on (*JTS*, 43).

The generic bigotry in these regional labels is then personalised for Hawes through a series of encounters, first in Liguria then upon visiting ‘the Old Country’ and meeting Ciccio’s extended family in Calabria. When Hawes and her friend, Patrizia, run into Umberto in San Pietro, he initially flirts with Patrizia until he finds out that she does not speak Ligurian because her grandparents “came from somewhere else.” As a foreigner, Hawes is unable to decode this phrase but Patrizia explains that Calabria is considered “such a shameful place of origin that you don’t name it” (*JTS*, 5). Until this moment, it has not occurred to Hawes that many of her good friends (including Patrizia and Ciccio) are, in fact, of Calabrian extraction, or that there is a social stigma attached with being even ‘notionally’ Calabrese. Patrizia sums up the local bigotry, stating: “We may have been born and bred here [Liguria] but we’re still outsiders” (*JTS*, 6).

As Hawes starts to piece together the tissue of local bigotry that had eluded her grasp, she develops a context for understanding intracultural tensions which had previously eluded her. For example, she realises why Carlo, Laura’s father, does not accept Marco (a Calabrese) as a suitable husband for his daughter (*RFP*, 135). She then hears from Ciccio’s parents how they confronted anti-Southern prejudice when, years earlier, they arrived in Liguria and were not shown any “decent places to live”, only squalid ones without a cooker, or sink, or bathroom (*RFP*, 302) because the landlord would not let decent places to *terrone*. Hawes notes the use of this Italian term by bigoted northerners to signify something between ‘peasant’ and ‘bogtrotter’, with the implication that Calabrians are uncouth and “probably keep pigs in the parlour and coal in the bath” (*JTS*, 7). This debasement of Calabrians uses the rhetoric of abjection and defilement which Spurr associates with a colonialist vision of the Other (1993: 76). Viewed through a prosperous northern Italian lens, Calabria is seen as “a wild, unruly, poverty-stricken place” (*JTS*, 8) and Calabrians as “friendly, cheery and devil-may-care” but also “lazy, spendthrift and unruly” (*EV*, 121). She further notes that this view is not unlike the English stereotype of Ireland in days gone by: “And like the Irish, the Calabrians, for a good few generations, emigrated *en masse* to escape the desperate conditions in their own land, seeking work and a future for their children” (*JTS*, 9).

Despite their success in becoming land owners in Liguria, in earning a living as olive farmers and in

building economic security for their children, Calabrians like the De Giglios are denied full social integration. This is made clear to Hawes when she happens to overhear two San Pietro men one day refer to Ciccio as “one of *them*” (*JTS*, 7) and realises the truth in what Patrizia had told her: the *figli d’immigranti* (children of immigrants) are still considered ‘outsiders’ despite being born in Liguria, growing up there, going to school there and settling down there as adults. Whilst being treated as outsiders makes them feel not completely at-home in Liguria, the De Giglios are not completely at home in Calabria either, as Hawes notes on their collective trip south. Labelled all their lives as *Calabresi*, Ciccio and his sister Marisa are expecting to fit in immediately when they arrive in Melipodio; instead, their homecoming is temporarily marred as the villagers in the local bar initially mistake them for a Bulgarian pimp and Polish prostitute. Later, once the confusion is cleared up, they are toasted, made to feel welcome and anointed “Jewels in the Crown” come back to the fold.

Nevertheless, this episode of mistaken identity sets an ambivalent tone for the remainder of their stay, and Hawes observes that they must continually negotiate “multiple senses of belonging and not-belonging” (*JTS*, 25). Marisa initially feels a sense of dislocation returning to a homeland she has never really known, then after a spell claims she is more at home in Melipodio than the “commercialized North” (*JTS*, 94) and thinks it would be a better place to raise her son, Alberto, who spends his time in Calabria outdoors with local boys, helps with household chores, and seems perfectly content without his Game Boy. For his part, Ciccio has a mild identity crisis provoked by a villager from Melipodio calling him a “bloody Northerner” (*JTS*, 136) with a disparaging glower at his Ligurian number plate after Ciccio stops to ask for some information using his ‘pidgin Calabrese’. The ambivalent insider/outsider status of the siblings is further reflected in the dualistic treatment they receive from their aunt Annunziata: on the one hand, she offers them *cotolette Milanesi*, “modern stylish food for the delicate palates of Northerners” (*JTS*, 149) instead of Calabrian home-cooking; on the other hand, she barges into their bedrooms in a familial gesture that reminds them they belong.

This shifting sense of subjectivity is rendered most clearly in Francesca’s experience of returning to her birthplace. Hawes describes the uncontained joy of her homecoming as she does “a happy shake of her whole being” and delights in “talking her own language, in her own land” (*JTS*, 59). Francesca makes a conscious effort to speak the local Calabrese dialect since using standard Italian would be proof that living in the North has “Tuscanified” her or, in other words, made her “big-headed” (*JTS*, 46). In fact, her sense of place is telescoped once she is down south: she is not a ‘generic’ Calabrian (as she is perceived in the North) but specifically comes from the province of

Reggio and identifies with its regional customs, culinary dishes and dialect as opposed to those of nearby Cosenza or Catanzaro. She also betrays strong localistic loyalty, extolling the virtues of Melipodio over Santa Cristina d'Aspromonte, her husband Salvatore's hometown.

At the outset of her visit, Francesca claims that "the Old Country is what counts" even after a lifetime in Liguria (*JTS*, 11), and initiates plans to set Ciccio up in the house she has inherited from her deceased brother. By the end of her visit, though, she recants: "That's what I would have wanted for my son fifty years ago. Not now... Who wants to tie themselves to Calabria? The place is never going to sort itself out. Not in our lifetime" (*JTS*, 328). This pendulum swing from total identification with Calabria to total rejection of it underscores the multiple and shifting nature of her sense of self and her sense of belonging to place. Whilst in Liguria, she feels Calabrian and the 'Old Country' is her fixed point; whilst in Calabria, Liguria and the life she has built there become the magnetic North of her personal compass. It is clear that the modern experience of migration has left her with a mobile sense of 'home', as well as a complex subjectivity in relation to place and time.

A longing for the past, for a return to a previous place and time, forms a powerful sense of nostalgia that pervades the De Giglios' initial identification of Calabria as their authentic home. As Kaplan explains, *nostalgia* combines the Greek terms *nostos* (a return home) and *algos* (a painful condition), and "is rooted in the notion that it is 'natural' to be at 'home' and that separation from that location can never be assuaged by anything but return" (1996: 33-34). The nostalgic longing for home is generally tied to a Utopian vision, according to Turner, since 'home' is located in a lost place and in a lost time that can never be fully recovered (1987: 154). Indeed, the De Giglios' sense of painful separation from Calabria and longing to return there contains an idealising impulse which is revealed in the way reality rubs up against the nostalgic cultural myths they have created of the 'Old Country'. Francesca remembers Calabria as it was fifty years earlier and dreams of returning to *that* place and *that* time. The projection of Calabria as 'home' is thus destabilised by the material conditions of place in the present and by the attendant feelings of 'not belonging' which challenge the idyll of a happy return. The layers of nostalgia operating in *Journey to the South* are complex: the longing to go back to a time and place that no longer exist is then supplanted by a longing to get 'back home' to Liguria. Lowenthal's (1985) claim that 'the past is a foreign country' that can never be fully repossessed rings painfully true in their case.

Locating an idealised home outside the space and time of the present as a way of escaping the pressures and anxieties of the contemporary world is arguably part of a nostalgic paradigm intrinsic

to the postmodern condition, a response to the general sense of displacement or ‘homelessness’ in late modernity. According to Turner: “The nostalgic mood is of particular importance in contemporary cultures in association with the loss of rural simplicity, traditional stability and cultural integration following the impact of industrial, urban, capitalist culture on feudal social organization” (1987: 152). The lament for a way of life that has disappeared, or is in the process of disappearing, and the attraction of returning to a Golden Age, a time when things were simpler and the social fabric of life less fragmented, is a discourse of nostalgia that clearly frames Hawes’s trilogy of memoirs. Her retreat to the countryside is, in fact, motivated by a desire to escape the complexity of modern life in London and set down roots in rural Liguria where she hopes to “out-peasant the peasants” by living an anti-modern lifestyle. Initially, Hawes seeks a re-enchantment of the world through close connection to the land and everyday practices in a traditional rural setting, perceiving in the rural retreat a form of primitivism which is more authentic and so more desirable. Yet she revises this idealising impulse over time through her experience of living on the land and experiencing the less attractive aspects of rurality. Throughout her trilogy, Hawes demonstrates an openness to revise her preconceptions and correct her *readings* of locals and local practices, as well as an ability to render layered interpretations of difference. This openness to and respect for difference shapes a cosmopolitan outlook in her texts, an outlook which is always evolving.

Even in the third memoir, Hawes reveals an awareness of place that is in continual development. As she prepares to embark on her journey south, she purchases a heavyweight five-volume history of Calabria which she hopes will save her from hours of “pointless puzzling” (*JTS*, 1). These “Pamphlets of Knowledge” do not, however, save her from making the same mistakes in *reading* Calabria as she did initially in *reading* Liguria. Her immediate reaction upon hearing that Francesca has inherited an orange grove with a rustic dwelling in Melipodio is to imagine a detached farmhouse in the countryside surrounded by orange trees: “My English heritage has led me astray again. In Calabria as in Liguria people have no tradition of living alone and isolated on their land” (*JTS*, 179). It is clear that the English filter through which Hawes interprets place is still intact and that her acculturation process involves confronting and negotiating cultural differences in an ongoing way.

She, in fact, denies possessing a cosmopolitan orientation, claiming: “It may sound pretty cosmopolitan, the Englishwoman living in Italy, but to tell the truth, the opposite is the case. I’ve gone thoroughly native: which is to say that, like my neighbours, I am about as provincial as you get” (*JTS*, 8). After twenty years of rural living, she has undeniably developed what could be called

a ‘San Pietro perspective’ on many things, from food to politics to farming. Indeed, her sojourn in Calabria further grounds her sense of belonging in Liguria and her identification of San Pietro as her ‘fixed point’. However, this monological self-appraisal is not reliable since she occupies a complex standpoint that superimposes local, regional, national and global identifications; her orientation is decidedly dialogical.

Blunt and Varley have shown that a sense of place, measured in terms of belonging or alienation, is intimately tied to sense of self (2004: 3). As Hawes’s identification with the customs and values of her adopted home deepens and she begins to feel more Ligurian than Italian, and arguably more Ligurian than English, her standpoint becomes more multi-layered and complex; in other words, she becomes more cosmopolitan not more provincial. Like her beloved English rose bush transplanted in Ligurian soil which flowers at its own time of the year – not in season with roses either in England or in Italy – Hawes herself is a peculiar hybrid. Her evolving subjectivity is inextricably linked to place, and the interplay of identifications she embraces provides her with an outlook that is multi-dimensional.

This hybrid perspective is captured in a poignant metaphor of vision that runs throughout Hawes’s narrative trilogy. After taking up residency in her *rustico* in Book One, she tries repeatedly to spot her hilltop house in Besta de Zago from different locations in the valley; her attempts are, however, frustrated as she cannot locate her patch of hillside from afar. Her obsession with trying to fix the exact location of her house leads her to seek out ordnance survey maps at the local library then to borrow a friend’s telescope, but neither help with the discovery: “No sign of the place [...] Not even with the telescope” (*RFP*, 132). This obsessive quest, also taken up by Ciccio who is “determined to find me the view I’ve dreamed of” (*RFP*, 132), gradually ebbs as Hawes resigns herself to its inscrutability: “Logic doesn’t come into it. [...] You can’t see my house from close by; and you can’t see it from afar either. I may be used to it, but it’s not fair. Mine is a beautiful house, and I’d very much enjoy gloating over it, if only I ever got the chance” (*RFP*, 94). Later on in Book Two, she gains the long-desired view of her house when two century-old olive trees standing in front of it are radically pruned back, but Hawes is horrified at acquiring her view through an act of violence as the surrounding landscape is “massacred [...] systematically, clinically” (*RFP*, 327).

This desire to fix the location of her house and to obtain a commanding view or controlling prospect that she can “gloat over” is a colonialist perspective, what Pratt has termed “the monarch of all I survey” (1992: 201). Attempting to see her house from afar, Hawes treats it as the ‘organizing

centre' from which to define the surrounding landscape, enacting a visual taxonomy of the environment and using the traditional tools of colonialism (cartographic maps and instruments) to this end. Seeking to tame "negative space" (Spurr 1993: 93) through a gesture of surveillance and classification, Hawes desires a visual authority that is inherent in the colonizing gaze. Yet in this case, the gaze is thwarted and Hawes's authority undermined by her inability to actually *see* her house until the surrounding landscape is stripped bare. That her long-desired view is gained at the expense of a ruined landscape implies a critique of colonialism, as well as the modern project of surveillance and classification. Moreover, it reveals Hawes's gradual shift in perspective from an *outsider* view that seeks an objective reference point from which to apprehend location, to an *insider* view occupying a subjective ordering position that looks outward.

This transformation in Hawes's way of seeing landscape signals a deeper shift in her perceptions of place. By developing a place-based and outward-looking focus, she is able to evaluate the local/global dynamics at play in a variety of settings. For instance, Gioia Tauro, a small coastal town in Calabria which she visits on her trip south, is revealed as surprisingly cosmopolitan for its size and location: "every possible skin colour on the face of the earth seems to be represented here, and the myriad tongues of the Tower of Babel are being spoken all around you" (*JTS*, 323). This unexpected diversity is attributable to the local container port, the largest of its kind in the Mediterranean, whose high volume of traffic and spin-off industries have attracted migrant workers from around the world. This transnationalism also seems to have given rise to the development of cosmopolitan attitudes, according to Hawes's description of a night out in a local *trattoria* where she witnesses the multicultural patrons all dancing the *tarantella* together, everyone trying to fit the dance steps of their own country to the Calabrian music: "all are melding together, somehow, into the down-home small-town-Italy ambience" (*JTS*, 323). It remains somewhat unclear in Hawes's retelling of this cosmopolitan idyll whether these global souls intermingling in this public sphere are indeed the sign of a truly multicultural and diverse society in Gioia Tauro, or an exceptional expression of transnational camaraderie facilitated by drink and reconstructed through the idealising lens of someone just passing through.

A more reliable account of the local/global dynamic surfaces in Hawes's description of the places she knows well through long-term association. Though she initially attaches a positive value to the culture of cosmopolitanism in Diano Marina, Hawes subsequently revises this view, noting that it becomes "a maritime parking lot" of deckchairs and umbrellas (*EV*, 177) at the height of the tourist season, indicating that her first impressions were unreliable, based as they were on touristic

readings of place. Similarly, the stark division Hawes initially posits between Diano Marina and San Pietro (divided by an ‘Olive Curtain’) is subsequently undermined by her gradual awareness that both places are sites for transnational exchange. The more time she spends in San Pietro, the more aware she becomes that it is not a time-capsule town, immune to change: “I should have learnt by now that peasant farming is not some hermetically sealed lifestyle cut off from the rest of the world. Especially in a land of migratory folk like this one” (*RFP*, 43). The longer she stays, the more she adjusts her lens and produces better readings of place. Initially, appearance and reality seem like clear-cut categories in her narrative reconstruction of Liguria and Ligurians; however, with the passage of time, Hawes is forced to reappraise her sense of place and acknowledge that place, like self, is complex, layered, and indeterminate.

Hawes’s ability to interpret intercultural and intracultural encounters signals a layered perspective that recognises many forms of diversity; this, in turn, enables her to produce situated readings of place. Her narrative style shifts from the use of negative stereotyping at the outset of *Extra Virgin* in representing Anglo-Italian differences, to a dialogical recognition of the multiple differences at play in social interactions. Overall, she illustrates that a monological reading is not tenable: ‘self’ (English) and ‘other’ (Ligurian) are not fixed terms in a stable conceptual model, but shifting signifiers – English, Italian, Ligurian, Calabrian, urban, rural, coastal, inland – in a social field that is thick with diversities. As both insider and outsider in her adopted home, Hawes demonstrates that her standpoint is not univocal but, instead, occupies several positions simultaneously. This dialogism evolves over a trilogy of texts which trace her arc of accommodation to life in Liguria over twenty years.

Conclusion

Throughout her trilogy, Hawes explicitly uses personal story frames to reconstruct events and transmit her impressions of Italy, thus signalling how central the discourse of subjectivity is to her cultural representations of Italy and Italians. Not only does she discover her ‘inner Italian’ in Liguria, but also her voice as a writer. Clearly, her process of accommodating to a new place requires accommodating to a new sense of self, one that evolves over time through intracultural and intercultural encounters. Her memoirs assume a temporal distance from the actual events she reconstructs – she began writing her first book in the trilogy only after she had already lived in Italy for ten years – which allows for more distilled reflection on the place-based dynamics described.

Through direct engagement with foreign place over an extended period of time, Hawes enacts a

particular form of ‘dwelling’, of being at home in place, which enables her to produce situated readings. This depth of connection to place is close to Heidegger’s notion of “dwelling”, a state of being containing both the concepts of ‘to build’ (cultivate, nurture) and ‘to stay’.⁸⁷ Both meanings converge in Hawes’s experience of building a home in Liguria and becoming at home there over time. Heidegger’s notion that place locates us rather than being something we manipulate in a sovereign fashion is recalled in the way Hawes engages with a deeper, more self-aware form of inhabiting place; this goes beyond merely simulating explicit knowledge of place and involves assimilating knowledge gained through a process of critical self-reflection on how self and place interact.

Transdisciplinary research on ‘home’ has shown that mobility challenges the notion of home as a fixed point; consequently, it is more useful to consider home not as a bounded location, but as a set of relationships to both humans and non-humans, as a focal point within an extended network.⁸⁸ A sense of being-at-home in a place is shaped by imaginative will as well as routine practices and habitual social interactions which give meaning to space, transforming space into place. Hawes treats home in both senses, as a bounded location (her Ligurian hillside house) and as a network of relationships emanating from this focal point. Surprisingly, she maintains no such sense of connection with London, which appears both materially and symbolically only sparsely in the pages of her Ligurian texts. Overall, London figures as an absent signifier in Hawes’s three memoirs; it is somewhere she returns to intermittently out of economic necessity and remains only briefly to line her pockets for longer stays in San Pietro. Summing up her unsentimental attachment to the home she has left, she states: “Although I may go on for years yo-yoing back and forth to England to restock with money [...] this place is my fixed point” (*EV*, 64). Through an act of imaginative will, Hawes adopts Italy as a new homeland, and through routine participation in everyday practices and social interactions there, San Pietro becomes her home.

Hawes’s relocation accounts emerge from this matrix and provide a powerful lens through which to examine how global/local flows are transforming identities in late modernity. Her memoirs demonstrate that whilst the world is increasingly compressed, *localism* is, in many ways, reinforced. The desire to experience what is authentically local and particular – the human attachment to things as they are, or recently were – is a side-effect of globalisation which drives the relocation pattern of lifestyle migration. The search for a simpler, more organic way of life is a late-modern quest that leads transnationals like Hawes to seek a lifestyle makeover in Italy, which is popularly perceived

⁸⁷ Heidegger (1975).

⁸⁸ See, for example, Nowicka (2007: 69).

as an ‘ideal habitat’ to holidaymakers, second-home owners, and expatriates seeking an escape from the strains of modern society. The danger, however, is for their cultural representations of Italy to rely on nostalgic readings and clichéd renderings of place instead of producing engaged (and more engaging) accounts. Hawes avoids a nostalgic evasion of modernity that views Italy as a rural idyll and engages, instead, with the multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality of difference through a process of ‘deep immersion’. Her accounts of the complexities and incongruities of everyday life in Italy offer better readings of cultural difference, ‘thick descriptions’ which avoid idealisation and essentialism. This deeper, non-touristic reading of place and place-specific practices is also evident in Tim Parks’s relocation trilogy, which will now be the focus below.

Chapter 4 – Tim Parks’s ‘Ironic Anthropology’

I have now lived in Italy for thirty-two years. There are plateaus, then sudden deepenings; all at once a corner is turned and you understand the country and your experience of it in a new way. You could think of it as a jigsaw puzzle in four dimensions; the ordinary three, plus time: you will never fill in all the pieces, if only because the days keep rolling by, yet the picture does seem more complete and above all denser and more convincing with every year. You’re never quite a native, but you’re no longer a stranger.⁸⁹

Introduction

Tim Parks is no stranger to Italy. Born in Manchester in 1954, he has lived in northern Italy since 1981, raised three children with an Italian wife in Montecchio, a provincial town near Verona, spent years commuting by rail between his home and his work as a professor in Milan where he now resides, and has earned the sobriquet “Mr. Italy” for his extensive writings about Italian society, politics and culture, as well as his translations of Italian literature.⁹⁰ Parks is clearly an insider who *knows* Italy; not the airbrushed Tuscan idyll popularised in some expatriate accounts, but Italy in its complex and multifaceted reality, with its enduring enchantments and frustrations. He has avoided the pitfalls of many foreign commentators on the *Bel Paese* who offer either rhapsodic praise for the country’s stunning landscapes, layered history, artistic treasures, sensual pleasures and everyday elegance, or scathing indictments of its political corruption and economic woes. Parks, instead, offers contextualised accounts and calibrated critiques which balance admiration and criticism in a voice that is uniquely engaged and detached, a narrative style he calls “ironic anthropology”.⁹¹

Over the years, Parks has perfected this pitch: his memoirs offer affable accounts of Italians and ‘Italianness’ that seem uncomplicated and unrehearsed because of their easy, confidential tone and their informal social commentary. These light-hearted descriptions, however, belie a sophisticated style as well as a layered and textured insight into the country’s complex nature.

⁸⁹ Tim Parks, *Italian Ways: On and Off the Rails from Milan to Palermo* (2013), xv. All subsequent citations to this text will be given in abbreviated form, *IW*.

⁹⁰ Parks’s memoirs on Italy include: *Italian Neighbours* (1992), *An Italian Education* (1996), *A Season with Verona* (2002), as well as nonfiction works about Italy such as *Medici Money: Banking, Metaphysics and Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (2005) and *Italian Ways: On and Off the Rails from Milan to Palermo* (2013). Parks is also the author of sixteen novels (including *Europa*, shortlisted for the Booker in 1997) and has translated the works of Machiavelli, Moravia, Calvino, Calasso and others.

⁹¹ See Tim Parks (2012: 2).

His first memoir, *Italian Neighbours* (1992), recounts how the author and his Italian wife, Rita Baldassare, settle near Verona in 1981, charting Parks's initiation into cultural differences within the context of condominium living as he gets to know his neighbours whose domestic routines provide a keyhole into the local culture. Its sequel, *An Italian Education* (1996), ostensibly about the milestones in his children's lives as they progress through the Italian school system, is as much about Parks's own education or re-education as he examines different cultural paradigms in seeking to understand what it means to 'grow up' Italian. In his third memoir, *A Season With Verona*, Parks follows the fortunes of Hellas Verona F.C. in the 2001-2002 season when the team was in the *Seria A* division, criss-crossing the country for games with a group of seasoned fans. These road trips provide Parks with scope to uncover and reflect on the country's marked regional differences, as well as the way football functions as a metaphor for national character.⁹²

Uncomfortable with the label "travel books", Parks claims his memoirs are more about *arrival*, about reaching a "point of no return" by deciding to stay in Italy and set down roots in foreign soil.⁹³ Though 1981 marks his first year in Italy, his first memoir was published a decade later in 1992, by which time Parks was feeling quite settled. He writes:

If this book is anything, I hope it suggests how I passed that point of no return. Which is a process of immersion in details, whether they be pleasant or unpleasant. For details are sticky as spider's silk; you are very soon caught. And rather than a travel book, perhaps if there were such a category in the libraries, I should call this an arrival book. For by the end, this small square handkerchief of Italy I live in has become home for me. Hopefully, for just a moment, the reader will have been able to feel at home here too. (IN, 328)

Even from the outset of his trilogy, he demonstrates a settler's perspective: his accounts offer an insider's insights on place, distilled through a sustained engagement with local life. In fact, Parks has been dubbed the "bard of Italian quotidianity"⁹⁴ for his attention to the minutiae of daily life in his adopted homeland. The variegated reality he observes, and which he is embedded in, comes to life in the autobiographical episodes he sketches – buying a house, tending a garden, attending condominium meetings, paying taxes, becoming a father, raising

⁹² By using the phrase 'in search of' in the subtitle of his third memoir, Parks frames his narrative as a 'quest'. Youngs (2013: 89) identifies the subjective quest as central to contemporary travel narratives, asking: "what quests remain to be embarked upon now that the 'age of discovery' is over?" Parks's quest to understand Italy via football is aligned with this subjective turn.

⁹³ Similarly, Lawrence Durrell insisted that his books about the Greek islands were not travel writing per se but 'foreign residence books'. My analysis proposes that relocation memoirs are, in fact, a distinct subgenre of travel writing.

⁹⁴ Andrea Lee, an American who has lived in Italy for more than 30 years, admits to feeling a "fellow expatriate's" matey admiration for him [Parks] as somebody who really knows the ropes." (2013:2)

‘foreign’ children, navigating bureaucracy, deciphering myriad cultural practices ranging from food to football – episodes which, although rooted in place and in the particular, resonate with universal import.

Drawing on his deep immersion in the “pleasant and unpleasant” details of life in the Veneto, Parks’s memoirs present an unconventional journey, one less about material movement and more about a settler’s movement into ever-widening spheres of belonging: home; community; nation.⁹⁵ His publisher, upon reading the manuscript of his first memoir, claimed this was “not the kind of material that invites the English middle classes to dream of moving to Italy”,⁹⁶ thus signalling the non-touristic turn of his writing: his texts appeal to readers more interested in everyday authenticity than in idealised accounts of *la dolce vita*. His confidential style, created by the repeated use of the pronoun *you*, draws attention to his ideal reader: his texts are not necessarily aimed at other expats or Italophiles with insider knowledge of Italy, but readers who are curious about daily life elsewhere in its local specificity.

Parks admits to initially being drawn to Italy by its sensuous charms: “I left England for Italy in the fall of 1981, having found myself a lovely Italian wife. We settled in Verona, where the Alps peter out in the north Italian plain, a small, elegant, conservative city, unquestioningly Catholic and immensely proud of its huge Roman arena and frescoed Renaissance piazzas. It seemed the right kind of place to underachieve in hedonistic peace.”⁹⁷ The lifestyle migration impulse is palpable here in his reference to peace and tranquillity, to downshifting, and to the natural and sensuous pleasures of place. Yet unlike other expatriate writers, Parks resists idealising Italy as a pastoral idyll or an escapist retreat from the pressures of modern life. His books are not about detailing its surface realities but about probing its complex internal workings and “laying bare some persistent group dynamic that would explain the vagaries of Italian public life”.⁹⁸ Rather than revolving around a mobile narrator’s account of picturesque landscapes and exotic others, Parks’s accounts offer an accumulation of impressions about Italy’s internal workings gathered through a process of deep immersion in place over time.

These impressions do not presume univocal authority in their representations or try to delimit Italian diversity by fixing its national character in essentialisms. Parks does not pander to a ‘Tuscan Sun’ idyll of Italy but, instead, creates a composite portrait across his trilogy through a

⁹⁵ Ross (2010: 122) notes that a new *topos* or narrative terrain has emerged in recent expatriate writing, which shifts the focus away from a traveller’s account of movement through landscape, to a settler’s account of “life among the locals”.

⁹⁶ Tim Parks interviewed by Sarah Crown (2012).

⁹⁷ Tim Parks (2011: 80-81).

⁹⁸ Ibid, 80.

dynamic layering of details:

The deeper you get into a country, the more every new piece of information, every event and discovery, arrives as a fascinating confirmation, or challenge: how can I reconcile this bizarre thing that has happened with what I already know about the place? What might have seemed trivial or merely irritating the first year you were here now enriches and shifts the picture. (*IW*, xvi)

His willingness to adjust his lens, to recalibrate his cultural impressions based on new findings, signals a migrating sensibility which is at once curious, intelligent, self-reflective, and evolving. Whilst the subtitle of his first memoir, *Italian Neighbours: An Englishman in Verona*, places Parks within a literary tradition of travel writing by the ‘Englishman Abroad’, his non-touristic depictions are in ironic tension with conventional travelogues that seek to entertain readers with tales of the ‘foreignness of foreigners’. Parks sidesteps stereotypes which ridicule or reduce his subject, signalling instead its complex and shifting nature. All in all, as Andrea Lee points out, Parks seems to have “worked out a civilized relationship with his chosen country” based on three decades of observing and engaging in the complexities of everyday life there.⁹⁹

4.1 Confrontation – Italian neighbours

Parks’s knowledge of place accrues in a layering of details gathered through sustained engagement over time, a progressive understanding which unfolds across a trilogy of texts beginning with his first memoir, *Italian Neighbours*. Unlike Mayes whose narrative style seeks to encapsulate essential ‘Italianness’ in poetic images, Parks notes from the outset:

There is no one characteristic which makes Montecchio Montecchio, Italy Italy, or the Italians Italian. And yet, as in any place, the slow accumulation of details does gradually form a sort of mesh or matrix. There is this constant entangling, as though in the weaving of a tapestry or net. And the more entangled and connected it all is, the more inevitable it comes to seem. It takes on the weight, the impenetrability of a dense contingent world. Yes, you tell yourself, it had to be so, because this is what this place is like. [...] What did you expect? This is Montecchio. (*IN*, 163)

His first sense of the ‘dense contingent world’ he has entered in moving to Italy is shaped by the matrix of everyday life in Via Colombare 10 where he and his wife rent a flat in a condominium complex inhabited by well-meaning but nosy neighbours who treat Parks as an exotic pet. He is as much a curiosity to them as they are to him, and they refer to him initially as *Signor Tino* and, later on, more familiarly as *Teem*.

⁹⁹ Andrea Lee (2013: 2).

Parks's initiation into the Italian every day is marked by a complete loss of anonymity, a condition of living in close proximity with others. Albeit a modern, urban arrangement, the Italian condominium reproduces the intimacy of traditional community life and its close-knit network of interdependencies. Parks finds this closeness suffocating, at first, and interprets it as a cultural rejection of the modern:

There is a scene in Fellini's film, *La voce della luna*, where a local politician, fallen upon hard times, is seen returning to his dreary flat in an old *palazzotto* in some tiny town of the Po valley. But every time he climbs the stairs and approaches his door, whether it be two in the afternoon or two in the morning, four ancient neighbours will appear at the door opposite and, like awful decaying sirens, try to lure him into their flat to share some old-fashioned dainty: a thimbleful of some sweet forgotten liqueur, a morsel of traditional crumbliness. [...] Which is immediately perceived as a trap, as if a whole culture were refusing to lie down in its grave, but were rising ghoulish to eat our contemporary flesh. [...] Such, for me, were Lucilla's insistent invitations. (*IN*, 102)

As a translator who spends much time working from home, he is especially vulnerable to the insistent interruptions and entreaties of his own neighbours – Lucilla, Vittorina, Orietta and Giampaolo Visentini – but his genuine desire to avoid giving offense bolsters equanimity in his social interactions. Thus, he is infinitely patient when Lucilla asks him to read out all the names of dressmakers from the Yellow Pages and to dial the numbers one by one (there are twenty odd) as she cannot remember with whom she has placed an order for seven custom-made bras, “otherwise they’re not comfortable” (*IN*, 207). He good-naturedly does as requested and suppresses the urge to laugh when she announces into the phone each time: “*Buon giorno, buon giorno*, I am Zambon, the signora of the seven bras, are you the dressmaker I ordered from?” (*IN*, 208). Clearly, there is little room for privacy in condominium living.

Musing about the intimacy of such everyday encounters, Parks says to his wife: “‘I wonder, you know, [...] I wonder if the yups and artsy guys and retired professors checking through estate agents’ lists of farmhouses in Tuscany have been adequately filled in on these details’” (*IN*, 17). Parks here signals the distance between reality and ideal in the Italian dream whilst distancing himself from other expats living an idyll of pastoral life removed from the anxieties and irritations of contemporary society. By contrast, he engages first-hand in the messy details of life in a new land through routine, close-up interactions which provide an immediate immersion in cultural difference. He learns, for example, that privacy regarding matters of personal health is not an Italian trait. Reflecting on a conversation with Lucilla who tells him she had *la totale* at age 20, Parks notes: “*La totale* is the grim Italian expression for a hysterectomy. Once again, I reflect that while people from the Veneto are generally reserved and formal, nevertheless when

they get on the subject of their health there is simply nothing, nothing they will not tell to the most casual acquaintance, from varicose veins to mastectomy, prostatitis to mere constipation” (*IN*, 139).

Similarly, Parks recounts a discussion about blood pressure on first being invited over to the Visentinis. Orietta is “appalled to discover that I don’t even know my own blood pressure. As far as I know it has never been taken. Her face shows genuine concern. Apparently, we are touching on a real cultural difference here” (*IN*, 128). Attempting to subsequently make a joke about what he perceives as an Italian obsession with health bordering on national hypochondria, he is met with bewildered and pained smiles: “Health is so important. Not for nothing did we say ‘*Salute*’ when we raised those glasses” (*IN*, 120). Though his joke falls flat with his interlocutors, presumably Parks’s readers see the humour in this intercultural exchange. His tone is not one of ‘laughing at’ but ‘laughing with’ others, revealing cultural differences as funny rather than threatening. Lisle’s (2006) comment about how Bryson and Palin use humour in their depictions of others equally applies to Parks:

Unlike Theroux, who finds difference irritating, writers like Bill Bryson and Michael Palin are more interested in pointing to the humour that resides in cultural difference. Their knack of ‘laughing with’ others is not undertaken in a rude or spiteful manner; rather, it is accompanied by a healthy dose of self-irony, recognition that the travel narrative has become ‘superficial’ in the age of tourism, and deliberate attempts to undercut the mythological role of the ‘English Gentleman Abroad’.¹⁰⁰

Clearly, Parks uses gentle humour to poke fun at himself as much as at others, revealing a great respect for his Italian neighbours whose behaviour he finds endearing, not irritating. Holland and Huggan (1998) argue that the use of farce, self-deprecation, self-parody and self-irony are strategies which contemporary travel writers use to detach themselves from their colonial predecessors.¹⁰¹ Parks, in fact, seems eager to distance himself from imperial associations of Englishness by fitting in with the locals.

His attempts to understand and comply with social codes of behaviour in his adopted home are prevalent in the initial phase of his relocation as he seeks to *fare bella figura* or give a good impression. He distances himself from the colonial posture and discourse of the traditional ‘English Gentleman Abroad’ through warmth and good-humour in his social interactions, and through his willingness to fall in line with social expectations regarding normative behaviour in his host country. Although claiming “there’s something that spells death for me in obsessive

¹⁰⁰ Lisle (2006: 100-101).

¹⁰¹ Holland and Huggan (1998: 274-277).

cleaning”, he takes turns mopping the condominium’s marble stairs, making sure to “get [the] mop into the corners” and not “sweep dust under doormats” as this would not pass muster in Via Colombare (*IN*, 205). When Vittorina inquires whether Rita is ill since she is not doing the mopping herself (so foreign is the sight of a man doing housework), Parks replies: “I tell her how often I wish I’d been born into the world and values of fifty years before. She takes this perfectly seriously. And maybe it does have a little sniff of seriousness about it” (*IN*, 204). Though a modern man who does his share of housework (and later childcare), Parks’s references to his “lovely Italian wife” seem anachronistic, lending an ambivalent tone to his account. Modernity and tradition constantly overlap in Italy, as they do in Parks’s own rhetorical style.

On another occasion, kept awake at night by the upstairs neighbour’s pacing as well as by the incessant barking of Vega, the dog next door, he resolves to confront Lucilla and pays a visit, but he is simply no match for his interlocutor: “there is simply no chink in her verbal armour, no hesitation into which one might thrust the dagger” (*IN*, 106). After feebly hinting at the nocturnal noises, he leaves without having cleared the air, admitting that “Signor Tino just can’t bring himself to say what he wants to say. The way he can never quite make up his mind to poison that dog” (*IN*, 107). Shifting from a first-person voice which privileges the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘me’, Parks then speaks of himself in the third person, using the nickname he has been given. This shift signals a step in his identity re-formation, marking the emergence of a more conciliatory Italian persona, *Signor Tino*. In this first phase of acculturation, he seems especially keen to please others and not appear cold or aloof; he forgoes individual self-interest in favour of group identification. Becoming part of a group, Parks later notes, “is precisely what any Italian education is all about” (*IE*, Foreword).

Much as Hawes derives satisfaction in ‘making out the grid’ of social behaviour and cultural obsessions in her Ligurian hill town in order to better integrate, Parks also takes pleasure in decoding local norms and practices then conforming to them. Hawes flouts local ‘coffee orthodoxy’ in private, drinking cappuccinos at all hours up at her *rustico*, but in the local bar she learns to conform to protocol out of a sense of propriety. Parks’s learning curve is arguably quicker (he, after all, has a ‘lovely Italian wife’ to school him) and he readily complies with local customs from the outset, eager not to be misconstrued as a tourist:

And while Italians seem to like foreigners, the foreigners they like most are the ones who know the score, the ones who have caved in and agreed that the Italian way of doing things is the best. [...] How they chuckle and grin when a German orders a *cappuccino*

rather than an *espresso* after lunch, pouring that milk on to an already full stomach. And here's a curious detail: *espresso* is always OK, twenty-four hours a day, even *corretto* (i.e. with *grappa*), but *cappuccino* has a very definite time slot: 8-10.30am. Trivia? No, good training. (IN, 19)

Parks clearly knows what to order, when to order it, and why. Compliance with local practices enhances his status as an insider, as someone who 'knows the score'; it is motivated, in part, by his search for 'authenticity' in MacCannell's sense of the "touristic desire to share in the real life of the places visited" (1999: 96). Here, Park's desire to appear not as a tourist but as a local leads him to seek insider knowledge of local customs in order to engage authentically in real, everyday practices in foreign place.

Commenting on the oft-cited distinction between tourist and traveller, MacCannell explains that the label 'tourist' functions as a moral stereotype for those travellers who are supposedly satisfied with superficial sights and experiences of others and other places, and who, consequently, are only capable of superficial insights about other cultures (1999: 9-10). He further comments that the modern critique of tourists is not a critique of tourism per se – of leaving home to go see sights abroad and the concomitant ecological, social, and economic impact of this activity– but of not "being tourist enough" by "go[ing] beyond the other 'mere' tourists to a more profound appreciation of society and culture" (1999: 10).¹⁰² At heart, this desire to experience the 'authenticity' of a foreign place is a basic motivation for all travel; however, in an age of mass travel, educated travellers seek to differentiate themselves from the masses, to display social distinction through their touristic performances. Parks's eagerness to display 'insider' status is motivated by the desire to give a good impression to the locals by not appearing as a typical tourist, a desire shaped by privileges of class and education.

Parks's compliance with local food and drink orthodoxy is also framed as a kind of initiation for more complex forms of Italian social protocol which demand adherence. With characteristic irony, he notes:

When the full complexity of these nuances becomes apparent – because the *digestivo*, the *gingerino*, the *prosecco* all have their right times and contexts too – you will be less surprised by the labyrinthine process of, say, switching your driving licence to an Italian one or sorting out your position *vis-à-vis* the health system. There is an order to all things; follow it, even when it borders on the superstitious and ritualistic. (IN, 19)

¹⁰² MacCannell criticises Daniel Boorstin's (1961) reification of the tourist vs. intellectual division, claiming that whilst insightful about touristic arrangements, Boorstin fails to provide a structural analysis of how this 'touristic attitude' of dislike for and disparagement of tourists is produced, and how it further contributes to an erosion of interpersonal solidarity in modern society by the educated masses.

The Italian way of doing things may indeed be best or, as Parks wryly implies here, it may simply be that it seems inevitable the longer one lives in Italy and develops a particular cultural mindset. Referring back to the passage quoted earlier, he is becoming caught up in a sticky, silky spider web of social norms and practices which have the weight of *a priori* constructs.

Whilst he is making progress in fitting into his new environment, Parks, at times, is positioned outside this matrix due to his ignorance or inexperience *vis à vis* normative social behaviour. The condominium garden is a case in point, acting as a crucible where old and new, as well as local and foreign ideologies, intermingle and are tested. Parks writes: “Every condominium is galvanised by a sort of magnetic field of attractions and repulsions. Nowhere could these be more strongly and urgently felt at Via Colombare 10 than in attitudes to the large square communal garden to one side of the house” (*IN*, 63). Lucilla’s and Vittorina’s earthy nostalgia for fecund vegetable patches from their peasant past clash with the Visentinis’ modern urban vision of a smooth lawn with shady tress. Competing orthodoxies about what to plant, how to plant, and when to irrigate thus make gardening something less than a leisurely pastime: “In the garden, everybody watched each other in a delicious tension to see whose culture would prove the most effective. And in this respect the situation was typical of the small handkerchief of Italy I live in. There is such a collision of ancient ideas and new. Which will win?” (*IN*, 72).

As demonstrated above, Parks has no qualms about shifting his allegiance between modern and traditional approaches as it suits him, yet in this case he remains outside the equation altogether:

To make matters worse it was assumed that, being English, I would naturally know a great deal about lawns and my advice, as we settled in, would frequently be sought on dry patches, ringmoulds, moss, etc., as of such knowledge were carried in the genes. I thus got used to observing a genuine sense of disappointment when it was discovered that I knew nothing, but nothing about lawns. And what’s more (to my shame now, actually) showed every sign of not greatly caring. (*IN*, 68-9)

He disappoints his neighbours by not possessing the expert knowledge they assume is programmed in his cultural DNA, revealing that stereotypes cut in both directions. Thinking back on the episode with the knowledge he has matured over the years, Parks feels ashamed for his indifference at the time, for having placed individual self-interest (or in this case lack of interest) ahead of the group.

Part of his acculturation process involves recognising when it is socially acceptable to put self-interest above the group: in short, when dealing with the State. Observing a *laissez-faire* attitude bordering on lawlessness in the Italian approach to public probity, he comments: “Life is

complicated. In any event the drift seems to be that the government makes well-meaning but complicated laws and people very sensibly get smart and get round them. [...] Bureaucracy is a huge tangle of sticky string in which every attempt to loosen one knot tightens another” (*IN*, 49). Parks explains that a public façade of fair but ineffectual administration is superimposed on an intricate private web of personal relationships that drive public life, resulting “in a delicious tension in so many areas of Italian life. The rules are only a veneer, and indifferently glued on at that; like the Pope’s diktats, or the catechism – no more than the thinnest coat of paint” (*IN*, 190). Whilst compliance with the rules of engagement in the dense world of private relations is expected, adhering to public rules and regulations emphatically is not.

His understanding of this gap between the ideal world of public policy and the real world of private arrangements is further concretised when Parks has to personally pay out a bribe to a functionary in the tax office to avoid a full-scale audit.

It’s a complicated story, perhaps a little bit of a digression, but I’d like to tell it all the same because it shows how even the ingenuous foreigner who arrives here, as one arrives most places, more or less by chance, can so easily run up against the dark side of Italy. This was an extremely close friend of mine. Like me he had arrived in Italy some time before, like me he lived in a little village not far from a sizeable town, like me had had grafted for a while with private lessons and commercial translations until good fortune had landed him one of the much sought-after jobs teaching English at the university [...] Now, since this friend of mine had a VAT number which he used for his translations, he went to the university accounts office to ask them what exactly his tax situation might be. (*IN*, 122-3)

Parks goes on to recount the episode in detail, claiming it happened ‘to a close friend’, but it seems obvious that this invented third party is a literary conceit. His self-disguise (he is decidedly not taking chances with the Italian tax police) signals his not being fully at ease yet in adopting the social attitudes and behaviour of Italians. The ‘close friend’ construct is a distancing gesture to protect his identity and distance him from illegal actions, albeit socially-sanctioned ones.

This episode marks a defining moment in Parks’s Italian initiation on several levels. First, he learns it is always best to avoid official bureaucracy and never draw attention to oneself (or one’s tax status), as he naively does by volunteering information about his various freelance sources of income; this guileless admission results in the discovery that he has “evaded VAT for around 9 million Lire”, approximately £4,000, a sum he has to repay along with a fine (*IN*, 128). Second, the accountant he hires to untangle this bureaucratic mess advises him to come to a private settlement by offering the tax official handling his file *una bustarella*, “a little envelope,

a bribe” of 400,000 Lire, with an additional 100,000 Lire paid to him, the accountant, for negotiating the deal (*IN*, 134). Here, the language itself is complicit in the act: the use of the Italian diminutive seeking to lighten the serious legal implications of paying a *ricatto* or bribe. This is one of many “Italian stories”, the kind, Parks says, one hears “more or less daily”, but as one that happens to him personally, it marks an important rite of passage (*IN*, 111). Summing up the lesson he has learned, he states, “My friend is still very English, though less than he was a month ago” (*IN*, 135), indicating a significant step in his identity reformation.

This episode recalls Hawes’s experience of coming to grips with the prevalence of cheating in a variety of social contexts (on examinations, on building permits, on tax declarations) upon her arrival in Liguria, and her gradual realisation that she needed to adjust a cultural lens in order to integrate in social life there. Parks similarly comes to see that his English sense of probity regarding the rule of law is misplaced in a context where people refer to the State as *governo ladro*, a government of thieves, and where all forms of self-defence are considered “always legitimate” before the “naked aggression” of the State (*IN*, 285). He wryly notes: “In the model anarchic society, to which Italy frequently approximates, there will be rules without end whose value will never be questioned. And under this excellent cover, everyone will live as he sees fit” (*IN*, 62). Later, he adds: “The law is only one of the arms the individual uses in his essentially lawless struggle. [...] It is a bellicosity one finds hard to take at first, but which constant contact with other people, and above all the authorities, gradually tends to make more comprehensible, and even attractive” (*IN*, 90).

Parks comes to perceive the sense of inevitability that pervades individual interactions with the State – that things are as they are, immutable and inescapable, and one resigns oneself to struggle by any means necessary – is not cynicism but realism in the Italian context: “It is a curious and, I believe, curiously Italian stalemate, in which ineradicable national pride (and why not?) exists side by side with a sense of cynicism (equally justifiable) and, at the end of the day, resignation” (*IN*, 116). He implies that this form of realism is a compromise position between extremes of idealism and cynicism, stating

There is no question of simply showing anger or outrage for all the things that make the country a less attractive place to live than it might so easily be. The blunt analysis and sleeve-rolling gaucheness which forms the typical reaction of, for example, the English, inevitably carries the subtext that something could and should be done, and quickly: reform the poll tax, cut inflation, dump Thatcher, etc. etc. English people usually believe such things to be possible, or at least imaginable. But the Italian knows that nothing can or will be done in his country, and that if it is done it certainly will not be done quickly. (*IN*, 116)

Noting the general sense of resignation that political culture in Italy imposes through its dense web of impenetrable and inescapable arrangements, Parks claims that Italians derive satisfaction from analysing this status quo – appreciating its pros and cons, its ironies and subtleties – rather than contesting it and trying to change it. The more he understands the local culture, the more he develops a sense of belonging. Like the Italians he observes, Parks too is becoming an “astute analyst”, one who “looks at the whole show from a distance, then goes about his business as he would have done anyway” (*IN*, 117). This mindset, *la legge non mi tange* (the law does not touch me), which is simultaneously engaged and detached, comes from participating in public life with a measure of reserve and wariness: insulating oneself from injury by not placing one’s whole faith in an impersonal system but, instead, divesting one’s interests in several places at once.

Parks points to the prevalence of this pragmatic mindset, not only in politics and public administration, but also in matters of religion. He observes that many Montecchese have copies of *Il calendario del frate indovino*, a wall calendar published by a religious order, which offers a potent mix of religious advice from a *frate* or friar alongside secular advice from an *indovino* or fortune-teller: “the quote from the Bible and the day’s horoscope beside” (*IN*, 251). He signals this contradiction as an example of the “magical duplicity about Italians”:

I’ll never get used to it. You think they’re superstitious bigots, but then they’re more open-minded than you are. None of them would ever have criticised Christ for plucking his ears of corn on the Sabbath. It’s as if they were a nation of Protestants, or even free-thinkers, who just happened to be deeply attached, for reasons of style and aesthetics, to the Catholic way of worship. Because they appreciate its richness. It fills their lives. (*IN*, 237)

His initiation into life in Italy involves navigating such conflicting impulses, which are not perceived as contradictory by Italians themselves (who consider their actions pragmatic, like a kind of Pascal’s wager) notwithstanding what outsiders may think. Parks suggests that this “profound schizophrenia” is “the charm of all matters Italian”: “the Pope adored and ignored, the law admired and flouted, politicians despised and re-elected. The gulf between officialdom’s façade and private thought could not be greater than it is here” (*IN*, 310).

He sees this defining tension at play in the aesthetic realm of daily life as well. Praising the Pasticceria Maggia in Piazza Buccari, Montecchio, Parks remarks: “I honestly know of nowhere, nowhere, where the whole experience of ordering and consuming coffee and a pastry is, or *could be*, more pleasant than in Pasticceria Maggia [...] You enter through a glass door

polished only seconds before you arrived, display windows to either side frothing with colourful goodies...” (IN, 21). Parks goes on to describe what makes the bake shop so special:

Needless to say, the whole arrangement has a cleanliness, smoothness of line, sureness of touch unthinkable in England, but without the antiseptic feel of the same thing in Switzerland, the self-consciousness of anything that is not a fast-food chain in the States. Tense as you may well be after negotiating that main street where the zebra faded years ago, depressed perhaps by a broken fountain full of litter, you can hardly help wondering, as you push in through the door, at the way this same people so infallibly reproduces these two starkly contrasting environments: anarchy without, ceremony within. (IN, 22)

The elegant lines and welcoming interior space contrast sharply with the worn and chaotic exterior space, revealing yet another example of a public/private dichotomy that characterises his new environment. Grappling with the gulf between controlled interiors and chaotic exteriors, Parks details particular instances of such contradictions in order to better identify its overall pattern and understand its ubiquity.

Understanding this pattern, he suggests, is a prerequisite for integrating in Italian life:

On a mild autumn morning you see a young woman in a seal fur climb out of a sky-blue Panda and start to fight with her remote control driveway gate which won't open. And you understand why she has a fur and why she has a Panda and why she paid more for her coat than her car. You also understand why she has a huge iron remote-control gate outside a modest house. (IN, 164)

As he settles into life in the Veneto, Parks becomes more practiced at perceiving such ambivalences on both micro and macro levels, as well as understanding their motivations. The local knowledge he accrues over time enables him to ‘read’ his environment in a more nuanced way, as an insider (not a passing tourist) would. Recalling Spirn’s claim that “reading landscape deeply requires local knowledge”, Parks here demonstrates his local knowledge through a layering of details which produce a ‘situated reading’ of place (2000: 4).

In his latest book on Italy, *Italian Ways* (2013), Parks echoes these observations from his first memoir, insights now distilled over three decades: “In every aspect of Italian life, one of the key characteristics to get to grips with is that this is a nation at ease with the distance between ideal and real. They are beyond what we call hypocrisy. Quite simply they do not register the contradiction between rhetoric and behaviour. It’s an enviable mind-set” (IW, 25). Knowledge of the many facets and articulations of this place-specific mindset is derived through regular interactions with neighbours and locals and through habitual engagement in local customs. Unlike Mayes whose early contact with locals occurs mostly through service transactions, the

interactions Parks engages in and reconstructs in his narrative seem genuine: his locals are not static objects, part of the landscape like buildings, trees, or mountains, but embodied and actively engaged in the mundane details of everyday living. Although he claims that “in a place like Montecchio, the indigenous population are, as Orietta had said, almost impenetrable because self-sufficient”, it is clear by the end of the first book that he has already made progress in penetrating this bubble and interpreting its internal workings (*IN*, 88). His evolving sense of belonging to this community is clinched by the birth of his first child, an event narrated at the end of the first memoir where Parks notes: “I date our final acceptance as first-class citizens of Via Colombare to the moment when it became generally known that Rita was to have a baby” (*IN*, 233).

His social interactions take on a new dimension as locals realise he is not simply passing through but is starting a family and setting down roots. His neighbours subsequently weigh in with advice on choosing the best gynaecologist and high-tech hospital, and on evaluating the pros and cons of public versus private health care for the pregnancy. Parks discovers that a child “is the ultimate passport to society here, a blank cheque to draw against vast reserves of Latin sentiment” (*IN*, 313). When the baby is born, he is overwhelmed by all the fussing and clucking their son, Michele, receives:

We had barely laid the carrycot on the table before they were knocking on the door, bringing gifts in extravagant packages. They peeked under the covers, went into ecstasies: the first male child born on Via Colombare for heaven knows how long! A jinx had been broken! (*IN*, 322)

Michele’s arrival guarantees their special status in Via Colombare, also known as *strada delle zitelle* (street of the old maids) because he is a *maschietto* (a little boy) in an environment of preponderantly unmarried, middle-aged women, all living under the gaze of the statue of *La Madonina*, the Virgin Mary, who presides at one end of the block. Summing up this mix of modern and traditional sentiments, Parks reflects: “Such was the world into which my child had now been officially introduced” (*IN*, 320).

4.2 Negotiation – Italian lessons

In his second memoir, *An Italian Education*, Parks further explores this dense world of everyday practices in Italy by tracing the evolution of family life as he and his wife leave the

flat they have outgrown in Via Colombare with the arrival of their second child, Stefania, about two-and-a-half years following Michele's birth. The children's journey through nursery and elementary school drives the narrative momentum of Book Two, whilst Parks's own reflections on what it means for them to 'grow up' Italian, and for him to concomitantly become more Italian, provides its internal focus. He notes: "One thing about having children is that they remind you of so much. And having children in a foreign country gives you a new awareness of distance, a new dimension of your awayness" (*IE*, 6-7). Parks's second memoir is the most personal of the trilogy, presenting his active negotiation of the dimensions of this 'awayness' as he shifts the focus from outward observation of cultural differences to an inward attempt to reconcile divergent cultural paradigms through a reconsideration of how national character is learned.

Much attention is given to the way 'Italianness' is inscribed first and foremost through the language during the period in which his own children are learning to speak. The second memoir is so rich in Italian words and expressions (all the chapter headings are in Italian) that Parks originally considered including a glossary to help the reader, but then decided against that form of literal translation which would offer "only an empty semantic shell", a surface meaning which is "nothing more than the stony outcrop of a great mass of cultural bedrock beneath" (*IE*, Foreword). Instead, Parks elucidates the meaning of the *frase chiave* or key phrases that frame each chapter by contextualising their usage through historical details and personal anecdotes which reveal different facets of that 'great mass of cultural bedrock'. He writes:

Our experience of another country is also an experience of its language, how similar it is to our own, how different. It once occurred to me that one way to talk about Italy would be simply to make a list of all those Italian words that are untranslatable, or whose translation tells you next to nothing, and then give dozens of anecdotes showing how they are used. I never got around to that. I'm not meticulous enough. But something of that project remains, in *Italian Neighbours* first, and now in this book dedicated to my children, my foreign children. For when my daughter exclaims '*O la Madonna!*', or my son sticks out two fingers of each hand and whispers '*Facciamo le corna*', it would seem superfluous to translate the first, while to write, 'Let's make horns' for the second isn't going to help anyone. This is language that has to be savoured, discovered, enjoyed. Dubbed movies are always disappointing. (*IE*, Foreword)

Parks here implies that by making an effort, a small *sacrificio* with the foreign expressions, the reader will also discover, savour and enjoy the language and, by extension, will be "guaranteed to feel, if only slightly, Italian." He thus invites his readers to become engaged as cultural insiders, "part of a privileged group, a family, [which] is precisely what any Italian education is all about" (*IE*, Foreword).

Park's second phase of acculturation to life in Italy begins with an awareness that children are genuinely celebrated and treasured, that they are at the very centre of Italian life. On his routine walk with Michele in the buggy, he notes: "Babies are public property. They tweak his nose and pinch his cheeks. And if the boy doesn't get a sweet in the newsagent's, it's only because I manage to spirit the thing away with my copy of the local paper [...] Meanwhile, a girl is kissing him and putting his cap on straight and feeling how chubby his knees are" (*IE*, 51). Unsurprisingly, an early word in Michele's repertoire is '*mella*', for *caramella*, or sweet (*IE*, 54). All this doting affection leads Parks to comment: "Clearly, it is quite wonderful being an infant in Italy, so much so that one fears nothing will ever be quite so good again" (*IE*, 51).

Indeed, the care and attention lavished on children is apparent from the very moment of birth, and Parks immediately notices the difference with England where "one can more or less wander into a maternity ward when and how one likes. [...] There is no climate of crisis", whereas in Italy, he must "put on a green coat over my clothes [...] It's the modern obsession with hygiene, with technique, with management, with control – the babies must not by any means be exposed to the outside world" (*IE*, 78). He examines how this modern obsession with health clashes with "the old world of Latin sentiment and immeasurable affection, the blind determination to get a sighting of the new child" (*IE*, 78), resulting in the hospital arranging a "*visione del bambino* 8.30-9.00pm" when babies are put on display in the nursery for visitors' viewing (*IE*, 79). Parks describes the scene of his own newborn daughter's *visione*, signalling the religious overtones of the event:

Infected by the general excitement, Stefano, Marta and I hurry down, too. We push through the glass doors to the nursery. But for the moment the wall of glass is obscured from within by a venetian blind. A crowd has formed, perhaps forty or fifty strong, all frantically waiting for the stroke of eight-thirty when the blind will be lifted and the miracle revealed. [...] Then comes the raising of the blind. The crowd surges, as at a football match. They press against the glass. [...] For my own part, I'm amazed at Marta's and Stefano's eagerness as they stare at cot 16 where little Stefania is facing the other way [...] Such fanaticism! Such enthusiasm! Such a desire to worship, to devour the object of worship. [...] And I realise now that access to the maternity ward is denied not just out of a sense of hygiene, but in order to enhance the notion of the child's sacredness. (*IE*, 81-82)

Parks's diction evokes religious zealotry in describing a kind of 'baby worship' that is a ritual part of Italian life, alongside a modern concern with health and well-being. Revealing how traditional and modern views coexist and combine to form a singular obsession with children's

welfare, Parks refrains from ridiculing this cultural mindset. Though his description presents the veneration of the child in mock-religious tones, this episode alludes to the veneration of the Christ-child without parodying it. He uses exaggeration to heighten the humorous effect, but does not mock Italian sentiment or practices; instead, he avidly participates in them.

Parks further notes how contemporary and traditional views on gender converge in relation to Italian children. He explains that one of his first duties as a father is “to play the role of the modern husband supporting his wife at birth, and this is particularly important in Italy, which has only recently discovered such healthy concepts (the range goes from gay rights to bottle recycling) and thus practices them with the eagerness of the neophyte” (*IE*, 67). Yet, despite the rhetoric of parity between the sexes and modern views about uniform socialisation for boys and girls, gender conditioning is still endemic in family life in the early 1990s as Parks is writing his second memoir. He notes that when a boy is born, people say “*E’ nato un maschio* – it’s a male – but when a girl is born they say, *E’ nata una bella bambina* – it’s a nice little girl – adding the ‘nice’ to make people feel better” (*IE*, 52). Furthermore, he observes that “little boys still get a blue rosette at birth and nice little girls a pink. So gender conditioning begins, delightfully, at birth, in the teeth of the new orthodoxy, and in the modern home as much as in the traditional” (*IE*, 73). Park’s tone here is one of restrained ridicule as he describes the ‘eagerness’ of Italians to embrace progressive concepts, adhering to their form if not their content.

His implicit critique of outdated gender views and anachronistic practices is mitigated by his own participation in these aspects of the host culture, in much the same way as he conformed to local orthodoxies regarding food and drink earlier on. This active participation removes any note of condescension from his account, indicating a blurring of the ‘I/they’ distinction:

The remarkable thing about the Veneto is not its still engrained Catholicism, nor its rapturous embrace of all things modern, but the fact that these two should so happily and profitably coexist. Until it begins to dawn on you that there is no conflict of cultures at all here – that was an Anglo-Saxon presumption – no conflict, but a superimposition. As if values were held more for their aesthetic properties than anything else, and thus could no more be in conflict than Armani and Krizia, Michelangelo and Picasso. You can believe fervently that men and women should be equal – it’s an attractive thing to believe – but if a pink frilly rosette is likewise attractive, then by all means stick it up. Where’s the problem? Once determined to avoid gender conditioning at all costs, I personally succumbed long ago. Having fixed my rosette securely to the railings, I fluff up the net circles and smooth out the two sheeny ribbons that hang down almost to the wall. Honestly, it looks splendid. (*IE*, 73-74)

The narrative voice shifts here from third person (‘the remarkable thing about the Veneto’) to

second person ('until it begins to dawn on you') to first person ('I personally succumbed'), providing an exemplary illustration of Parks's migrating sensibility as it moves from detachment to engagement. The superimposition of two distinct mindsets with regards to gender is yet another example of the "stable schizophrenia" which he identifies as a defining trait of Italians, a trait he is not only adept at deciphering but increasingly at ease adopting (*IE*, 280).

He proves, however, less amenable to participating in such dualistic behaviour regarding matters of religion. The son of a clergyman who led a Charismatic congregation, Parks himself rejected religion as an adult. He opts out of religious instruction for his children at the local school, noting: "Michele's friends have been telling him he'll go to hell ever since he became one of only two in his class to opt out of the *ora di religione*" (*IE*, 210). The fact that his children have not been baptised is raised by Don Guido, the parish priest in Montecchio, when Michele comes of age for his First Communion, a rite which Parks also opts out of as it would be hypocritical for his son to participate in this sacrament when they are not practising Christians. Parks later sees the *faux-pas* he has committed by assuming that belief in the substance and adherence to the form are mutually dependent practices, that one necessarily precedes the other:

Didn't I understand, he [Don Guido] must have been asking himself, that it was the form that mattered, rather than the content? [...] The emotion attaches itself to the form, the gesture [...] It was frankly churlish of me to start talking in this dogmatic fashion about the details of the baptism service, thus excluding my children from the community merely for the sake of some ridiculous pride that attached itself to dubious notions of sincerity and coherence. But it would take me another while yet in Italy to appreciate that. Or perhaps it's writing about it that gets you there. As a rule of thumb, the more you write, the less sure you feel about your point of view. One hopes that's as it should be. (*IE*, 220)

Though somewhat belatedly, he recognises the distance between rhetoric and reality, this time in relation to religion, and comes to see that participating in religious rituals is primarily a matter of inclusion in community not an expression of faith. He notes: "How dangerous it is to put yourself outside the group mentality in Italy! To declare that God doesn't exist, to jump off the gravy train of a state job!" (*IE*, 199). It is not clear from his account whether fear of exclusion causes him to reconsider his opt-out position on religion, but his reflective recalculation here does clearly demonstrate his engagement in actively negotiating the dimensions of his 'awayness' *vis à vis* local precepts.

The process of continually recalculating his position in relation to his adopted culture leads

Parks to expresses concern midway through the second memoir that he might be giving a negative impression of Italians and their childrearing practices:

Will it seem from these pages that I have nothing but condescension for how Italians bring up their children, how they run their nurseries, that I believe the little Latin rascals are at once spoilt and frustrated, likely, if following their parents' and grandparents' example, to become woefully superficial, at once emotional and Machiavellian? Nothing could be further from the truth. (*IE*, 169)

The declaration at the end only partially mitigates the preceding critique conveyed through a series of negative adjectives directed at Italians and their offspring: 'spoilt', 'frustrated', 'superficial', 'emotional' and 'Machiavellian'. Moreover, the use of 'little Latin rascals' draws on an essentialism of Italian children as unruly *by nature*, a stereotype Parks deploys here in a veiled comment on national character. This verges on the rhetorical mode of 'classification' that Spurr identifies as a colonial strategy to establish a "hierarchy of humanity along a series of gradations ranged between the two poles of civilization and savagery."¹⁰³ By cleverly couching his critique within a final disclaimer that implies the opposite, Parks tries to distance himself from a neo-colonial discourse that disparages 'Others' by deploying markers of cultural difference in order to ridicule them. The passage is self-reflexive and refrains from ridiculing Italians yet the negative tags remain; the 'truth' alluded to in the final line seems to lie somewhere between authorial condemnation and approval.

Parks's comments on Italian family life are even more opaque. For example, his claim, "'Earned emotion' is not an idea I have ever heard mentioned in Italy. Any extravagance of sentiment is legitimate" (*IE*, 224), is a declarative statement delivered in a neutral tone that masks Parks's own opinion on whether he considers such exuberance 'legitimate'. By recounting a visit from his in-laws and the way they lavish their grandchildren with affection, Parks sets two cultural paradigms in relief:

It would truly be hard to exaggerate the cooing and crying and sighing and kissing and nose-tweaking and exclamations and tears and tickles and cuddles that now have to take place. [...] It's what the Italians enthusiastically call *fare festa a qualcuno*, which, literally translated, means 'to make a party for someone', and combines the ideas of welcoming them and smothering them with physical affection. Comparison of this expression with the slightly disapproving 'to make a fuss of' speaks worlds about the difference between Italian and English approaches to such occasions. (*IE*, 142-3)

¹⁰³ Spurr (1993: 67).

Whilst the difference between Italian and English approaches is palpable both in the number of cuddles and in the language used to express the occasion, it is difficult to take Parks's own pulse on the matter: does he approve or disapprove of such 'Latin' displays of affection? Do they make him feel delighted or uncomfortable? By not assigning explicit value either way, he remains detached, open-ended, sensitive to cultural differences but impartial. This indeterminate position recalls Blanton's view that the best travel writers are those who are unhindered by their own subjectivities.¹⁰⁴

This neutrality is, however, untenable as a sustained narrative strategy and gives way to calibrated critiques, particularly when Parks reveals the darker side of Italian affection channelled into excessive concern for children's security and well-being. He notes how Italian parents worry incessantly about whether their children are safe, whether they are getting a balanced diet, whether they are adequately dressed for variable weather conditions, whether they are getting enough or too much physical exercise, and so on, stating: "Contrary to popular belief, then, the Italian child is not born into a splendid world of spontaneity, fun and sensual delight, but into a tight space of immense caution, inhibition, and a suffocating awareness of everything, but everything, that could go wrong" (*IE*, 32). Parks uses exaggeration here as a rhetorical strategy for gently poking fun at another aspect of the widespread Italian hypochondria he examined in his first memoir.

Yet this mild mockery is also self-directed as he juxtaposes Italian maternal devotion – "For a mother isn't just always there, but always protecting. The roadside images show the woman with tiny child or dying man. In both cases her gesture is the same: the encircling arms" (*IE*, 230) – with his own Anglo detachment as a parent, and reveals himself neglectful by contrast. He ruefully notes that "there is no man in greater trouble than an Italian husband who has been careless enough to let a child catch a cold. It's far, far worse than mere desertion or problems with alimony" (*IE*, 128). This combination of hyperbole with self-mockery deflects negative stereotyping of Italians, and the overall humorous tone suggests that Parks is not concerned with securing his cultural superiority. He reveals his own foibles while pointing to the foibles of others, a narrative technique which Lisle associates with an understanding that "cultural encounters are best translated through a sense of humour rather than a serious polemic."¹⁰⁵

Parks's respect for cultural idiosyncracies also derives from the awareness that his own children

¹⁰⁴ Blanton (1995: 107).

¹⁰⁵ Lisle (2006: 103).

are developing these traits through socialisation. He recounts a seaside conversation between his children, aged six and eight at the time: “Stefi says, ‘Michele, you’ll have to take your towel down near the water so you can put it round your shoulders as soon as you get out.’ ‘Don’t forget your flip-flops, Stefi,’ Michele replies, ‘or you’ll hurt your little feet on the shells.’ It’s asphyxiating. And so endearing” (*IE*, 428). His juxtaposition of these two adjectives lays bare his own ambivalence, a mixture of criticism and praise, for how his children are absorbing “the attitudes and mental gestures society makes available to them” (*IE*, 268). This layering of sentiments, even contrasting ones, indicates the dialogical nature of Parks’s evolving identity.

The multiplicity, indeterminacy and ambivalence of his own position are further revealed as the so-called Italian obsession with comfort and security, which Parks hitherto decried, becomes the impulse for his bold new adventure in home ownership:

As part of the obsession with security that manifests itself in tall iron fences defending bristling vegetable patches, prescriptions for every medical test under the sun and an instinctive fear of any food that does not form part of the traditional national diet, it has become a generally acknowledged truth in Italy that a couple should not embark upon a family until they own the bricks and mortar they live in. (*IE*, 41)

Not only has Parks become more adept at deciphering the contradictory impulses within the Italian every day, he is also increasingly comfortable with practising them. He notes that the second pregnancy marks their ‘house-buying adventure’ and launches a new phase of his initiation into the dense world of public rules and private arrangements. He moves from the condominium in Via Colombare to a *villetta* in Via delle Primule (literally, Primrose Way) after a prolonged process of negotiation with Signor Righetti, the builder, who *naturalmente* only accepts cash payments for the house purchase. Noting the irony of their situation, Parks states: “Thus was our second child born into a world of maximum stress in order that she be safe. What could be more appropriate by way of initiation?” (*IE*, 42). The tone of self-irony here suggests that Parks is not immune to the cautious and conservative mindset local culture imposes.

This move marks his initiation into a new community with its own protocols: “Perhaps it is appropriate that the day after Stefania’s birth is also the day of the first condominium meeting. My own family increases and I myself am admitted to the larger family of the *palazzina*” (*IE*, 83). The new neighbours, five young middle-class families, all with a single male child, meet to discuss matters of collective concern, such as the installation of a remote-controlled gate at the end of the perimeter wall encircling the row of new houses. Having spent beyond his budget on the house, Parks hopes to limit condominium expenditures, but is generally out-voted by his

neighbours who are keen to install the latest automatic gadgets and luxury fixtures which act as status symbols: “at once as superfluous and essential, or essentially superfluous, as the sprinkler system and the lawn lighting and [...] expensive tiles in the garage” (*IE*, 92). But with a stroke of genius, Parks kills their plan by declaring the gate “dangerous for children” and recalling an incident he read about in the local paper of a child dying when an automatic gate closed around his neck: “In a rare moment of intuition, I have set two Italian ideals at loggerheads [...]: on one side, protection of property [...]; on the other, the safety of your only, high-investment child” (*IE*, 94). The manually-operated gate stays, and Parks here demonstrates real *furbizia* or cunning worthy of an Italian education.

The communal gate in Via delle Primule provides an apt metaphor for the inside/outside division local culture imposes, a fault line Parks must negotiate daily as a foreigner living in a provincial Italian town. At times an insider, at times an outsider, Parks occupies an ambivalent position, continually rubbing up against different cultural viewpoints as he recalculates his own position. As a parent raising ‘foreign children’, he is doubly aware of operating within a field of shifting signifiers whose interplay is the cause (for him) of much existential anxiety. Watching Michele as he sleeps, Parks reflects: “Looking at him, I reflect that at birth, as Stefania is just born, the child’s experience must be more or less universal. At what point then do they actually become Italian?” (*IE*, 94). His writing about Italy is a way of working towards some kind of answer to this question; by recording episodes of daily life, Parks seeks to clarify the process of acculturation:

I have seen Michele fiddling with the little button inside the perimeter wall that buzzes open the pedestrian gate out onto the street. It is put there for people departing, so they won’t have to use a key, but Michele has learnt that even on coming back to the house, people reach their hands over the wall and use it, including people who have never been to our house before but who know that such things are common. So, there is a lock on the gate and even a spring-shut device to keep out intruders. But for convenience sake, and because electrical things are attractive, there is a button on the wall that everybody can use to open the gate, intruders included; just as children go to bed at eight, but don’t because they don’t want to, and as there are excellent rules about all kinds of things that for convenience sake everybody disobeys. (*IE*, 94-95)

At age two and a half, Michele has already mastered the trick with the gate; in metaphorical terms, he is already an ‘insider’. Parks reflects that even at his tender age, the boy is learning how to “approach that triumph of expediency that involves holding two separate and mutually contradictory propositions simultaneously, so as not to have to go through the anguish of rejecting either of them. Gate with lock for protection. Lock easy for everybody to open for

convenience” (*IE*, 95). This education, Parks implies, is at once absurd and attractive; he is not passing judgement, but simply acknowledging the ambivalence.

In the formal education his children receive at school, there is less room for ambivalence; in fact, it is very straightforward and traditional in both its content and approach. Parks notes: “It’s incredible how early schools start giving hours of homework in Italy, how seriously and traditionally they teach grammar and maths. It warms a parent’s heart” (*IE*, 218). Their academic progress is tracked in an open system which compares individual performance to the group, with no attempt to disguise individual weaknesses or protect fragile egos:

A large chart shows how the children are getting on at their various subjects. There are the names of the pupils along the vertical axis, the subjects on the horizontal and then different colours filling the squares defined by the meeting of name and subject: red for excellent, blue for good, green for average, yellow for not good enough. It’s a remarkably open system, brutal for those who are doing badly. I can see that Iacopo’s child has problems with composition, while Stefano’s Beppe is the best at maths. Michele, I choose to think, with the kind of parental jealousy one always hoped one wouldn’t have, is hanging in there like a good long distance runner, in the pack behind the leaders. All his squares are blue. (*IE*, 260-1)

This public system of grading reinforces the important role of the group in the socialisation of Italian children: each child knows exactly where he or she fits in, as well as everyone else. Parks reflects that in this way, children learn the value of difference (as distinct from discrimination) and learn how to behave in a group (*IE*, 185).

He further observes that Italian schools focus exclusively on academic subjects and offer no programme of extracurricular activities. Children’s participation in music, art, theatre, sports, clubs or activities is done wholly through private community-based associations outside of school; late afternoons thus “become full of *sacrifici* of time and money” as parents shuttle their kids around to these activities (*IE*, 288). Commenting on the absence of extracurricular life at school, Parks states:

The [Italian] school doesn’t as it does in England, pretend to offer a community that might in any way supplant the family, or rival Mamma. That’s important. It doesn’t, and later on the university won’t either, try to create in the child the impression of belonging to a large social unit with its own identity. There is no assembly in the morning, no hymn singing, no prayers, no speech day. (*IE*, 287)

Schools are places of socialisation, but only up to a point: they do not infringe on the primary role of the family and local community in children’s education since the social cohesiveness of

both is assumed.

The family unit plays a paramount role in Italian life, and Parks is initiated into its specific dynamics along with his children. Reflecting on visits from Rita's parents and brothers, he good-naturedly notes: "Nobody minds their business in an Italian family, nor are they expected to. Everybody's behaviour is fair game for everybody else" (*IE*, 152). Family time thus "proceeds in a sort of merry-go-round of well-meant advice, every last word of which is just so much form, so much water off another's duck's back. But these ducks swim in such water. They like to feel it running down their feathers" (*IE*, 152). The teasing and nosiness are signs of affection, of familiarity, so that everyone talks critically about "Uncle Berto's love of expensive clothes", or "Uncle Renato's tendency to send his mechanic's bills to his father" (*IE*, 146), but everyone embraces each other rapturously, "hand-clapping, back-clapping, hugging and kissing" (*IE*, 147). Real resentments or grievances are suppressed in "this wonderful *spettacolo* of affection, this carefully choreographed *festa*" in which everyone puts on a good show of getting along together (*IE*, 147). Parks questions whether Italians could imagine family life differently:

I have often wondered in this regard, whether Italians can really appreciate a story like King Lear. Why didn't Cordelia put on a bit more of a show for her foolish old father? Surely that was wrong of her. For there are times when a little falsehood is expected of you, and can be engaged in quite sincerely, because appearance has a value in itself, indicates, precisely, your willingness to keep up an appearance. All the world is appearance. Cordelia was wrong. (*IE*, 148)

Even within the heart of family life, thus at the very core of Italian society, Parks notes a tension between appearance and reality. Yet he, like his children, is wise enough to disregard whatever unpleasantness underlies everyone's getting on together and simply enjoy the show. As he notes, "predictable and required theatricality is another way of helping people to live well" (*IE*, 437).

Unpleasant matters are dealt with strictly in private, as when Parks's father-in-law, Adelmo, confides in him about his grown sons' repeated requests for money, complaining that he has to support his kids even in their forties, satisfying their enormous appetites "to the bitter end" (*IE*, 439). This lifelong responsibility is what it means to *tenere famiglia* (support a family), an expression with a unique mix of meanings in Italian. Parks notes:

Great generosity, total control. It's a heady (even divine) mixture, and one that gives rise to another triumphantly Italian expression [...] '*Tengo famiglia*', which translates, 'I

support a family.’ But no, no, it’s more than that. Translation is helpless here, in the face of the vast mental iceberg sailing beneath this apparently harmless semantic tip. For *tengo famiglia* lies at the crossroads of so many cultural highways. *Tengo* comes from *tenere*, to hold. The expression means, I hold a family, in the sense of both I support it and I control it. It contains the notions both of *sacrifici* and of power. (IE, 311)

Despite grumbling about this responsibility, Adelmo would not have it any other way; Parks observes how he ends his gripe with a laugh, saying: “‘*Gli schiaffi dei figli sono carezze per i genitori.*’ It’s the ultimate statement of the *sacrifici* principle: ‘A child’s blows are caresses for the parents’” (IE, 442). “Growing up anywhere in the world,” Parks notes, “is partly a question of absorbing the lesson that you can’t always get what you want. But Italian children do get a great deal” (IE, 281).

Growing up in an environment where they are coddled their whole lives, it is no wonder, Parks thinks, that Italian children are not in a hurry to leave home. He sees this trend in his own extended family as well as with his university students who tell him, “‘I like living with *mamma e papà*. There’s nothing I’d like to do that I can’t do at home’” (IN, 258). Rather than producing spoilt and bratty young people, this indulgent form of parenting seems to breed contentment and self-confidence. Parks observes how Italian adolescents are mature and well-adjusted, how they have a “decorousness and calm about them at once admirable and disturbing” that comes from having good relationships with their friends, their parents, their elders, and the larger community (IN, 259). This private bubble of protection acts as a bulwark against the vagaries of public life with its uncertain rules and unpredictable outcomes. Noting the prevalence of various *graduatorie* in Italian society – open processes of selection for everything from getting into a college hostel, to getting a low-interest mortgage, to getting a job – Parks reflects on how a complex machinery is put in place to circumvent personal networks of influence and favouritism, but it is often “little more than a cover for what is was designed to eliminate” (IE, 186). With such uncertainty in public life, the family unit exists, in part, to provide a buffer of comfort and security from cradle to grave.

Parks rubs up against this impersonal world of ‘open’ selections and ‘fair’ competitions when he enrolls Michele in *nido* or nursery school, initially marvelling at the quality of public services available to Italian families: “Italy has the most generous maternity leave regulations and the most enlightened system of pre-school care of any country I know” (IN, 157). Whilst he is thrilled that Michele receives a Montessori-based programme at a reasonable fee, he soon discovers that the State is more generous with some parents than others. The admission process

to the *nido* establishes a *graduatoria* or ranking in a hierarchy of entitlement based on a point system, with points allocated according to different criteria, including financial need as per data provided by prospective parents on their application forms. Parks agrees that it is only right that parents with higher incomes should pay more for the nursery service, but then he sees the publication of the *graduatoria* which reveals what each family is actually paying. Parks is the only one paying the full amount, 400,000 Lire per month (10% of his income), whilst others are paying as little as 50,000 Lire per month.

He immediately understands that others have misrepresented their income and cheated the system, an awareness that gives rise to that “most characteristic [of] Italian emotions, [...] that mixture of envy, perplexity and wonder that comes when one realises that others are working the system far more effectively than oneself – *sai com'è?* – this together with the knowledge that they are doing so and will continue to do so with absolute impunity” (*IE*, 165). Parks feels both scorn and envy for the man in the gold wristwatch and black Saab who is paying monthly only 110,000 Lire. “People are not so respectful of authority here”, he writes, “it is remarkable to see quite how far some will go to get round a rule without actually breaking it. For cunning lies not in ignoring rules, breaking boundaries, but moving as it were in a different dimension, where they become irrelevant” (*IE*, 190). The *nido* episode marks a significant step on his learning curve as he realises that “the system was invented in order to be worked in this way” and adjusts his behaviour accordingly. Parks senses this is a turning point in his initiation, stating: “I was aware of having suddenly become a little bit more Italian, aware of the society and its language speaking through me” (*IE*, 165).

Nowhere is it more apparent that Parks's adopted culture is ‘speaking through him’ than in his description of the quintessential pleasures of an Italian beach holiday. Its first distinguishing feature is how starkly it differs from Parks's own childhood holidays:

For this is not a holiday such as those I remember from my own childhood where the first thing Mother and Father did was to buy an ordnance survey map [...] so in the end you set out, rain or shine, often visiting a museum when the sun was powering down, or the beach when gales blew your towels away – wonderful holidays of discovery in windswept Welsh bays [...] holidays of adventure and risk, of foaming surf, hard shale, precipitous paths [...] Those were holidays that made a hero of you, that made you proud of our glorious centuries of miserable weather, holidays that made you... English. Pescara is not that kind of holiday. (*IE*, 373-4)

Instead, Pescara is defined by a cloudless sky, always “blue and blistering”, temperature in the

high thirties, a sandy stretch of beach and blue sea beyond (*IE*, 374). Parks notes the absence of thermos flasks of hot tea, of daily ‘projects’ to decide on, the absence of any decision beyond whether to bring the flippers and what to eat for lunch. He muses: “As long as you’re not expecting a direct encounter with nature (of the variety my mother was after), Pescara is impeccable” (*IE*, 384). Unlike the search for adventure, for a hazardous or risky experience to test courage and bravado which he remembers as the impetus for English seaside holidays in his youth, in Pescara the sun and the sea *are* the experience.

Another counterpoint to summer seaside holidays of his youth is the marginal role fathers generally play in Italian beach holidays. He notes:

I can rejoice in yet another difference between these holidays and those of my youth: in those days, in England, Father was present all holiday, he saw and suffered it all, while I, like so many Italian men, am just driving my family down to the sea, the better to escape back home to a month’s steady work and solitary amusement. When in Rome do as the Romans, especially when they have a tradition that turns out to be so convenient. (*IE*, 358)

Traditionally, Italian children finish school in mid-June then head off to the seaside with their mothers and grandparents while their fathers stay home to work, joining their families intermittently. These gender roles, though at odds with his own cultural experiences, are ‘convenient’ ones which Parks is willing to adopt. The pleasures of detachment and solitariness are vestiges of patriarchal privilege in a culture wherein childrearing remains primarily a woman’s purview. Such prolonged periods of absence and solitary amusement also lead to different kinds of summer ‘adventures’ than those of his youth; as Parks notes, in vernacular Italian, *avventura* means a ‘brief affair’ (*IE*, 375).

Parks recounts a revealing role reversal one summer when Rita, pregnant with their third child, is unable to accompany Michele and Stefania to the seaside; Parks goes and discovers the pleasures of engaging daily with the Pescara beach scene. He deeply enjoys the routine which unfolds exactly the same way every day: arriving at the beach around 8.30 am; finding the blue-and-white sunshade and lounge bed rented for the season; setting up a little encampment there then wandering over to the bar (100 metres away) for a cappuccino and croissant; back to the beach with a newspaper while the kids play in the sand, swim, build sandcastles, swim some more; back to the bar for an *aperitivo* at 11.30 am while the kids play video games; quick shower at the bathing station; home by 1.00 pm for lunch then siesta. He delights in the invariability and predictability of this routine – “never is it easier to be oneself and relaxed

about it than when you know exactly what is expected of you" (*IE*, 437) – and in the intimacy that develops at the beach between families installed under sunshades set exactly two and a half metres apart. He writes:

But the real pleasure here, and one you won't imagine till you've experienced it, is this chance to observe the same people at play every day, to know where to find them and how to avoid them in this rich warren of shade and light. [...] People cease to be just shapes, ugly or attractive; you get to know exactly how they move and gesture, what their routine is, the mothers' neuroses and the men's newspapers, the pensioners' scars. [...] It's a splendid intimacy these sunshades bring. (*IE*, 384)

Parks acknowledges that English friends who join him at Pescara remain unimpressed by the "gridwork of sunshades that depresses them, this routine of rented deck chairs and lounge beds, the machinery of it, the beach bureaucracy" (*IE*, 382). His particular pleasure in the communal aspect of the beach experience, its intimacy, suggests that he is developing an Italian mindset.

This intimate beach setting offers Parks the opportunity to let his masculine gaze wander unfettered over all the seaside attractions in a socially-sanctioned ritual of people watching. He notes, for example, that "The *bagnino* comes around to open our shade. He is followed by a girl, perhaps no more than fifteen. Tall, slim, very well endowed, she doesn't help him, doesn't even talk to him, but drapes herself on objects round about" (*IE*, 381-2). In Parks's construction, the boy is defined primarily through his active role whereas the girl fulfils a passive, decorative function. His sexualised gaze similarly rests on a young mother at the bar: "She is in her late twenties and wears a lime green shift that just fringes her buttocks left naked by her tanga costume. Not quite the buttocks of a girl, but almost" (*IE*, 376). Parks notes that as he leaves the bar, he and the proprietor exchange "a fat and knowing smile" of male complicity (*IE*, 379). It is not difficult to detect patriarchal culture 'speaking through him' here.

Parks's leisurely inspection of female bodies on the beach and the eroticisation of his account bear all the hallmarks of the masculine gaze in travel writing: the male subject is all-seeing and all-powerful, and the exotic female is a passive object subjected to unveiling by the eroticising gaze. Spurr notes how the rhetoric of objectification and eroticisation operates in travel writing through gestures of "reduction" (detailing female body parts) and "seduction" (projecting erotic fantasies) which secure the power of the male writer whilst denying any subjective personal identity to the female object.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Parks's roving eye treats the female body as landscape

¹⁰⁶ Spurr also claims that the objectification of the female body in travel writing is "emblematic of the larger colonialist enterprise" (1993: 175).

subjected to the dominant and ordering gaze: systematically identifying parts; detailing size, colour, texture; passing an aesthetic judgement. Generally polite, charming, and emotionally *contained* in his writing – neither offensive towards others nor overtly self-revealing – Parks lets down a guard of political correctness here. His masculine gaze reveals that he is not, in fact, unhindered by his subjectivity, but is embedded in a patriarchal tradition of travel writing that eroticises the female Other.

In this passage, Parks's persona appears every bit the classic 'Englishman abroad', descending in a direct line from the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition which explicitly related travel with the gratification of libido.¹⁰⁷ Like Byron's continental adventures which fuelled the fantasies of his compatriots back home, Parks presents the Italian seaside holiday through a sexualised lens, with the tanned, semi-nude female body as an ornament of holiday escapist culture. In a narrative that otherwise details the life-affirming qualities of the quotidian – the domestic world of children and family life – Parks here juxtaposes erotic desire – the domain of non-reproductive sexuality – and the desire to surrender to foreign place and its exotic attractions. Bataille (1957), Jameson (1981), Deleuze and Guattari (1983) and Bennett (2001), among many theorists, have signalled the tension between the affirmative and destructive qualities of *eros*: human nature following its own compulsions and convictions, uncontained by the rationalised self or by social and moral dictates.

Embedded as it is in the relationship between self and other, eroticism is, according to Papayanis, "the ground upon which ethics falters, contradicts itself, strives to remain true to itself" (2005: 18). Commenting on the tension between ethics and eroticism in travel writing, she further states:

Expatriate desires are suffused with a kind of eroticism that is to be distinguished from "mere" hedonism. Eroticism is the prism through which intimacy between the expatriate and the native is most frequently represented, drawing together different modes of desire: the carnal, the spiritual, the destructive, the life affirming, the violent, the passive, the quotidian, the sublime, the transgressive, and the domestic, the exotic and the mundane. (2005: 16-17)

The contested site where incommensurable and often incompatible ethical models meet, namely those directed toward the self and those directed toward the Other, is actualised in Parks's

¹⁰⁷ Rojek and Urry (1997: 17) note that the "Byronic legend of the mobile, lusty lover remains highly durable. Added to it are the travel memoirs of Flaubert, de Nerval, Wordsworth and many other (male) nineteenth-century artists. The liberation that these men felt in travelling has a palpable libidinous connotation both for themselves and for their readers."

account of an Italian beach holiday.

The erotic desire conveyed in Parks's seaside passage is layered and complex. The masculine gaze operates here in a circumscribed way: Parks is not quite the Byronic lover released from the moral and social strictures of civilised life through solo travel abroad; he is, after all, at the seaside with his two children, a role, in the Italian context, generally reserved for mothers or grandparents. Wilson (1992) reminds us that modernity destabilises social relations so that gender categories are rendered inherently ambiguous and the public/private spheres of activity are blurred. Indeed, Parks presents a contemporary, domesticated version of the masculine nineteenth-century adventurer: part flâneur, part ogler, and part dutiful dad. His stolen glances at beautiful women in bikinis are on par with his stolen moments enjoying a cappuccino or aperitif at the beachside bar while his kids play alone: mildly transgressive acts of personal escape and indulgence contained within a general adherence to bourgeois cultural norms of production and reproduction.

The eroticising gaze is further contained by a framing device provided through Parks's broader reflection on Italian youth's sense of ease with sexuality, and the cultural contrast this presents with his own experience. Whilst his prurient gaze is consumed by the gorgeous, young flesh on the beach, he observes the detached interest young Italians themselves display before bikini-clad bodies, remaining nonplussed by attractions which are familiar to them from years of beach holidays. Parks notes: "One girl, still a child but with a woman's body and elegance, is dancing, in a bikini that says 'More Energy' round the waistband and again on a sort of tight sash affair beneath her breasts. She is beautiful. But the boys are perfectly relaxed about it" (*IE*, 392).

Parks admires their lack of inhibition, their self-confidence and ease regarding sexuality, noting:

I think, one of the reasons I've stayed in Italy is that I believe, perhaps erroneously, perhaps sentimentally, perhaps merely in reaction to my own childhood of church halls and rainy weekends – I do believe that kids have a better time here, that adolescence is more fun here. Certainly I never saw a group of people so confident and at ease with themselves and their youth. I wish it for my children. (*IE*, 392-3)

He further notes the tendency Italian adolescents have to "go off to pet and canoodle in groups, large groups, occasionally breaking off and shouting jokes to each other. They have none of the trepidation and secrecy that seemed such an inevitable part of the package in my adolescence" (*IE*, 423). The naturalness and ease towards sexuality which Italian adolescents possess but which was not 'part of the package' for Parks shifts the balance of power away from his

ordering gaze; he self-reflexively acknowledges a lack of mastery or authority in this area.

In recognising the advantages of the Italian model of socialisation to sexuality, Parks surrenders another dimension of cultural superiority. Whilst stating, “The story of my fatherhood has been that of a long strategic retreat from the systems I hoped to impose”, he accepts that such a transformation is inevitable: “If my children are inevitably acquiring an Italian education, they force me to acquire one too. At least up to a point” (*IE*, 237). Pin-pointing the degree of his ‘Italianness’ is impossible because his identity shifts along with his identifications; he is continually “falling between the stools of two cultures”. Parks reflects: “I’m not English any more, but I still can’t worship Baggio” (*IE*, 455).

He sometimes worries that such cultural indeterminacy affects his children in a negative way, asking himself: “Can a child or person really have two nationalities, express the traits, that is, of two national characters? Or doesn’t one inevitably exclude the other? Or worse still, they simply destroy each other, so that rather than being English and Italian, my children with their mix of languages and habits, are neither one nor the other. These are imponderables” (*IE*, 234). Yet when Stefi recites ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb’, punctuating the song with Italian hand gestures, or when Michele tells him not to be ‘so fiscal’, Parks sees that they already embody both cultures. There is a tinge of melancholy in his recognition that his children are not learning the ‘systems’ he had hoped to impart, but in an exchange with his father-in-law at the close of the second memoir, he admits: “‘No better place to grow up than Italy,’ I tease him. [...] my father-in-law is quick to correct me: ‘No better place,’ he says, ‘not to grow up!’” (*IE*, 456).

4.3. Accommodation – community and conviviality

In his third memoir, *A Season With Verona: Travels Around Italy in Search of Illusion, National Character and ‘Goals’*, Parks examines the passion and business of Italian football by focusing on the triumphs and travails of Hellas Verona in their 2001-2002 season. The prospect of chronicling a season in the life of his adopted home team, following their fortunes both on the road and at home, means an opportunity for Parks to write a ‘real’ travel book: one that charts a physical journey through space in contrast to his first two memoirs about immersing himself in the everyday rhythms of one place. This challenge resonates both as a genuine interest and a contrived excuse for him to spend Sundays away from his family, as he wryly notes:

For years I have been a regular at Bentegodi [Verona stadium], but this season, for the

first time, I have decided to go to all the away games too. And to write about them. Partly, the writing is an excuse. How can I explain to my wife that I'm going to be away every other Sunday for nine months if I'm not writing about it? If I'm not making money. It's such a mad indulgence: to watch Verona play in Rome, in Naples, in Lecce and Reggio Calabria. 'It'll be a travel book,' I insist. 'At last I'll write a real travel book.' I can't wait to see those games. I can't believe I'm going to do this. (*SWV*, 2)

Following his passion for the game, Parks produces a travelogue about football which offers a wider panorama of sights and insights whilst still being very much about Verona and the Veronesi. Suggesting that his first two nonfiction works on Italy are “complemented, perhaps completed” by *A Season With Verona*, Parks explains that this third instalment provides a grand overview of national character through the “comic microcosm of provincial fandom” which he experiences first-hand as an adopted member of Verona's infamous *Brigate Gialloblù*.¹⁰⁸

Dedicated to “the boys who travel on the Zanzibar bus”, the third book charts Parks's experience of becoming part of a tribe, an education on the inclusionary and exclusionary nature of community. His travels with the *Brigate* provide him with an understanding of the strong group affiliations and regional identifications which shape individual identities as well as national character in Italy. *Campanilismo*, a sense of local pride and community identification, is especially apparent in the cohesive group identity of the core Verona fan base which, Parks notes, “all hail from inside an area of about fifty square kilometres” and “speak a highly specific regional dialect” (*SWV*, 39). He comments:

One of the things about the *ragazzi gialloblù*, I'm telling myself, unlike supporters of say, Juventus or Manchester United, is that it would be unimaginable for someone from outside Verona to infiltrate them. Their community is so genuinely tight-knit, so radically local and such a well-defined linguistic island, that the idea of masquerading as one of them is unthinkable. (*SWV*, 23)

The irony here, of course, is that an outsider *does* infiltrate them, but only by becoming one of them. Parks's position as an Englishman brought into the local fold provides him a unique vantage point from which to analyse local, regional and global dynamics through the game of football.

L'amore di campanile, love for one's hometown (literally for one's bell tower), translates in football terms as loyalty first and foremost to the home team. Parks describes the long-standing rivalries between provincial teams such as Bari and Lecce, or Verona and Vicenza, which are

¹⁰⁸ Cited from Tim Parks's blog: <http://tim-parks.com>

each other's "nearest and so most-hated rivals" (*SWV*, 38). He notes that much is at stake in maintaining local distinctions, even in an age of globalised sports, perhaps *especially* in an age of globalised sports. The fans are defined along fiercely entrenched local lines whilst the players (managers and owners) circulate globally: localism, here, strives to be an antidote to globalisation and its culture of sameness, its erasure of particularity. Parks writes:

No distinction is more urgent or more arduous than that between ourselves and those who most resemble us, the guys down the road. And how much more difficult the distinction becomes when Verona is now owned by the Vicenza-born Pastorello and Vicenza by an anonymous consortium of British investors. It's one of those puzzling moments when you must '*aggraparsi ai colori presi dallo stemma della città*': cling to the colours taken from the city's coat of arms. (*SWV*, 121-2)

He reveals how this ethos of local pride and loyalty shapes the provincial fans' disdain for the big clubs from Turin, Milan and Rome, which represent big business interests, using mega-salaries to draw the best players from around the globe with the consequence that they have little local affiliation. Similarly disparaged are Italian fans that support the big clubs over their own local teams, rooting for Juventus, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Lazio, or Rome which have better funding, better players, better rankings, better television coverage, and which seem to receive better calls during matches from referees.

The sense of injustice that provincial fans feel as 'underdogs' *vis à vis* these comparative advantages helps to sediment solidarity by reifying an 'us vs. them' mentality. Parks notes that in 1985 when Verona miraculously won the *scudetto*, the national championship, it was the first time in four decades that the competition had been won by a small provincial team; not unrelated, it was "also the year that the league decided to select referees by lot rather than designation. Needless to say, the following season, the league went back to the old system."¹⁰⁹ Rather than feeling surprised, Parks notes the tone of resignation expressed by players and fans alike who never doubted that it could be otherwise: "Big towns like Milan, Rome, and Turin had more influence than Verona, and Verona had more influence than many smaller places. No one was thinking of the sport as a whole, only of his place in the pecking order."¹¹⁰ In football, as in other dimensions of Italian life, much is decided off the pitch; group identity based on local affiliations provides a bubble of protection before such impersonal bureaucratic hierarchies.

¹⁰⁹ Parks (2011: 82).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 82.

Beyond the city versus province distinction, Italian regionalism is also evident in the bitter north-south division which manifests itself in the stadium terraces through insults traded between fans. On his inaugural road trip with the *Brigate*, Parks travels 550 miles south to watch Verona play against Bari and recounts the xenophobic insults they shout, “*Meridionali di merda*”, “*Terroni figli di puttana*”, “*Non esiste senza di noi*” (you wouldn’t exist without us, i.e. without the rich, taxpaying north), and other taunts which rely on stereotypes of southerners as crude, uncultured and lazy, recalling the stereotypes of Calabrians used by Ligurians in Hawes’s retelling of her trip south. Bari’s standard response to these slurs is to call the Veronesi ‘racist shithheads’, “*Veronesi, razzisti di merda!*” Over the course of the game, Parks comes to see that this chorus of foul insults has a certain mad theatricality to it; it is essentially a “wild comedy” since about half of Verona’s team members are southerners (a fact which the fans are aware of) and most of the Verona fans themselves have southern friends (*SWV*, 33). The verbal antagonism functions as a mechanism to reinforce group identity and release tension, thus avoiding an escalation in conflict.

Parks notes, in fact, that this exercise of insults is essentially a ‘false confrontation’: “They’re going to arrive at the point where there is shouting and insult and outrage and then they’re going to do exactly what they’re told”, unlike hooliganism within English football which harbours the threat of real danger exploding (*SWV*, 35). He points out how a loose pile of stones left carelessly inside the Bari stadium exposes the tameness of both sides since “nobody picks up anything. Nobody’s interested in trouble” (*SWV*, 35). Parks reflects that in spite of the *Brigate*’s deviant, provocative behaviour, their excesses never reach beyond a certain point: “Surprisingly, certain rules exist and are obeyed” (*SWV*, 29). After many trips with them, he comes to see that “football offers an ambiguous middle ground between words and blows” (*SWV*, 119), that it is “an arena for experiencing all the passions, positive and negative, and escaping unscathed” (*SWV*, 120). The xenophobic insults are part of a “schismatic process” (*SWV*, 130) through which northerners and southerners respectively seek to protect their identity and power through rhetorical debasement of the other whilst avoiding coming to blows.¹¹¹

This north-south dividing line is not absolute, as revealed in a moment of humanism when fellow-feeling overrides regional loyalty during the Bari game. When a gust of wind blows a prized *Hellas campioni d’Italia 1985* cap off one of the *Brigate*’s heads; it goes sailing over the

¹¹¹ Spurr identifies “debasement” as a rhetorical strategy through which the Self seeks to reinforce the so-called ‘purity’ of its dominant symbolic system by establishing the Other in terms of abjection and defilement through language, social organisation, and ideology (1993: 76-91).

high fence separating the terraces and lands on the Bari side. Glass-eye, whose hat has been lost, pleads with the line of riot police (positioned between the terraces to keep opposing fans apart), but no one budes to retrieve the cap; instead, several police officers impassively exchange grins. Park describes the stand-off:

‘My hat, *Dio boia*, my old hat.’ It wouldn’t be easy to get hold of a genuine 1985 Verona champions of Italy hat. ‘I was ten years old, *Dio can!*’ Verona are not likely to be champions again. Faced with such a grievous loss, Glass-eye suddenly seems to be acting like the most normal of people. ‘*Ragazzi*,’ he shouts to the Bari fans beyond the police. ‘*Abbiate pietà!*’ Have mercy. His voice his hoarse with yelling. ‘Please, can you get me my old hat?’ (*SWV*, 37)

After an uncomfortable wait, two Bari fans break through the police line, grab the hat then, “waiting for a lull in the wind, concentrating so as to make sure the hat will go over the high fence and then across the frightening gap in the cement floor”, toss it up and over where the precious thing lands in the Verona terraces (*SWV*, 38). The *Brigate* break out in unison “Ba-ri! Ba-ri!” (with no expletives) then switch their chant to “*Lecce Lecce vaffanculo!*”, Lecce being Bari’s closest and, thus, most-hated rival. Besides providing Parks with a justification for having travelled cross-country – he would never have experienced such intense emotions by watching the game on TV – this comic microcosm of reality contains a serious lesson for him on the nature of Italian group identity: solidarity first resides with one’s local team, then with one’s region, but always with the human group before the bureaucratic arm of the State.

His first road trip with the *Brigate* also presents an important induction into the ‘job’ the group performs at games. Parks is surprised to discover that this rag-tag assembly of one-hundred-and-fifty bleary, beery boys actually plays a vital role in communicating to the players their sense of unity. Parks notes that the *ragazzi gialloblù* give to Hellas Verona “what no television camera ever can, an immediate vocal response to whatever they do, a response of admiration, or of scorn, but above all encouragement, a sense of urgency”. Without “these wild boys” and their incredible spirit, which at time borders on delirium, Parks claims the game would simply not work because a “huge injection of excitement, of spilt libido and perverted civic pride, is absolutely necessary” (*SWV*, 40). The fans achieve this purpose, this united front, through song. Noting the very first chant they break into at all away games – ““*Chi noi siamo?*” Who are we? [...] ‘*Glielo diciamo?*’ Shall we tell them? [...] ‘*Brigate, Brigade Gialloblù!*’ [...] ‘*Siamo l’armata del Verona!*’ We’re Verona’s army” – Parks observes its power in immediately transforming the fans into a single entity.

This song functions as “a declaration of identity, a rallying to Hellas, to the homeland” (*SWV*, 10), helping to create a sense of community, one which Parks feels both within and without. He identifies with the *Brigate* up to a point, noting that his presence among them is somewhat like that of “an unobtrusive parent on a rather deviant Sunday school outing” (*SWV*, 27). In fact, the nickname they give Parks, ‘*Parroco*’ (parish priest), underlines his separateness from the rest of the group whose pseudonyms, by contrast, suggest more feral identities. Despite his passion for the team, his knowledge of the game and his civic pride, Parks will never be a true *gialloblù* because he was not “born in the shadow of the Bentegodi” and does not have the same sense of ownership of the team (*SWV*, 176). However, when faced with a choice between “town and stadium”, between the boys on the bus and the “bejewelled and befurred Veronese”, his class loyalty is clearly with the former.

It is not that people of the *curva* are like me. Our backgrounds are a thousand miles and many light-years apart. It’s just that, if only because Verona can never be a big team, this is necessarily a population of underdogs. And there must have been a moment when, unwittingly, I linked my own battles to theirs, my own experience of, as I saw it, shovelling shit to Hellas Verona’s endless fight against the flood-tide of big money. In that sense, I could feel part of their community. (*SWV*, 105)

Parks identifies with the community of Bentegodi fans, not the fur-coat culture of Verona. He enjoys the choral pandemonium of the bus and the *Brigate*’s antics, noting: “I like the din, the confusion, the shambles of beer cans and bottles and abandoned newspapers and smoky air. And above all the riotous, desecrating songs” (*SWV*, 262).

These songs all celebrate transgression and immediately provoke two emotions: “insane hilarity and a vast sense of unease” (*SWV*, 264). One song mocks the bus driver, another mocks the *carabinieri*, another mocks a notorious serial killer called Stevanin, then mocks his victims, whilst other songs more predictably mock opposing teams and their fans by deploying vile stereotypes and vulgar humour: “‘*Senti che puzza/scappano anche i cani/sono arrivati i napoletani.*’ Get that smell/ Even the dogs are running/ The Neapolitans are coming” (*SWV*, 253). Parks notes that these chants are “truly awful” yet, at the same time, compelling; similarly, the “wonderfully sick jokes” and baiting insults which compare athletes who perform badly on the pitch to ‘paraplegics’, ‘brain-dead vegetables’ and ‘mongoloids’ have a perverse attraction (*SWV*, 88). He enjoys this “poisonous blanket of parody” (*SWV*, 265) with an embarrassed giggle, self-reflexively wondering: “How can you laugh? How can a middle-aged, respectable

family man like myself giggle over such a song?” (SWV, 263).

In an away game against Udine, Forza, one of the *Brigate*’s seasoned members, delivers a true “masterpiece of offence” after challenging the younger fans to come up with an insult that would get the game off to a roaring start and drive the Udinesi “completely mad”. Parks notes: “It’s a tough question. None of the younger folks seem to know. Down south obviously, the opposition are all *terroni di merda*. In Bolgona they are *comunisiti di merda*. In Turin they are *gobbi di merda*, hunchbacks. But what can we say of these respectable northerners?” (SWV, 301). Forza delivers the perfect blow, “*Terremotati!*” Parks explains:

A *terremoto* is an earthquake. In 1976 the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, of which Udine is the capital, was devastated by a severe earthquake that caused thousands of deaths. So, in stark defiance of the standard contemporary rhetoric of compassion, we are going to insult these people by reminding them that they have been profoundly unlucky, that they have suffered. (SWV, 302)

As though this level of bad taste were not sufficient, Forza then sets the insult to the jolly tune of ‘Guantanamera’ and leads the *gialloblù* in a raucous chorus: “‘TER-RE-MO-TA-TI! ... Voi siete terremotati. Terremota-a-a-ti, voi siete terremotati’” (SWV, 302). Parks reflects that it is the perfect provocation: the Udinese fans respond with predictable vehemence, “feeling properly angry”, and so the game will mean more, matter more; the insults are deliberately designed to produce antagonism that will up the ante regarding the game’s outcome.

Parks’s own role in the chorus of irreverence is ambivalent; he sits in the *curva sud* with the *Brigate* but is both part of the group and apart from it. In relation to the *terremotati* chant, he says “everybody joins in [...] there are only a couple hundred of us [...] we have barely started a second round of the song before the place explodes with rage” (SWV, 302). His use of the pronouns ‘us’ and ‘we’ seem to indicate his own active participation in the mockery. Yet elsewhere he notes: “Am I myself so fanatic? I’ve often wondered about the way I switch back and forth from ‘we’ to ‘they’ when I talk about Verona” (SWV, 41). The more Parks feels himself becoming one of the ‘we’, the more he seeks to reassert his individual identity: “Hellas Verona football club is not my destiny [...] not in the way it is for these people around me, these people who grew up speaking the local dialect, who cannot imagine a different life. I can tear myself away from this [...] I can say ‘they’ not ‘we’. I can and must detach myself” (SWV, 42). The choice of the modal verbs ‘can’ (capacity) and ‘must’ (obligation) in the last line signals Parks’s unsettled sensibility; the absence of ‘do’ (action) suggests an unsuccessful

outcome in following through on his intentions and detaching himself completely from the group. His insider/outsider status is rendered here in all its clear ambivalence.

The *Brigate*'s mocking and derision is a form of puerile humour used to provoke group identity through debasement of others. Parks reveals that the name which they use to refer to each other, '*butei*', is, in fact, a Veronese dialect word for 'young child'. '*I butei gialloblù*', he notes, is simultaneously an affectionate and ironic expression: they are both infantile and are playing at being infantile (*SWV*, 9). The exaggerated bad taste of the *butei* creates a carnivalesque atmosphere that lends their chants and insults an air of un-reality; Parks says he enjoys them most "on the bus, in the context of the trip, the carnival din of voices, the fatuous Fondo, wearing pink skiing goggles beneath his *gialloblù* cap" (*SWV*, 264). In fact, as the fans leave the stadium and remove their game personae, the masquerade of vile humour abates and reality resumes.

Parks observes that the stadium is a kind of '*zona franca*' where one can escape his everyday identity and "be anyone and say anything" (*SWV*, 275) in a carnivalesque inversion of reality that provides a release from social decorum. In *Rabelais and His World* (1984) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), Mikhail Bakhtin analyses the role of the carnivalesque in literature by reflecting on the transgressive power of carnival activities in popular culture. In the carnival, social hierarchies of everyday life — solemnities, pieties and etiquettes, as well as all ready-made truths — are profaned and overturned by normally suppressed voices and energies. From carnivalesque comedy to choral performance, Parks reflects on the way individual identities are subsumed by the power of the group. Once the game begins, the *gialloblù* become disciplined and professional, operating as a chorus:

From the moment the team steps out on the field, a transformation takes place in the *brigade*. The individual insults stop. The boys are now solid as a well-trained chorus line. They give their voices generously, unceasingly. They do a job, a job that is actually admired [...] Despite being hopelessly outnumbered and sometimes quite overwhelmed by surrounding voices, they are nevertheless compact and reliable. They obey a well-established hierarchy, responding immediately to cues from their leaders. They never flag, they never disobey. In short, from now until half-time they will not stop clapping and singing and chanting. It's exhausting. It's heroic. (*SWV*, 40)

Being with the *Brigate Gialloblù* reminds him of singing in a choir as a child, of "succumbing to the enchantment of the group" (*SWV*, 176). Observing that in Italian '*in canto*' means 'in song', but '*incanto*' means 'enchantment' or 'spell', Parks signals a note of danger in the type of

enthrallment the *Brigate* provoke: “They may not be sirens, but their enchantment certainly seems able to hold people in its grasp” (*SWV*, 175). At one point, Parks feels he is “losing control of my thought patterns. My mind is full of chants” (*SWV*, 270). He also observes that others with no direct connection to Verona (his friend Daniela, from Catania, some Germans who travel from Munich to watch Hellas play, an English couple who occasionally fly over), have equally been “enslaved by the song, by the rhythm it gives to their lives” (*SWV*, 175). The *Brigate* “accept these strays with a mix of pity and incomprehension” (*SWV*, 176) for “like the church, the *curva* embraces all comers” (*SWV*, 180-1).

This analogy between football and religion points to the uneasy relationship between the contemporary popularity of professional sports and the parallel decline of the Church; Parks reflects how “Sunday by Sunday the football calendar superimposes itself on the religious calendar, with optional ceremonies during the week ‘for several occasions’ as the Book of Common Prayer puts it” (*SWV*, 189). The comparison also throws into relief the dichotomy between the sacred and profane: whereas the Church creates community through rituals that venerate the sacred, Hellas is a faith community that binds its disciples together through desecrating rituals. Parks notes that “Hellas is a faith...you must never ask why” (*SWV*, 132), yet he clearly does question his motives for identifying with this group and questions his obsession with football more generally, admitting that he feels “embarrassed when non-believers see me with my blue-and-yellow calendar. I always pretend football’s a bit of a joke” (*SWV*, 195).

Though the *Brigate*’s puerile jokes and mocking chants are mildly transgressive, and so tolerable to Parks, the overt racism they display on the terraces is not. He illustrates:

Then comes the one thing that for me always breaks the enchantment. The majestically black Lilian Thuram, French international, European and World champion, touches the ball and the *curva*, or a small part of it, begin their monkey grunts. ‘Oo! Oo! Oo!’ The rest of the stadium falls silent. ‘Oo! Oo! Oo! A new tension is in the air, corroding the happy spell of the encounter. (*SWV*, 271)

The racist insults break the spell of the *Brigate*’s communal song by revealing that, for them, “identity is more important than morality” (*SWV*, 74). Parks does not say what he thinks about the new Federation rules introduced in 2002 to impose a stadium ban on any club whose fans indulge in racist chants, but it is clear that he is disenchanted with the *curva*: “if football is that place where globalisation and local dreams confront each other, the one on the pitch, the other

on the terraces, then the dividing line, at least for the *brigade*, is colour” (*SWV*, 78).¹¹²

Each subculture has its own vernacular and the *Brigate*’s is inflected by xenophobia and racism. By refusing to exclude this demotic speech from his account, Parks presents an un-retouched portrait of Italian regionalism that unveils its flaws. Whereas Mayes posits Tuscany as an idealised homogeneous space (failing to contextualise the presence of black prostitutes she passes on a rural road), Parks reveals the Veneto as a site where traditional and modern perspectives clash. He seeks to provide a context for such conflicts, noting that in the early 1980s when he arrived, the region was still locked in timeless struggles with external rivals whilst internally still a very homogeneous society of white Catholics. Arriving in Verona from Acton and Shepherd’s Bush, Parks was surprised to find “there was not a single black face on the streets” (*SWV*, 61). Reflecting on the xenophobia of the *Brigate*, he traces its roots to the region’s tradition of internecine struggle: “The boys indulge in racist chants, they define their group by its exclusion of all outsiders, it’s a declared if sometimes pantomime hatred of all surrounding cities, teams and regions” (*SWV*, 24).

Parks further contextualises the interplay of local/global dynamics by suggesting that the *Brigate*’s vocal racism is designed, in part, “to prolong a quarrel with the pieties-that-be”, namely, the Italian press (*SWV*, 25). He explains that in the national consciousness, Italy’s north-east region, and Verona in particular, is stigmatised as irretrievably racist, as “a pocket of the most loathsome and backward right-wing dogmatism” (*SWV*, 16) because of its historical relationship with the Austro-Hungarian empire, its support of the Fascist government in Salò during WWII and, more recently, the formation of the separatist and xenophobic political party, Lega Nord (*SWV*, 17). The national press vilifies the Veneto for its bigotry and racist intolerance, which Parks suggests, though not unwarranted, is also due to the traditional Italian rivalry between cities and regions, “the endless internecine struggle which is Italian unity” (*SWV*, 61).

Whilst rejecting the content of their speech, Parks favours freedom of expression over politically-correct censorship:

The *brigade*, I reflect, are not a savoury bunch, but in so far as they define themselves by being against somebody, it is the liberal press they are against, the perennial p.c. of

¹¹² In a postscript to his text, Parks notes: “On 25 August 2001, the black Colombian player Johnnier Estainer Montano made his debut for Hellas Verona at the Bentegodi. He was warmly welcomed by the Curva Sud” (*SWV*, 447).

contemporary society. That's why I feel a certain sympathy with them. Every public statement is so predictably pious, the stadium offers the only place where you can stand up and yell something excitingly foul. In any event, it's clear that the two antagonists are actually in complicity with each other. The *brigade* chant their racist chants and then are outraged by the hypocrisy of the press. The press are delighted to have such an easy target. (*SWV*, 26)

He suggests that by providing a framework wherein shouting obscenities is allowed, football serves the socially useful function of releasing, and so containing, tensions. Just as his masculine gaze in the previous beach episode upsets feminist notions of 'good taste', his suggestion here that the subaltern voices of the *Brigate* are a legitimate rejoinder to more dominant 'pieties' regarding race and ethnicity is a provocative position.

Overall, by not pandering to political correctness, Parks risks alienating his readers through a valorisation of transgression which might be misconstrued as support for the content of the transgressive speech. Close reading, though, suggests that Parks is uneasy with the latter and that it problematizes his identification with the group as noted in his qualified statements about the Verona fans and fandom in general. As a writer, linguist and translator with a clear passion for the inventiveness and intuitiveness of language, Parks celebrates the chorus of voices he encounters through football, their full range of inflections and what these reveal about Italy, without censoring any. This narrative style is fundamentally dialogical as it presents a plurality of voices which convey a multi-faceted picture of Italians and Italian ways.

Conclusion

By presenting this polyphony of independent voices, Parks depicts Italian national character as something textured and complex, not reducible to a solo voice or to a dominant strain accompanied by dependent chords. Instead, it is a "choral pandemonium" of competing voices, and it is in this national crucible that identities are forged. Writing in *The New Yorker* on the 150th anniversary of Italian unification, Parks notes that, historically, Italy came into being as a nation through a process of political accommodation without internal agreement or unity of purpose among regions, an ethos which Italians call *trasformismo*.¹¹³ Parks's own struggle for an accommodation with Italy reflects this 'unity within disunity': identity based on a lack of internal agreement or coherence, on multiple and, often, discordant identifications.

This indeterminacy is clearly rendered in a moment of self-reflection in which Parks reveals his

¹¹³ Parks (2011: 81-82).

uneasy accommodation with Italy:

Before the half-time break was over I had formally and finally decided to become less interested, to forget next year's season ticket, to call it a day. It's a reaction I often have with Italy in general. This is not necessarily my destiny, I will tell myself, when something goes seriously wrong, something particularly and miserably Italian, some tussle with Bourbonic bureaucracy, or the nth wildcat strike on the Milan metro. You could leave this place, Tim, I announce. I say these things out loud sometimes. You are merely resident here. You could go tomorrow if you wanted. Tomorrow! How many times have I told myself that? (*SWV*, 42)

Both critical and approving of Italy, both on the inside and outside of community, Parks seems to have achieved that 'triumph of Italian expediency' which he previously noted: the ability to hold "two separate and mutually contradictory propositions simultaneously" (*IE*, 95). Just as he refuses to airbrush his landscapes or present characters as heuristic devices to convey poetic idylls of Italian life, Parks does not hide behind a mask of unified identity by using a narrative voice that is monological. As he negotiates an accommodation with Italy over thirty years, his position remains fundamentally dialogical.

Recounting episodes from everyday life and his shifting identifications with local culture and its practices, Parks's trilogy offers situated readings of place, impressions which are layered and textured through sustained foreign residency. His Italian stories do not present a colonial vision of Italian 'Others' as reducible and knowable, but rather a cosmopolitan vision that celebrates the complex connectivity of selves and others in a spectrum of shifting identifications. In an author's note at the outset of his trilogy, Parks signals that his books are attempts to capture gestures, moods and postures of Italy: its "national character, a sense of place, the feeling people, place and weather generate", but in the act of fixing these features on the page, they "immediately lose all colour and shape" (*IN*, Author's Note). He compares himself to a man wielding a huge net, at times wildly, then having to pick out truisms, clichés and caricatures; what remains is something between reality and illusion, not quite "documentary authenticity" but nonetheless truthful in its own way.

Elsewhere, Parks's notes that this rhetorical style is 'ironic anthropology'; indeed, Parks himself seems to be a self-conscious ethnographer revealing many sides to his subject as well as his own indeterminacies in the process. In contrast with other expatriate accounts of life which seek to capture and fix Italianness for foreign readers, Parks's accounts arrive at no fixed point. His experience of acculturation is one of moving through cyclical phases of

confrontation, negotiation and accommodation, a movement which does not presume a final arrival point or destination. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Parks compares his thirty-year engagement with Italy to filling in a jigsaw puzzle in four dimensions, a puzzle which is never completed. Not a native but no longer a stranger, Parks resides in an indeterminate liminal space and seems at home there; he invites readers to be at home there too.

On the nature of writing, he says: “A book for me has always been a form of defence, I think, against excessive joy, excessive pain, a nosing about a false belief, or something that I would prefer, more positively, to call an illusion” (*SWV*, 44). After thirty years and three books spent ‘nosing about’ Italy in search of better comprehending its realities and illusions, Parks does not deliver an ultimate truth from above but rather a series of impressions from the ground. Like football, which he claims is best enjoyed at pitch-level, Parks’s narratives give his readers a sense of “witnessing the humdrum mechanics that make a dream possible” (*SWV*, 228). Viewed together, these everyday impressions collected on the ground by someone engaged in the game provide a sense of the overarching geometry of life in Italy, as it is lived by Italians and by those who share in community and conviviality with them.

Conclusion

The history of travel literature is complicated: it touches intimately on the way that we in Europe have understood and dealt with the rest of the world. But I think its essence is its record of the ways in which we have tried to escape from our own world, and perhaps from ourselves, to set out on journeys of exploration, whether they result in adventure, poetry, comedy, transgression, wisdom, sadness, suffering or desolation. This sense of escape, surprise, discovery and transformation is the great strength of travel writing, and this is why it deserves a higher place in the pantheon of literature, even though we still cannot exactly say what it is. (Peter Whitfield, 2011, *Preface*)

The interplay of globalism and localism in the practices of travel and tourism provides fertile ground for scholars from the social sciences and humanities to examine the relationship between globalisation processes and contemporary culture change in relation to social and cultural modernity. Recent social and cultural theory has focused on “travelling” or “touring” cultures, that is, cultures which are mobile and detached from specific places.¹¹⁴ Theorists point to how conceptual oppositions within the conventional discourse of tourism – home/away, traveller/local, centre/periphery, work/leisure, every day/holiday – have been destabilised in (post)modernity, leading to a reconceptualisation of subjectivity and culture as fluid processes, no longer so easily localised. Robbins (1992) refers to this as “situatedness-in-displacement”, a particular form of mobile engagement whose dimensions require further conceptualisation. Similarly, Clifford (1992) examines the concepts of “travelling-in-dwelling” and “dwelling-in-travelling” in global cosmopolitanism. Edwards and Graulund (2012) also analyse the ‘orienting’ and ‘disorienting’ practices of travel. The flow of people, objects, ideas, stories and values across borders, both literally and imaginatively, continues to have a tremendous impact on traditional social organisation and local cultural practices, as well as on the modes and strategies through which these processes are discursively reproduced.

In undertaking to build homes abroad, lifestyle migrants pursue two seemingly opposing impulses – a desire for movement and a desire for rootedness – which form a dialectic tension between flux (routes) and fixity (roots) that remains unresolved through settlement in adopted homelands. Hawes, Mayes and Parks reveal that adapting to life in Italy is not a teleological process that leads from initial confrontation to final arrival or complete integration over a definite period of time; rather, it is a lifelong process of accommodating to intercultural differences – of dwelling in difference – a process which is always unfolding and evolving.

¹¹⁴ See Rojek and Urry (1997).

Their sense of becoming ‘at home’ in Italy derives from experiencing place as both fixed and fluid: ‘home’ as a fixed point or bounded location (a Tuscan villa, a hilltop *rustico*, a semi-rural condominium) and ‘home’ as an evolving network of relationships shaped by routine practices and habitual social interactions which give meaning to space, transforming space into place.¹¹⁵

In a fluid world of movement, in which people’s lives are increasingly shaped by global forces, a sense of belonging to place matters more than ever: locality remains a deeply contested and symbolically rich site for situating identity and for constituting the self. A hybrid form of travel writing and life writing, relocation memoirs provide an apt narrative lens through which to examine the interplay of ‘self’ and ‘place’ in the process of contemporary identity (re)formation. Every day rituals of place-making are central to the construction of mobile identities as writers who relocate to foreign locales explore the process of settling into adopted homes through nonfiction narratives that highlight personal story lines. Mayes, Hawes and Parks offer three models of home-making and identity-making in accounts which address the local/global dynamics arising from their experience of relocation. Although their stories share a common pattern of resettlement that comprises phases of confrontation, negotiation and accommodation, their individual trajectories are distinct; consequently, they produce distinct symbolic geographies of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in negotiating a sense of belonging in Italy.

The arc of accommodation traced by Tim Parks’s trilogy moves outward from the fixed point of Montecchio to embrace ‘place’ in its broader configurations. Subtitled *An Englishman in Verona*, his first memoir draws reflexive attention to his initial status as an outsider commenting on the foreignness of foreigners as he settles in the provincial town and confronts the particularities and eccentricities of place through engagement with his immediate neighbours. He signals Italian hypochondria, latent Catholicism, baby worship, bureaucratic miasma, material ostentation, conviviality, and cunning as place-based cultural traits that construct a vision of Italian otherness. However, his depictions are not complicit with a colonial/neo-colonial enterprise of reduction and debasement, as he, instead, reveals heterogeneity both within the adopted culture and within his own subjective position as it evolves and narrates place.

Though Parks seeks to translate Italian ways for Anglophone readers by rendering cultural differences intelligible through contextualisation and commentary, his insights do not assume

¹¹⁵ Cresswell (2006).

totalising certainty; instead, these insights are revisited and revised across the trilogy as they accrue new layers of meaning and are modified by experience. In addition, his subjective position is not the all-controlling and coherent position of the modernist travel writer/coloniser which Lisle critiques for “describing, organizing, and translating difference” in ways that reify the self at the expense of the other (2006: 132).¹¹⁶ Parks, in fact, foregrounds his own shifting sensibility across his trilogy as he adopts new traits and habits (Italian, Veronese, provincial) whilst maintaining old ones (English, Londoner, metropolitan). After living and working in Italy for thirty years, he states: “I’m scarcely sure what nationality I really am these days” (*IW*, 147). This postmodern indeterminacy, arising from a “density of overlapping allegiances” (Robbins 1998), is intrinsic to his identity reformation and calls into question any fixed cultural presuppositions. Throughout his trilogy, Parks avoids reproducing a self/other binary logic which seeks to stabilise subjectivity in opposition to Italian alterity, occupying instead a destabilised and multiple standpoint.

His process of settling into family life and community life in Verona (detailed in Books Two and Three) entails a thick immersion which further shifts the narrative focus away from external demarcations of cultural difference to the ‘internal workings’ that provide a context for these. In fact, his trilogy departs from the ‘rural idyll’ pattern of relocation which seeks escape from modernity in pastoral settings; Parks moves to the urban-rural fringe area outside Verona, a landscape that is both verdant and industrialised, and which is populated by locals who live modern lives that are richly textured by both present and past. His character portrayals do not essentialise or idealise others; they are layered depictions which reveal racism, sexism and xenophobia as aspects of provincial life, along with the more convivial and nurturing bonds of community.

Similarly, the general narrative movement in Annie Hawes’s trilogy is towards ever-more situated readings of place. Her memoirs demonstrate how she accrues a cultural competence over fifteen years in Liguria, evolving from a colonial to a cosmopolitan orientation in narrating cultural differences. Her narrative style shifts from the use of negative stereotypes at the outset of *Extra Virgin* in representing Anglo-Italian differences, to a dialogical recognition of the multiple differences at play in social interactions in *Journey to the South*. Initially, Hawes focuses on novelty – on the differences of place that catch her tourist’s eye – such as Italian

¹¹⁶ Critical studies of the politics of travel writing reveal how representations of travel are ideologically enmeshed in historical and contemporary forms of Empire. See Pratt (1992), Spurr (1993), Holland and Huggan (1998), Lisle (2006) and Huggan (2009).

food orthodoxy, English bathing habits, Italian sociability, and English probity. Later, in Books Two and Three, she illustrates that any monological reading of ‘difference’ is not tenable: self (English) and other (Ligurian) are not fixed terms in a stable conceptual model, but shifting signifiers – English, Italian, Ligurian, Calabrian, urban, rural, coastal, inland – in a social world that is thick with diversities.

The longer she lives in Italy, the better she becomes at deciphering multiple forms of diversity and rendering their complexities in situated readings of place. Her integration in family and community life in Liguria is fundamental to this epistemological development: taken into the fold of close human relationships and the cycle of obligations and favours that such ‘belonging’ imparts, she becomes an insider who gains insights into the internal workings of her adopted home. Though she filters new experiences through an acquired cultural mindset, she also maintains an outsider’s perspective (for example, her English rural idyll), thus reading place through Robbins’s (1998) “density of overlapping allegiances”. Hawes’s dialogical standpoint as both outsider and insider operating in a field of shifting signifiers reveals that knowledge of place, like knowledge of self, is always complex, relational and indeterminate: her subjective position is not univocal but multivocal, containing inflections deriving from varied sources.

By contrast, close reading and discourse analysis of Mayes’s Tuscan trilogy reveals a limited shift towards a cosmopolitan orientation over the arc of her three narratives. The extracts analysed show that her reconstructions of Italy, Italians and Italianness rely on static depictions of ‘Others’ which consistently resort to distancing gestures – the use of essentialisms, of the definite article before the noun of nationality, of adjectives with temporal referents, of pronouns and possessives, of the absence of direct speech or extended dialogues – in other words, expressions which deploy markers of difference to assign the status of alterity to the local population under her scrutiny. This style is prevalent in her first memoir as she records the novelty of her new home, but persists even in Books Two and Three since her rhetoric is tied to her vision of Italy as a rural idyll insulated from modern influences, not a place alive with complexity and incongruence.

Overall, Mayes’s accommodation to life in Italy seems more a process of Italianification than Italianisation: whilst her house, furniture, garden, cooking, and daily routine take on *Italianate* features, she does not convey a web of social relations and practices which ground her to place more deeply; her connection to place is primarily conveyed through domestic objects and

lifestyle practices rooted in material culture. Her resettlement project seems more about building a lifestyle rather than a life in Italy, as evidenced by her tendency to aestheticise Tuscany and Tuscans. Indeed, Mayes's trilogy exploits the desire for the 'Made in Italy' brand by promoting a lifestyle whose privilege enables it to be coloured by locality (to transfer a Tuscan 'patina' from objects to owner) but not transformed by it. Hers is more a touristic engagement with place in contrast with the deep engagement of Hawes and Parks whose lives are genuinely '(Re)Made in Italy' as recounted in narratives which trace their process of accommodation as they grow in awareness and become embedded in the complexity of locality over time.

Reflecting on the different degrees of engagement with place of two interwar travel writers, Ian Fleming and Patrick Leigh Fermor, Lawrence Osborne notes:

But where Fleming retreated to Jamaica to knock out six-week thrillers, Fermor lived in his landscape more deeply; he explored with dogged rigor its ethnography, its dialects, its mystical lore. His books are not 'travel' in the usual sense. They are explorations of places known over years, fingered like venerable books and therefore loved with precision, with an amorous obsession for details. [...] Truth for Fermor lay in the details, and his books show the same straining eye for the small fact, the telling minutiae.¹¹⁷

These different levels of engagement are also evidenced in the resettlement narratives of contemporary transnationals. Like Fleming, Mayes has a more superficial engagement with place, representing it as an Arcadian backdrop where subjects can escape modernity; Hawes and Parks, by contrast, dwell in their landscapes more deeply, as Fermor did. Whereas Mayes has a touristic eye that reduces complexity to outline in order to paint an idealised portrait of Tuscany, Hawes and Parks have the straining eye of the artist, precise and penetrating, which paints a multi-dimensional portrait brimming with detail. Mayes seems to love Italy's idyllic surfaces and poetic images; Hawes and Parks love its revealing minutiae, including its imperfections. This difference accounts for the better descriptions produced by Hawes and Parks whose situated readings offer a layering of realistic details; these 'telling minutiae' of everyday life have been absorbed through sustained residence which enables more nuanced understandings of place. Mayes's engagement with place though equally long (twenty years) is not as deep; consequently, she performs authenticity more superficially through lifestyle accoutrements.¹¹⁸

Through their attention to everyday minutiae, Hawes and Parks create vivid paracosms of life in Italy, though these are not imaginary landscapes populated by fantastical creatures but detailed

¹¹⁷ Osborne (2012).

¹¹⁸ See Benson (2013) on how lifestyle migrants to rural France perform authenticity as a process of social distinction.

life-worlds comprising realistic locales and local inhabitants. Their story landscapes are more engaging than Mayes's because they convey place more distinctly, more credibly through textured details which contain the 'power of the particular'.¹¹⁹ Parks's Verona, for example, is given depth and definition through the hard edges of the Bentegodi subculture; he does not airbrush its imperfections or erase the hard lines which define the structure and habits of this specific community. Similarly, Hawes's Ligurian life-world is powerfully rendered through place-based particularities such as the contempt of locals towards rich northerners or the general xenophobia towards all southerners: rough edges which help define locality and localise her representations. Mayes's Cortona, by contrast, is less precise, less localised as it is defined by soft boundaries; consequently, it seems more artificial and generic. She treats place as a romantic idyll and locals as exemplars of an aestheticised way of life, as static objects that are part of a bucolic landscape, and fails to address its illusory nature, even when reality disrupts her peaceable construction.

Italy holds a special magic for Americans and Britons as a place linked to the past, to a pre-modern world that has already disappeared or is fast disappearing with the onslaught of (post)modernity; it is posited as an immortal landscape in which human beings naturally find themselves humanised through connection to locality and to local traditions. This idealising strain, prevalent in all three writers' first memoirs, is subsequently overcome by Hawes and Parks whose dialogical depictions address multiplicity and heterogeneity instead of surrendering to the Mediterranean myth, whereas Mayes's narrative representations remain inured in a touristic idealisation of place. Ross critiques Mayes for this aestheticising impulse, claiming that she renews herself in Italy "but not the genre" (2009: 57). Whilst I agree with this evaluation overall, my analysis of Mayes's third memoir reveals a 'modest cosmopolitanism' (to use Bruce Robbins's term) emerging in her recognition (after twenty years and following the grenade incident) of the distinction between ideal community and real community. The exploded idyll presents the possibility for a new paracosm of Tuscany to be created, but this potential remains unrealised in the narrative arc of her Tuscan trilogy. Hawes and Parks, by contrast, renew themselves in Italy *and* renew the genre of travel memoir through textual experimentation.

¹¹⁹ Writing about paracosms, David Brooks (2012) claims "It's a paradox that the artists who have the widest global purchase are also the ones who have created the most local and distinctive story landscapes. Millions of people around the world are ferociously attached to Tupac Shakur's version of Compton or J.K. Rowling's version of a British boarding school or Downton Abbey's or *Bridehead Revisited*'s version of an Edwardian estate. Millions of people know the contours of these remote landscapes, their typical characters, story lines, corruptions and challenges. If you build a passionate and highly localized moral landscape, people will come."

Edwards and Graulund reject the claim that travel writing is inextricably implicated in forms of imperialism, addressing how its hybrid nature allows for a “critical vocabulary for a politics of contemporary travel practices that is nuanced” (2012: 8). Drawing on this view of travel writing as a genre capable of critiquing its own motives and forms, my thesis shares this empowering reading of its openness to generic reconstruction, reinvention and reinvigoration, recognising genre as a “negative imperative” in Todorov’s (1976) sense of a theoretical model which is meaningful only when and if displaced and deconstructed in diverse, specific and irreducible textual practices. Travel writing has always been a hybrid form, embodying Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “heteroglossia” in its generic structure: travel texts use a plurality of overlapping, interactive and, at times, discordant voices which confirm the impossibility of rigid generic taxonomies.

Drawing on the belief then that travel writing can and does destabilise its own precepts, my argument situates Hawes and Parks within a corpus of self-reflexive and innovative travel texts which reinvigorate generic conventions through textual experimentation. One aspect of this innovation is the absence of *movement* in the journey of relocation: the arc of accommodation does not move in a linear fashion from initiation to integration; it is a lifelong journey through cyclical phases which do not progress forward to a final ‘destination’ or ultimate sense of belonging and integration. Similarly, the narrative arc of their trilogies follows a trajectory that moves towards indeterminacy without a final resolution or restoration of order, a structural element which narrative representation presumes.¹²⁰

By presenting accounts in which the narrative end is suspended, Hawes and Parks disrupt the conventional order stories impose in moving from revelation to development to resolution. Consequently, their relocation stories disrupt the pleasure of the text, which Spurr notes is a “disinterested pleasure” related to an aestheticisation of human reality which distances the reader from the social world.¹²¹ In this sense, Mayes’s texts are more ‘pleasurable’ because the cultural differences she voluptuously presents are more easily *consumed*, maintaining the reader at an aesthetic distance from reality. By contrast, Hawes’s and Parks’s accounts explicitly call attention to the complex workings and gritty details of Italian social reality without resolving the tensions introduced. By making vivid a range of social differences, they practise a heuristic

¹²⁰ Spurr (1993: 44) describes the characteristic narrative form as a movement from the *revelation* of a dramatic situation and introduction of characters, to a *development* or expansion/explication of elements in the original discovery which advances the action and heightens the tension, to a final stage of *resolution* where the action plays itself out and tensions are stabilised.

¹²¹ Spurr (1993: 45-46) calls this corrupt form of aesthetic representation “an aesthetic of consumption”.

approach to social life wherein the Italian every day acts as an arena, in Highmore's sense, where differences and commonalities are negotiated, leading to the possibility of finding "new commonalities" and breathing "new life into old differences" (2002: 3).

This self-reflexive and self-critical form of engagement with difference is a departure from the coherent subject position assumed in traditional ethnographic depictions of cultural others in travel writing. By questioning their initial monological perspectives and moving towards destabilised subjectivities shaped by a dense web of overlapping allegiances, Hawes and Parks engage in a form of self-interrogation across their memoirs linked to a fluid model of selfhood which is associated with the (post)modern tradition. The belief in the mutable self, the self as always in flux, and so unfinalised and unknowable, signals a state of *ontological* indeterminateness which disclaims ultimate knowability (*how can I know the other when I cannot even know myself?*). Hawes and Parks present subjectivities unmoored from ontological certainty, subjectivities which are fundamentally reconstituted in Italy, thus producing accounts that are more fragmented and disparate. To use a contemporary mobility metaphor, they are like a GPS which is continually 'recalculating' at every turn, making the progression of their journeys harder to track; they are fundamentally 'at home' in this state of ontological dislocation.

This post(modern) notion of selfhood contrasts with the fixed selfhood of the humanist tradition that posits an essential self with an immutable core which endures and unifies consciousness over time. The humanist subject experiences changes to selfhood as more superficial, not substantial, underlining a state of *epistemological* indeterminateness which still presumes knowability (*knowing the other allows me to know myself better*).¹²² Mayes's relocation trilogy presents a subjective position that acquires new epistemological awareness through foreign residence but is fundamentally not transformed at its core. Her lifestyle makeover in Italy is about gaining self-knowledge, and she sees the Other, in Said's terms, as "a source and resource for a better, more critical understanding of the Self".¹²³ Across her trilogy, Mayes is more focused on creating a coherent narrative of self, a unified identity and a stable biography.

Encounters with 'Others' facilitated by travel and tourism provide opportunities for individuals to engage in both kinds of identity (re)formation projects. The identity work undertaken by travellers and migrants affords spaces for self-interrogation, self-realisation and meaning

¹²² See Giddens (1991); Taylor (1992); Kegan (1982); Elliott (2007).

¹²³ Said (2004: xi).

formation, processes which are also connected to wider attempts to resolve personal identity issues within late modernity. Relocation narratives provide a powerful *localised* lens through which to examine how identities are dialogically constructed through contact with difference in a *globalised* world. By investigating the relations between tourism, identity formation and culture change, this thesis seeks to contribute to interdisciplinary dialogue on self and place in late modernity.

The implications of this study are varied. The thesis makes an original contribution to the study of travel writing through analysis of a cultural form – relocation narratives – which emerged from new patterns of mobility and place attachment in the late-twentieth century. The research could be further developed through study of geographical variants of the ‘Made in Italy’ narratives (expatriate writing on France or Spain, for example) as well as study of other forms of cultural mediation (such as televisual or blog versions of the relocation story). The narrative nonfiction stories examined in this thesis could be of interest to sociologists or cultural anthropologists investigating patterns of lifestyle migration and the ethnography of travellers’ tales. Finally, the thesis has potentially wider impact in society in terms of intercultural education by presenting better understandings of how selves and others are shaped through a travel-mobility paradigm; this recognition opens up the possibility for intercultural dialogue. The *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001), written as a first step in UNESCO’s action plan to achieve “intercultural dialogue”, emphasises culture as a shared heritage in which each individual must acknowledge “otherness in all its forms” and “the plurality of his or her own identity, within societies that are themselves plural”.¹²⁴ It is my wish that this thesis contributes in a small way to that humanising goal.

¹²⁴ Matsuura (2001:1).

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