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4

THE EXPATRIATE LIFE

Lynn Mastellotto

Dwelling in difference

The global flow of people, capital, goods, services and ideas helped characterise the twentieth century as a ‘century of migrations’,1 with the emphasis on the plural noun signalling how the defining experience of flux is embedded in a wide range of material and aesthetic practices, which have continued in the twenty-first century. Though emigration is commonly understood as a one-way movement – leaving one’s homeland for an adopted home, usually in pursuit of an improved quality of life – it is, in fact, a spectrum of different forms of displacement, including exile, voluntary relocation, sojourn and resettlement, which occupy different positions in a complex and often overlapping field of mobilities. ‘Expatriation’, which derives etymologically from the Latin ex (out of) and patria (country, fatherland), is commonly understood as a voluntary form of migration by individuals searching for greater freedom, economic opportunity, self-determination or other lifestyle advantages through relocation abroad. It has long co-existed with ‘exile’, a term deriving from the Latin exilium (expulsion, banishment), which is generally associated with political migration (voluntary or enforced) related to war, poverty or persecution. Neither is a particularly new migratory phenomenon, but both grew exponentially in the twentieth century as forms of voluntary and involuntary displacement increased as effects of modernity.

Easy access to leisure travel and occupational mobility for middle-class Westerners in contemporary society often masks the privilege inherent in such ease of movement; the recent migrant crisis in Europe serves as a reminder that mobility is not always a matter of individual choice. This chapter does not address the migration narratives of those who suffer displacement through political upheavals and migrate under extreme duress; for a discussion of the recent responses in Europe to the migrant crisis, see Aedín Ní Loingsigh’s chapter in this volume. Nor does it discuss literary expatriates on the move in the early twentieth century – the well-documented experiences of interwar writers like Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway in 1920s Paris, of D.H. Lawrence in Italy and Lawrence Durrell in Greece, of W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood in 1930s Berlin, of Richard Wright and James Baldwin in 1950s France – in search of freedom through escape to continental outposts or European cultural capitals from social, racial, sexual and artistic limitations imposed at home. Instead, this chapter seeks to expand an understanding of ‘expatriate’ by examining the defining choice to live elsewhere as
The expatriate life

one guided not only by aesthetic concerns but also by an ethical impulse to remake one’s life in accordance with a particular vision of ‘the good life’; in other words, expatriation as a deliberate act of displacement and a long-term process of self-transformation centred on the question, ‘How should I live?’ Conveying interior journeys towards greater self-knowledge and identity reformation, these narratives follow a quest pattern in Young’s sense of ‘travelling in search of meaning, purpose and belonging’.2

Displacement as a theme in Western culture is a familiar terrain of analysis, particularly in relation to literary modernism and the central role of the exile and émigré writer in experiments with language, perspective and form. Critics such as Anders Olsson point to the centrality of the exilic experience in the development of Western literature, from Dante Alighieri’s Divine Comedy to Albert Camus’s L’Étranger, and signal the connection of modernist exile writing to witness literature in twentieth-century narrative.3 Edward Said’s well-known claim that ‘modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles’ and that, consequently, the past century can be called ‘the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration’, identifies displacement as the existential and cultural condition of the twentieth century.4 Although expatriate writers are often labelled as ‘self-imposed exiles’ or ‘voluntary exiles’,5 and their works studied through the exilic lens of a metaphorical loss of origins and its aesthetic implications for modernist narration, this chapter takes a slightly different perspective by surveying expatriation through a wider lens, one which opens up the modernist treatment of expatriation beyond a focus on formal tropes and figures (organicism, primitivism, exoticism, hedonism) to take into account the affective and ethical dimensions of the expatriate life in the mid-nineteenth and late twentieth centuries.

Recognising expatriation as a form of ‘dwelling-in-traveling’, as James Clifford does, requires a mobility paradigm in which routes and roots are not inherently oppositional but, instead, co-exist, overlap, contest and, at times, complement each other.6 Justin Edwards and Rune Grulund refer to this expanded mobility paradigm in their discussion of the simultaneously ‘orienting and disorienting’ practices of travel.7 The tension between the impulse to move (flux) and the impulse to stay put (fixity) in the expatriate experience is a productive one: even when migration is voluntary, it does not follow a seamless path from A to B since uprooting oneself and re-routing the course of one’s life involve a cultural accommodation that is neither simple nor straightforward. Whilst some expatriates are short-stay travellers who move mainly within compatriot enclaves, never seeking integration in the host country, others become residents who engage more deeply with locals and local culture over time. For the latter type, expatriation can be an indelibly diasporic condition of ontological displacement characterised by multiple senses of belonging and not belonging, not easily resolved through repatriation to the home country or through permanent resettlement abroad.

This chapter will examine Susanna Moodie’s expatriate memoir about her mid-nineteenth-century emigration to the New World and Frances Mayes’s account of her own late twentieth-century resettlement in Europe in order to illuminate issues related to identity and belonging that characterise the expatriate life as it evolves in overlapping stages of intercultural confrontation, negotiation and accommodation, in different locations at different moments in time. The search for the ‘good life’ – for improved economic security, enhanced freedom of self-expression and self-definition, peace and tranquillity, greater work–life balance, and other attributes generally associated with greater well-being – has unfolded on an ever-expanding horizon in the modern period as transportation, telecommunications, trade and commerce, education, and tourism have been transformed by what John Tomlinson calls a ‘rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences’ that make a range of lifestyle options accessible to voluntary migrants.8 The constant factor linking expatriates across this
wide continuum is choice: expatriation is a privilege pursued by a minority of migrants at any historical moment, those with the education, money and means to voluntarily relocate in order to overcome perceived limitations at home and pursue presumed lifestyle advantages abroad. As Bruce Robbins notes, cosmopolitans’ independent means and globe-trotting ways give them ‘the choice to live abroad and return home if/when it suits them’.9

Postcolonial critics have rightly pointed to the problems associated with cosmopolitan privilege; that is, with elite travellers enjoying the Western cultural legacy from a dominant position over the past 500 years.10 The term ‘expatriate’ conjures images of elites – young nobles on extended Grand Tours in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; British colonial officials in India, Africa and other outposts of empire in the age of imperial expansion; nineteenth-century Romantics fleeing the effects of urban industrialisation for less developed lands – enjoying the local heritage in exotic locales whilst deriding the locals encountered. While it is true, as Ghose notes, that white, middle-class women, ‘albeit marginalized, are nevertheless participants in the dominant culture’, it is also true that the discursive practices of self-examination and self-transformation prompted by travel are especially resonant in travel narratives by women, as revealed in an analysis of Moodie’s and Mayes’s resettlement accounts below.11 As Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan claim, women’s travel writing more explicitly interrogates the identity of the travelling subject, ‘a subject recognized as being constituted by the complex interactions of gender, race, and class’.12 This chapter seeks an expanded understanding of expatriation, offering a more generous reading of its contribution to cultural representation, by drawing on conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism that decouple the term ‘expatriate’ from its reductive association with mobile, rootless elites, recognising, instead, the possibility for transnationals’ ethical engagement with cultural difference.13

Drawing on Marilyn Papayianis’s view that expatriation is ‘a significant mode of apprehending some important life good’, I argue that expatriation can be read as a quest for the articulation of value, for a meaningful way of living in a disenchanted world, and that expatriate writing deserves serious consideration rather than dismissal as necessarily ‘colonialist/neo-colonialist’.14 Reading contemporary resettlement accounts as a form of ascension, of a disciplined meditation on the self, a significant component of self-artistry, the central theme of identity reformation emerges as an ethical imperative: these are stories of individuals struggling to be true to a mode of meaningful existence through discursive and life practices.15 Expatriate women writers like Moodie and Mayes are deeply engaged in forms of ‘identity work’ as they negotiate national, gender and class identities through the experience of geographical displacement and the intercultural encounters it affords.16 They develop points of identification and attachment with subject positions constructed through these new life practices; their narratives then present a reflection on this process of self-transformation, grounded in the subjective experiences of their embodied selves transformed through long-stay resettlement.

The philosophical focus on selfhood and identity draws on a vast literature which recognises that the process of identity-making involves continual self-overcoming and self-transformation in which alterity plays a pivotal role since identities are dialogically constructed through difference: one defines oneself based on the recognition of what one is not in relation to the Other.17 Encounters with others facilitated through travel provide opportunities for individuals to engage in the modern project of reforming personal identities in ways that do not simply reproduce a fixed self/other logic but which, instead, treat these terms as dynamic and socially constructed.18 This links expatriate writing to broader debates about the ethical value of narrative and its enabling of perspective-taking, empathy, moral inclusiveness and respect for Others.19

Close readings of two expatriate memoirs bring these ethical issues to light by revealing a migrating sensibility in the authors’ accounts of expatriate life as they dwell in difference over
time. First, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) by Susanna Moodie, an English-born emigrant whose memoir details her experiences as a settler in Upper Canada as the wife of a military retiree lured to this colonial outpost by the promise of a reduced cost of living and better quality of life. Moodie’s excitement about building a new life in a new land gives way to disillusionment as she chronicles the hardships of a pioneering life in a subjective style that increasingly registers a modern consciousness of heterogeneity through her encounters with indigenous inhabitants and European settlers. Second, Frances Mayes’s *Under the Tuscan Sun* (1996), the first memoir in her Tuscan trilogy, recounts her flight from metropolitan life in San Francisco and pursuit of a ‘slow life’ in rural Italy in the 1990s. The self-help *cogito* underpinning this book – eat-pray-love and home-renovate your way to personal happiness – accounts for the cool critical reception of her popular memoir, yet it should be read as an initiation story, part of a multipart series in which Mayes’s intercultural consciousness develops over time.

At first glance, there seems little in common to connect a middle-class military wife from Sussex coming to terms with life in the Canadian wilderness in the first half of the nineteenth century and an American academic from San Francisco seeking to downshift in rural Tuscany in the late twentieth century. Indeed, differences and discontinuities in their historical contexts, reasons for migrating, experiences of acculturation and narrative modes of representation will be examined below. Yet, these multipart memoirs are linked by a common thread – the desire for greater freedom, self-determination and self-expansion that travel often affords women – which leads in both cases to a deliberate act of displacement and a prolonged process of cultural accommodation. These are stories with a long span, since for both Moodie and Mayes expatriation is a life project with affective and ethical dimensions that deeply engages them in place through a process of identity reformation over time.

**Expatriate life in rural Upper Canada, mid-1800s**

In the introduction to her two-volume memoir, *Roughing It in the Bush: A Life in Canada*, first published in 1852, Susanna Moodie (née Strickland) notes how the great tide of emigration flowed westward in the 1830s as ‘Canada-mania’ pervaded the middle ranks of British society. Enticed by advertisements in public newspapers and by private letters extolling the advantages to be derived from resettlement in this supposedly ‘highly-favoured region’, many military families ‘rich in hope and poor in purse’ chose emigration to the colony in the hope of bettering their material conditions (1: ix). Counting herself among migrants misled by overblown and romanticised accounts of life in Upper Canada – ‘its salubrious climate, its fertile soil, commercial advantages, great water privileges, its proximity to the mother country, and last not least, its almost total exemption from taxation’ (1: xii) – Moodie rails against marketers’ portrayal of the colony as the British emigrant’s utopia, then sets down her own corrective version, detailing the realities of life without the sentimentalism or triumphalism characteristic of heroic tales of colonial adventure.

Before she emigrated, Moodie’s publisher, Richard Bentley, encouraged her to write a settler’s guide to the colony, prompting her to record her resettlement experience in a journal. Moodie’s account presents a cautionary tale for would-be emigrants of her day, offering a frank depiction of the difficulties inherent in the pioneering life in early Canada, over two volumes which span the nineteen years of her residency there. Beginning with her reluctant departure from England in 1832, she chronicles her family’s early struggles with the harshness of the land and climate, the lack of familiar cultural customs and comforts, their general inexperience and unpreparedness for backwoods farming, and their strained interactions with meddlesome ‘Yankee’ neighbours. Noting that ‘a large majority of the higher class [of emigrants] were officers of the army and navy,
with their families – a class perfectly unfitted by their previous habits and education for contending with the stern realities of emigrant life’ (1: xi). Moodie signals class-based aspirational and experiential differences inherent in the migration story.

As the middle-class wife of a retired army officer seeking to prosper economically through a colonial posting, Moodie explains that

the half-pay of a subaltern officer, managed with the most rigid economy, is too small to supply the wants of a family [in England]; and if of a good family, not enough to maintain his original standing in society [. . .] In such a case, it is both wise and right to emigrate.

(1: 209)\(^{23}\)

Hers is clearly a case of voluntary relocation in pursuit of lifestyle advantages, yet she eschews the notion of having had any freedom of choice, stating:

In most cases, emigration is a matter of necessity, not of choice; and this is more especially true of the emigration of persons of respectable connections, or of any station or position in the world. Few educated persons, accustomed to the refinements and luxuries of European society, ever willingly relinquish those advantages, and place themselves beyond the protective influence of the wise and revered institutions of their native land, without the pressure of some urgent cause.

(1: vii)

Her claim that she is especially hard done by as a middle-class emigrant because she is accustomed to the advantages of a certain social status and lifestyle conveys the kind of class blindness that postcolonial critics point to as pervasive in travel narratives from the age of empire.\(^{24}\) Though Moodie’s perspective is not static but evolving, with her sensibility shifting notably across the span of two volumes written over two decades, similar to Fanny Parkes in India, the cosmopolitan openness to difference marked by Moodie’s later observations is not in evidence in the earlier part of her narrative.\(^{25}\)

Upon stopping at Gros Morne Island during her initial journey up the St Lawrence River in August 1832, Moodie remarks on the unruliness and insolence of the locals, using the rhetoric of negation identified by David Spurr as a narrative device through which colonial writers ascribe negative values to others in order to create distance from them.\(^{26}\) She especially condemns the Irish and Scottish emigrants she encounters for their incivility: their shouting in ‘uncouth dialect’, violent gesturing and lack of ‘common decency’ by walking around ‘almost naked’ cause her to shrink ‘with feelings almost akin to fear, from the hard-featured, sun-burnt harpies, as they elbowed rudely past’ (1: 11). This passage also deploys the rhetoric of abjection and defilement, which Spurr associates with a colonialist view of the Other in presenting a stereotypical depiction of Irish and Scottish emigrants.

Further noting that these ‘vicious, uneducated barbarians who form the surplus of overpopulous European countries, are far behind the wild man in delicacy of feeling or natural courtesy’, Moodie simultaneously paints indigenous peoples as ‘noble savages’ imbued with a kind of intrinsic grace: ‘the Indian is one of Nature’s gentlemen, he never says or does a rude or vulgar thing’ (1: 11). Though seeming to praise non-European inhabitants, this form of naturalisation draws on the Rousseauian ideal of natural man as representative of ‘original freedom and the absence of artifice, dissimulation, or repression’.\(^{27}\) Thus, in her first contact with others in the new world, Moodie denies them equality by portraying them as one-dimensional rather than as real, complex and embodied.
The expatriate life

Such rhetorical distancing gestures are prevalent in her early sketches as she initially confronts cultural difference through a colonialist lens. It is important to read these as part of an initiation story that unfolds in a multipart account over time, revealing Moodie’s evolving sensibilities and rhetorical forms. Her two-volume memoir maps out an arc of accommodation as she moves through various phases of acculturation that characterise the gradual process of building a new home in a new land: 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.29 These phases should be understood as cyclical, not linear: as new situations arise, patterns of confrontation and negotiation repeat themselves; consequently, Moodie’s memoir does not describe a teleological progression towards integration, but rather an ongoing process of cultural accommodation.

Peter Hulme refers to this third phase as ‘deep immersion’, noting that as travel writers immerse themselves in foreign cultures and languages for extended periods they acquire ‘the sort of intimate knowledge which gives them access to people and places unknown to short-stay travellers, let alone tourists’.30 For Moodie and for other long-stay expatriates, there is no moment of definitive arrival or complete integration in the adopted homeland, nor do their texts reproduce the archetypal pattern of return to the place of origin and re-integration in society there. Long-term expatriates occupy a liminal position, living between two cultures and maintaining a foot in both worlds. Robbins signals how transnationals develop a ‘density of overlapping allegiances’ by cultivating multiple identifications between their home and host countries, affinities that are not resolved over time but rather accrue and give rise to complex identities.31

This tension is evident in Moodie’s expression of nostalgia for England when she writes:

Keenly for the first time I felt that I was a stranger in a strange land; my heart yearned intensely for my absent home. Home! The word had ceased to belong to my present – it was doomed to live for ever in the past; for what emigrant ever regarded the country of his exile as his home?

(1: 31)

She observes that emigration, even when freely chosen, can feel a lot like exile: ‘an act of severe duty, performed at the expense of personal enjoyment, and accompanied by the sacrifice of those local attachments which stamp the scenes amid which our childhood grew, in impenetrable characters, upon the heart’ (1: vii). Yet, she simultaneously seeks to be open-minded about Canada and its possibilities, admonishing readers and would-be emigrants: ‘Beware of drawing disparaging contrasts between the colony and its illustrious parent. All such comparisons are cruel and unjust; you cannot exult the one at the expense of the other without committing an act of treason against both’ (1: 20–1). Her affective ambivalence about her adopted home rubs up against an ethical impulse to remain open to its cultural differences.

Her early interactions with neighbours are, at best, strained as Moodie shrinks from their ‘rude, coarse familiarity’ whilst they, in turn, view her as an interloper ‘who wished to curtail their independence by expecting from them the kind of civilities and gentle courtesies of a more refined community’ (1: 212). The Moodies are treated with insolence despite their class superiority because, in the new world, this is permissible. She reports one neighbour’s spiteful words to her: ‘I rejoice to see you at the washtub, and I wish that you may be brought down upon your knees to scrub the floor’ (1: 141). In England, necessity compelled the compliance of the lower classes in a system of homage to rank and education, however insincere, whereas
in Upper Canada ‘they are free, and the dearest privilege of this freedom is to wreak upon their
superiors the long-locked-up hatred of their hearts’ (1: 213–14). Irritated at first, she gradually
comes to see herself from their point of view, and she sees their irreverence as ‘better than a hol-
low profession of duty and attachment urged upon us by a false and unnatural position’ (1: 215).
This shift in sensibility indicates her growing ability to negotiate between two sets of customs
as she accommodates to local life.

In addition to losing their social standing in Canada, the Moodies lose their economic advan-
tage as their fortunes suffer through emigration; far from prospering in the colony, they are
reduced to poverty after being swindled in property deals that deplete their savings. Moreover,
unaccustomed to ‘bush-farming’, they expend their scarce resources in hiring labourers to work
the land. Moodie notes that much of her time in this early period is spent ‘abusing the place,
the country, and our own dear selves for our folly in coming to it’ (1: 85), recounting how, like
other destitute emigrants, they cannot even pay for a return passage to England. It is clear that
the Moodies have lost the social and economic privilege conventionally associated with expatri-
ates: their situation is a far cry from the independent means and globe-trotting ways expatriates
are presumed to possess, as well as from the presumed choice they have ‘to live abroad and
return home if/when it suits them’, as posited by Robbins.31

Perhaps even harder to accept than their downward social mobility and financial ruin is the
fading connection to England experienced through their prolonged absence. Moodie notes:

After seven years’ exile, the hope of return grows feeble, the means are still less in our
power, and our friends give up all hope of our return; their letters grow fewer and
colder, their expressions of attachment are less vivid; the heart has formed new ties,
and the poor emigrant is nearly forgotten. Double those years, and it is as if the grave
had closed over you, and the hearts that once knew and loved you know you no more.
(1: 122)

While she seeks to keep alive her connection to England and simultaneously nurture a connec-
tion to Canada, such dual allegiance is not shared by her compatriots back in England whom
she claims lack understanding of the diasporic condition. Moodie fully belongs to neither the
place she has left nor the one she has arrived at; instead, she maintains affective bonds to both
and acquires a plural sense of ‘home’.

The sense of painful separation from England eases once she starts building a community
in her adopted home. She gradually develops a close and affectionate friendship with several
neighbours, including two indigenous women she calls Mrs Muskrat and Snow-storm, who
occasionally borrow Moodie’s canoe, admiring her pluck in managing house, farm and children
whilst her husband is away for long periods with his regiment. Upon visiting their encampment,
they teach her how to dry venison, read the clouds for changes in weather and paddle with the
current to cross the lake and gain headland (2: 267–9). This latter skill is arguably a metaphor for
Moodie’s acculturation process: over time, she develops the practical and social skills needed to
steer her way in a new environment by assimilating local knowledge through close interactions
with locals and through engagement in local practices.

As the years pass, Moodie reaches an accommodation with her new life, claiming:

Now, when not only reconciled to Canada, but loving it, and feeling a deep interest
in its present welfare, and the fair prospect of its future greatness, I often look back and
laugh at the feelings with which I then regarded this noble country.

(1: 83)
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However, when a reversal of fortune enables their sudden departure, she bids a frank farewell to pioneering life, stating:

I have given you a faithful picture of a life in the backwoods of Canada, and I leave you to draw from it your own conclusions. To the poor, industrious working man it presents many advantages; to the poor gentleman, none!

(2: 290)

The lack of sentimentalism and resounding cautionary tone in this final address reveal the negative conclusion Moodie herself seems to have drawn about expatriate life in Canada.

Expatriate life in rural Tuscany, late 1990s

In contrast to Moodie, there is little affective ambivalence in Frances Mayes’s account, as she ostensibly sees no downside to expatriate life in rural Tuscany. Escape from the pressures of urban living in California lead her to Cortona in 1990 where she acquires a 300-year-old stone villa, ‘Bramasole’, whose name means ‘to yearn for the sun’ (TS, 15). This aptly captures the impulse that draws Mayes to its doorstep: both a literal longing for sunshine and a metaphorical desire for a better quality of life. She states at the outset of her bestselling memoir, *Under the Tuscan Sun* (1996), that the allure of a foreign place is about imagining new possibilities for selfhood, imagining what it would be like to ‘be extant in another version’ (TS, 28). This potential for self-transformation is also what makes relocation writing so compelling for readers. Blending conventions of travel writing and life writing, these hybrid accounts offer readers a touristic escape by gazing vicariously on exotic landscapes whilst simultaneously satisfying their penchant for gazing into interior spaces and the mundane details of domestic life lived elsewhere through the personal accounts of transnational writers like Mayes who have built homes abroad.

At the outset, Mayes repeatedly invokes her urban life in San Francisco as a counterpoint to her life in rural Tuscany as she renovates the hillside ruin with a view: the household objects and practices which characterise her Tuscan life gather meaning in opposition to those associated with her American life. This recalls Susanna Moodie’s early tendency to compare the customs she left behind in Sussex to ones in the colony, albeit to opposite effect. Whilst Moodie is initially dismayed by her new surroundings and she experiences cultural differences mainly as irritants or obstacles, Mayes enthusiastically embraces each novelty in Tuscany with an idealising impulse. This marked difference in their initial responses to their adopted homes is perhaps indicative of the varying degrees of choice each exercised in the decision to relocate: while Mayes’s decision is motivated by individual will and self-interest, Moodie is bound by the socio-economic and cultural conventions of her time to follow her husband to the new world.

*Tuscan Sun* is filled with Mayes’s early impressions of the place and its people rendered through the objects of material culture – house, garden, food and culinary practices – which act, initially, as portals to greater understanding of foreign place and local practices. Her journey of becoming ‘at home’ in Italy involves moving beyond this immediate domestic sphere of home renovation and culinary exploration to engage with place through a local–global nexus of social relations. As with Moodie, Mayes’s impressions accrue over time; however, unlike Moodie who lacks the means to return to England, Mayes maintains two homes and eventually retires in Tuscany. Across the twenty years chronicled in her trilogy, her status shifts from an intermittent resident whose initial engagement with locale is mostly touristic, to a fixture in the community
whose engagement moves towards the dialogical. After several years in Italy, Mayes begins to understand events unfolding around her, leading her to claim: ‘Now that I know this one place a little, I read with doubled perception’ (TS, 152). Later, in her second memoir, 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 she becomes gradually more adept at reading place and understanding others, her initial readings of Tuscany and of Tuscans present a monological interpretation of cultural difference. Wendy Parkins observes that Mayes’s characters tend to serve as ‘heuristic devices’, or ‘exemplars of eternal verities’, not as ‘subjects with whom to connect in community’. Her tendency to idealise and essentialise Italians is poignantly displayed in her initial description of Placido, a neighbour, who appears episodically across her trilogy:

I have begun to idealise his life. It is easy for foreigners to idealise, romanticize, stereotype, and oversimplify local people [. . .] but what I idealize is that Placido seems utterly happy [. . .] 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 is en route to some medieval joust or fair.

(TS, 198–9)

In this portrayal, Placido is paradigmatically a-modern: existing outside time as a kind of ‘noble savage’ who communes with falcons and horses, lives in a stone hut and appears perennially ‘happy’ in his peaceable kingdom. Even though Mayes attaches a positive value to Placido’s uncultured simplicity, to his uncorrupted natural way of being outside modernity, her construction closes off the possibility for complexity and ambiguity in his representation, as did Moodie’s early depiction of indigenous people in Upper Canada. Parkins notes that Mayes’s poetic image of the peasant Other serves her artistic purpose of portraying Italy ‘as an Arcadian backdrop against which the existential dilemmas of modernity [can] be illuminated and explored by subjects from elsewhere’.

A subtle shift in narrative sensibility and rhetorical style is demonstrated in Mayes’s third memoir after a twenty-year period of sustained residency in Cortona. When she re-introduces Placido in Every Day in Tuscany (2010), she gives a more rounded impression of the man. The sense of alarm she experiences when he falls from his horse and spends several months recovering in hospital is real and palpable; she worries about the person, not the poetic image. Upon seeing him again, she finds him ‘thinner, with a crease on either side of his smile, but he’s [still] Placido’ (ED, 28). His creased smile is a significant shift in detail from the previous straw portrayal of the ‘utterly happy’ Rousseauian figure and marks a post-lapsarian turn in Mayes’s text: Placido becomes humanised through suffering. 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’ (ED, 28). The unthinkable loss of her friend helps Mayes render a more human portrayal:

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.

(ED, 28)

The qualities of ‘slow living’ are clearly evoked through his everyday way of living: convivially in a close-knit community, a husband to his farm, a forager who knows the land, an artisan who crafts objects of great beauty, a modern-day St Francis who lives close to nature and whom the creatures praise in song. Although his portrayal is more layered in this passage than in earlier constructions, Mayes cannot quite resist the tendency to idealise Placido, rendering him symbolic of Tuscan authenticity; he appears as a real, embodied person in her text, but still functions as an exemplar of an idealised rural past.

Her nostalgia for the past causes Mayes to misread her environment, as illustrated in a significant episode relayed in Bella Tuscany. Her bucolic description of the countryside as one of ‘hummooky hills, cypress-lined road, cerulean skies with big baroque clouds that look as if cherubs could peer from behind them’ (TS, 54) emphasises how rural Tuscany – in opposition to hyper-modern California – serves her purpose as a poetic image. This picturesque portrait does not reveal the region’s complex culture, though, as 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 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, 90–1)

This tableau ‘makes no sense’ to Mayes, neither at the time of observing it nor subsequently when reporting it, because she fails to fully analyse the dynamics of globalisation in the region: how global flows of people and capital result in her own presence there, as an affluent American second-home owner, as well as the presence of African sex-workers.

Mayes’s account too often elides the ways in which her construction of the ‘good life’ in Arcadia is an idealised one shaped by a selection of white, middle-class affinities. Jeffrey Folks suggests that Mayes 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’.34 This critique is partially valid since, despite acknowledging their presence, she sees the prostitutes as intruders who disturb the bucolic integrity and peaceful authenticity of the Tiber valley, as though it exists as a place outside time. Silvia Ross notes that this insistence on Italy’s timelessness is a form of nostalgia for a sanitised version of the past.35 She claims that Mayes’s repeated references to the ‘country’s
ancient roots, mythological figures, and the art of centuries gone by are a means of preserving the trope of renewal and rebirth associated with Renaissance Tuscany, of ensuring that Tuscany continues to function as a rural idyll in her aesthetic representations. Though Mayes might prefer rural Tuscany to remain a retreat from modernity and its influences, the presence of African prostitutes subverts its construction as a coherent Renaissance tableau: it is not a bucolic refuge from modernity or an ‘ideal community’ inhabited by coherent and homogeneous locals (among whom Mayes counts herself), but instead is a postmodern space marked by heterogeneous influences.

Later, when a stranger leaves a hand grenade on her lawn at Bramasole, Mayes’s Tuscan idyll collapses and she is forced to confront the fact that it does not provide immunity from the modern world: 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’ (TS, 88) since rural Tuscany is also contaminated by the anxieties of contemporary life. 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: Bramasole is not the shelter or refuge from modernity she had posited. The grenade incident, similar to her previous sight of the prostitutes, but not as easily ignored, 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 complex layers of local history to make sense of her situation and surroundings.

Her decision to stay marks a defining moment in her twenty-year process of accommodation; thereafter, 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 those in it. She notes:

What became clear over the ensuing months was that our [Mayes’s and her husband’s] 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 elettori, elective residents, but familial. ‘Cari, siete cortonesi.’ My dears, you’re of Cortona […] I didn’t even know I was on the outside looking in until I was suddenly on the inside looking out.

(ED, 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’ (ED, 282–3). After spending her adult life in San Francisco learning to be ‘monumentally self-reliant’ (TS, 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 one of engaged participation, in Beck’s sense of cosmopolitanism as a practice of the ‘dialogical imagination’ that is deeply rooted in engagement with difference. Though Mayes states towards the end of her third memoir, ‘I came to Italy for the art, the cuisine, landscapes, history, architecture, wine, and the ineffable beauty. I stayed for the people’ (ED, 179), one is left with the sense that she spends
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too long cataloguing the lifestyle advantages of Tuscany and arrives belatedly at ‘the people’. In fact, following the grenade incident, she buys another rustic house to renovate, a mountain refuge further removed from town (hence from the encroachments of modernity) where she hopes to encounter ‘deep-country Tuscans’ (ED, 6). Whilst an index of change is revealed across her trilogy, it is a modest form of cosmopolitanism that shies away from fully dialogical encounters with difference. Perhaps surrendering too readily to a Mediterranean myth, her relocation trilogy falls short of rendering what Folks refers to as a full ‘meeting of self and place’, which he identifies as the secret to good travel writing, noting: ‘travel writing — all writing, in fact, if it is to be any good — is not about the place but of it’.39

Conclusion

As long-term expatriates, Moodie and Mayes address the local/global dynamics inherent in relocation with varying degrees of intra-subjective awareness and inter-subjective engagement as they seek an accommodation with foreign place over time. Defining cosmopolitanism as ‘an intellectual and aesthetic openness to divergent cultural experiences’ in which a ‘willingness to engage with the Other’ is demonstrated through a ‘search for contrasts rather than uniformity’,40 Hanmerz signals openness and engagement with diversity as core values in this ethical orientation. Vered Amit proposes that the consonance or disjuncture of cosmopolitan consciousness is not a simple either/or question: ‘the issue becomes less a matter of the simple presence or absence of inclusive consciousness but of the degree of inclusiveness, self-awareness and the consonance or disjuncture between this consciousness and the actual experiences of travel’, and he questions ‘the degree to which [cosmopolitan] privileges can blunt the edge of full engagement with difference’.41 This question is central to understanding whether and how white, middle-class travellers like Moodie and Mayes can overcome the circumscriptions associated with their class status to achieve self-transformation, the kind of self-transcendence that Gerard Delanty identifies as central to cosmopolitan engagement.42

The two cases presented in this chapter reveal varying degrees of cosmopolitan engagement with cultural difference. Bronisław Szerszynski and John Urry claim that cosmopolitan predispositions involve ‘a willingness to take risks by virtue of encountering the Other’.43 Though Moodie loses her economic privilege and social status through emigration, she develops rich loyalties and attachments in the local community for survival and support. Her life in Upper Canada is filled with risk and her memoirs chart a deepening engagement with place through situated readings of life in Upper Canada over two decades (1832–1850), accounts that move away from a colonial subject’s totalising certainty towards a settler’s recognition of complexity and ambiguity. Moodie’s memoir charts a shifting sensibility as she develops self-awareness and critical reflection through accommodation to foreign place over time.

Mayes arguably experiences less risk in relocation as she maintains a life in California; her initial engagement with Tuscan space is consequently more touristic. The view she offers of Italy and Italians is not at ground level but from a more detached point of view, one which enables her to construct an idyll of rural Tuscany based on a circumscribed selection of self-referential affinities. She is an ‘ideal observer’ in Maria Lugones’s sense of a post-cultural subject who observes and essentialises other cultures while remaining ‘pure, unified and simple so as to occupy the vantage point and perceive unity amid multiplicity’.44 Mayes’s interactions avoid risk-taking by remaining detached and reducing multiplicity and complexity through idealisation, thus blunting the edge of full engagement with difference. Hers is a modest form
of cosmopolitanism: the narrative point of view across her trilogy remains largely fixed and unchanged, a free-floating cultural connoisseur more focused on displaying an Italianate self and the cultural accoutrements acquired through a transnational lifestyle than in engaging deeply with cultural differences. Mayes’s expatriate story is more makeover than self-transformation: the ethical project of living ‘an examined life’ evoked at the outset of Tuscan Sun is circumscribed by the consumer discourse running through her narrative reconstructions of life abroad. Her connection with cultural difference is more strategic in Michael Skye’s sense of furthering her own instrumental goals rather than progressive aims or values.45

In both cases, travel fulfils the axiomatic imperative of ‘broadening the mind’ with which it is conventionally associated, since the experience of relocation enables both writers to acquire an expanded sense of the world through the experience of foreign place. Yet their experiences of dwelling in difference reveal varying degrees of cosmopolitan engagement through their attachments, place-based interactions, processes of self-interrogation, cultural inclusiveness and meaning formation. Unmoored from ontological certainty, Moodie’s subjective persona is fundamentally reconstituted through relocation; Mayes’s memoirs, instead, present a subject who gains epistemological awareness of cultural diversity yet remains constant and unified, not radically transformed through migration. Expatriate writing by those who seek an accommodation with foreign place over time provides powerful examples of the ways in which identities can be dialogically reconstructed through contact with difference in a globalised world.

Notes

15 Papyanis, Writing in the Margins, 10–11.
16 The term ‘identity work’ is used by Walshe to address the socially constructed status of identities, drawing attention to the ways in which identities are dynamic, contested and contextualised as opposed to


20 My notion of ‘dwelling in difference’ builds on Clifford’s conceptualisation of ‘traveling-in-dwelling’ and ‘dwelling-in-traveling’ in global cosmopolitanism: see Clifford, ‘Traveling Cultures’.


22 Frances Mayes, *Under the Tuscan Sun* (London: Bantam, 1996); *Bella Tuscany: The Sweet Life in Italy* (London: Bantam Books, 1999); *Every Day in Tuscany* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010). Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text, identified as TS, BT and ED respectively.

23 Moodie further explains that in 1832 a military half-pay stipend amounted to approximately £100 per annum of Canadian currency, which was sufficient to supply the family with food and to pay for the clearing of land for wheat and hay for cattle (1:288).


31 Robbins, ‘Comparative Cosmopolitanism’, 177.


33 Parkins, ‘At Home’, 258.


36 Ross, ‘Home and Away’, 49.


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40 Hannerz, 'Cosmopolitans and Locals', 239.