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In March 2020 the entire world came to a dramatic turning point due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our homes were no longer just a hearth, but they turned into a refuge against the calamity that was dangerously spreading all around us. In the months of confinement, people re-evaluated the importance of outer spaces and, after the shattering early phase of crisis, humanity slowly tried to renegotiate its relationship with the external world and its beauties.

With this premise, the volume *Immagini e paesaggi della Toscana nella tradizione letteraria e artistica europea* should be read as not only a collection of papers, but as a 'love letter' to Tuscany itself, written by virtually taking a glance at the region throughout the centuries. As a matter of fact, the importance given here to the natural landscape and the artistic treasures of Tuscan cities allows one to assess relationships involving people and nature alongside the significance of art and culture, while foregrounding travelling – which, in the post-COVID era, no one may take for granted anymore – as affecting the soul and heart of visitors and tourists.

Edited by Giulio Milone and Camilla Del Grazia, this volume brings together a selection of the contributions presented at the International Conference *Immagini e paesaggi della Toscana nella tradizione letteraria e artistica europea* held at the civic library "A. Betti" in Bagni di Lucca in September 2021. Organised by the Fondazione Culturale "Michel de Montaigne" and academic members of the Department of Philology, Literature and Linguistics of Pisa University, the event saw the gathering of national and international experts who, coordinated by Marcello Cherubini, Roberta Ferrari and Laura Giovannelli, discussed the influence of Tuscany on English and American authors across the centuries.

Starting from the Middle Ages, Italy has been a renowned pilgrimage destination and its attractiveness enormously increased in the wake of the Grand-Tour fashion in the eighteenth century, when travellers from all Europe came to the *Bel Paese* to discover its beauties. Among Italian regions, Tuscany grew in importance in the early decades of the following century: thanks to its artistic heritage, mild climate and unspoiled landscapes, it soon became a ritualistic step for European visitors and, even more so, for the English ones. Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Leghorn (Livorno), and the Appennines became privileged destinations and favourite subjects for literary and artistic works. The volume intends to bear witness to this cultural phenomenon by

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illustrating the presence of Tuscany in works ranging from the early nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

Mary Shelley is the *fil rouge* connecting the three opening essays. In “‘The most civilized district of Italy’: Mary Shelley’s Tuscan Tales Between History, Literary Echoes and Politics”, Nicoletta Caputo focuses her attention on two of Shelley’s stories, “A Tale of the Passions” and “The Brother and Sister: An Italian Story”, respectively published in 1823 and 1832. Drawing on her experience in Tuscany, Shelley sets them in the region during the Middle Ages, when the domain was torn by the struggles between Guelphs and Ghibellines and family feuds. In the former story, Caputo highlights the meaning of ‘passion’, which “is shown as being something protean, something that is transferable from the private, domestic sphere to the public, political one” (p. 21). Although set in medieval Tuscany, the tale purports to create a bridge between past and present, as the social struggles it illustrates echo those fought in Naples in 1820-1821 against the Bourbon monarchy and the Pope. Caputo also underscores the main difference between “A Tale of the Passions” and “The Brother and Sister: An Italian Story”: while the former ends with the ruin of the female figure and the triumph of war and masculine violence (which also characterises other texts by Shelley, e.g. *Valperga* and *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*), the latter, with its happy ending, conveys a message of what “we would call ‘ethic of care’”, showing that “peculiarly feminine propensity to emphasize relationships, empathy and compassion, to see humanity as interconnected and to pay greater attention to the needs of others” (p. 34). Caputo stresses the important role played by Tuscany (and Italy in general) in Mary Shelley’s life, not only as her second home, but also as a land capable of attracting exiles and freedom fighters thanks to its long history of oppression and division.

Together with Elizabeth Stisted and Francesca Alexander, Mary Shelley is part of the female trio Paolo Fantozzi takes into account in “*This Fairest of Lands. Tradizioni e leggende popolari tra la Val di Lima, l’Appennino negli scritti di Mrs Stisted, Francesca Alexander e Mary Shelley*”, where he examines the significant influence of local folklore and legends on some of their writings, namely Stisted’s *Letters from the By-Ways of Italy*, Alexander’s *Roadside Songs of Tuscany*, and Shelley’s *Valperga*. Stisted first travelled to Italy in 1827 with her husband, visiting Venice, Florence (where the couple hosted an old Walter Scott), and Rome; they eventually settled in Bagni di Lucca, where they bought the villa nowadays known as ‘Villa Barbagli’. Fantozzi proceeds to draw attention to *Letters from the By-Ways of Italy*, a book Mrs Stisted wrote to pay off the family’s debt after the construction of the Anglican church and the cemetery in Bagni. *Letters* invites the reader to explore hidden spaces in Val di Lima and it can be considered as a fresco of life in Bagni di Lucca and its surroundings from 1830 to 1845 (p. 41). Francesca Alexander, on the other hand, came to Italy, namely to Florence, in 1852. She soon forged affective links with those in need, as she would help them not only financially, but also morally, lending a sympathetic ear to their condition. Fantozzi specifically highlights her friendship with John Ruskin (as shown in *Roadside Songs of Tuscany*, edited by Ruskin himself) and with poet Beatrice di Pian degli Ontani, who lived in the mountains of Abetone and was described by Alexander as an extraordinary woman (p. 49). As for Mary Shelley, Fantozzi focuses on *Valperga*,

a story whose characterisation of the frightful witch owes much to the legends told by the farmers of Val di Lima, a territory abounding in tales of magic and sorcerers.

Mary Shelley is also the protagonist of Jocelynn A. Scutt's essay, "'Of light and electric's': A Tale of Mary Shelley in Tuscany", which foregrounds the author's contacts with the Tuscan environment and climate, in particular thunderstorms. Scutt begins by mentioning 1816, famously known as 'the year without a summer', a very cold time-span fostered by the devastating effects of the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia. The phenomenon was so violent that it changed the global atmosphere for the whole year, also leading to the condensation of dark clouds that caused the famous stormy night in Geneva, when *Frankenstein* was first conceived. In 1818, after the first edition of the novel was published, Shelley visited Italy with her husband, stopping at Bagni di Lucca, where she eventually witnessed the breathtaking electrical storms that were striking the region. Interestingly, Scutt suggests that the particular Tuscan climate in that period could have influenced Shelley in writing the second version of *Frankenstein*, where the power of electricity plays an even more pivotal role.

Tuscany has always been a favourite topic with British travelogues, the literary genre Paolo Bugliani takes into account in his essay on William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, entitled "Dire quasi la stessa Italia: William Hazlitt e Leigh Hunt di fronte ai paesaggi toscani". Hazlitt's *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (1826) bears witness to the philosophical inclination of its author, whose view of travelling can actually be seen as mainly intellectual and still drawing on the principles of Enlightenment. Hazlitt takes different kinds of notes, focusing not only on the beauty of the landscape, but also on sociological and ethnographic features (p. 88). This is clearly exemplified by his comments on the Florentine carnival, when he ponders on the value of masks, which do not differentiate one person from another, but rather unify those who wear them in a sort of grotesque body (p. 91). Hunt, on the contrary, provides us with an almost literary account of his journey in his *Autobiography* (1850), realigning himself with the second Romantic generation along with Shelley, Byron, and Keats. For example, he describes the murder of Count Guiccioli as if it were an event reminiscent of a gothic romance (p. 96), and he often connects Italy with the supernatural, for instance when he describes Siena as a 'ghosted house', as Hawthorne would do. Hunt's journey through Tuscany was indeed an important moment in his life, which allowed him not only to get in touch with the region's beauty and suggestiveness, but also to test his capability to convey and translate his experience to the English reader.

In her essay "Tuscany in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*: The 'Thinned' Arcadia and its Role in the Romance", Camilla Del Grazia stresses the role Tuscany plays in Nathaniel Hawthorne's quest for the "poetic or fairy precinct" (p. 101), suggesting that *The Marble Faun* might be seen as a reshaped version of the author's *French and Italian Notebook* (1871). Hawthorne visited both Rome and Florence, and the two cities deeply marked him: the former because of the contrast between its sublime traits and its dirtiness, on both a material and spiritual level; the latter for putting him at ease, owing to its warmer climate (Hawthorne visited Florence in summer, while he used to live in Rome through the winter) and because it granted him the necessary time and space to concentrate on his recollections. For this reason, Rome can be considered

as a non-place, while Florence is inhabited by “real” people (p. 107). Thus, the Tuscan city provided Hawthorne with a proper inspiration for *The Marble Faun*, a text imbued with references and echoes linked to the geography of the territory and its ‘enchanted’ landscapes, showing quite different features from the author’s motherland. Del Grazia also underlines the main differences between Florence and Rome as highlighted in Hawthorne’s romance: despite its glorious history and artistic relevance, Rome emerges as morally corrupted, while Florence (with Monte Beni) represents a sort of *locus amoenus*, a *felix* Arcadia. In the end, a final comparison is drawn between Italy and America: while the former exhibits evident contrasts between its architecture and the land (this being a sign of a nature-culture cleavage), the latter still allows the human to merge with the environment, envisaging a natural harmony capable of stimulating one’s imagination. Del Grazia concludes by arguing that *The Marble Faun* reflects Hawthorne’s thoughts on Italy: although the country has not suffered yet from the same effects of time and history affecting Rome, Monte Beni is bound to slowly face the same destiny; conversely, young and unspoiled America could be a ‘new muse’ for authors.

Gabriele Corsani’s “Janet Ross e Vernon Lee: due dimore alle pendici della collina di Maiano, a est di Firenze” deals with two female authors who were connected to the small town of Maiano, near Florence, at the end of the nineteenth century: Janet Ross and Vernon Lee. Despite living in the same town, the two never met, but they shared the same passion and respect for the area that welcomed them. This is testified by the care they put into the restoration of their two villas, Poggio Gherardo and Palmerino. Ross renovated her mansion with the help of several antiquarians, who provided different exotic decorations, reflecting her Victorian *gusto* for extravagant ornamentation. She could be considered as a kind of New Woman by virtue of her knowledge of Renaissance art and history, her ability as a singer and guitar player, her drawing and writing skills, and her prowess in the kitchen and orchard, as Corsani remarks. Analogously, Lee stands out as a woman of immense culture. She loved being surrounded by intellectuals from Florence, whom she would later include in her private circle. Besides, Poggio Gherardo and Palmerino share a series of architectural features, namely the door, *la soglia*, capable of dividing but also of bringing together (p. 147), and the passages and windows that opened directly onto the landscape, reminding of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s descriptions in the poem *Casa Guidi Windows* (p. 151). Last but not least, both authors boast an important literary output that confirms their love for Italy and its history: Lee’s *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880) and Ross’s *Italian Sketches* (1887) are but two examples of their Italian publications. By interlacing the architectural taste with the literary interests of these two women, Corsani reflects on how Maiano was fundamental for the lives of Ross and Lee, who now rest in peace in the region that gave them such new energies.

Marco Canani’s “Sulle orme toscane di Byron, Shelley e i Brownings. Il discorso del turismo e il paesaggio romantico nelle *anthoguides* di Anna Benneson McMahan” introduces us to the concept of ‘anthoguide’, a term he proposes to define the production of the American author Anna Benneson McMahan. Canani focuses his attention on three of her texts: *Florence in the Poetry of the Brownings* (1904), *With Shelley in Italy* (1905), and *With Byron in Italy* (1906). These anthoguides consist in

anthologised guidebooks in which the function of the editor proves crucial. More specifically, her goal is to explore the relationship that the Brownings, Shelley and Byron established with the Italian landscape, and to icastically convey it to the reader. McMahan invites the tourist who reads her book about the Brownings to virtually follow the footsteps of the couple by concentrating on some of their poems linked to their sojourn in the Tuscan city; the reader can thus identify himself/herself with the spouses while visiting the same places, and this is possible thanks to the hybrid nature of the anthoguide itself (p. 181). *With Shelley in Italy* and *With Byron in Italy* present the same structure: the life and the poetry appear as closely connected, with an apparatus of photos of the landscape and sites of cultural significance that aim to capture the tourist-reader's attention. Canani highlights the importance of the anthoguide as a particular type of guidebook that plays on different communicative codes and genres, resulting in something unique. McMahan's anthoguides, in particular, are able to give prominence to the idea and implications of travelling and to promote a new kind of literary tourism: a "pilgrimage" (p. 195), as the author herself calls it.

With Luca Baratta's essay, "'Like Moths to the Lighthouse': dissolvenze fiorentine in *The Soul's Gymnasium* di Sir Harold Acton", we enter the literary world of Sir Harold Mario Mitchell Acton, an English author who lived in Florence and died there in 1994, leaving his properties to New York University and the British Institute of Florence. Here the focus is on *The Soul's Gymnasium*, Acton's anthology of tales published in 1982. After a brief introduction to Acton's life and his love for Florence and its history, witnessed by such books as *The Last of the Medici* (1930) and *The Last Medici* (1932), Baratta outlines the structure and the themes of *The Soul's Gymnasium*. The first two stories, "The Marchesa Carrie" and "Leo's Ivory Tower", are built on Acton's personal memories of real Anglo-Florentine characters. The triptych composed by "St Gabriel", "Fin de Race" and "Flora's Lame Duck" is devoted to the theme of the inevitable demise of life. The eponymous story, "The Soul's Gymnasium", dwells on the absurd behaviour of a dandy who is probably affected by some kind of mental disorder, and his misadventures with a young American student. "Codicil Coda", "A Phantom Botticelli" and "Morning at Upshott's" reflect on the theme of nostalgia, not so much for a place as for past glory. The final story, "The Narcissus Elegy", focuses on a failed writer who owes his ephemeral fame simply to the unpredictable dictates of fate. This concluding tale provides a most suitable conclusion for such a heterogeneous book: it is an auto-ironical satire on the literary mediocrity and the false literary myths fostered by critics, but it is also an elegy on dreams' ability to preserve human naïveté (p. 210). Despite the presence of different themes, the *fil rouge* that connects all these tales is decadence and corruption, in a physical sense (the degeneracies of mass tourism) and on a moral level, as epitomised by the apathetic rich. The only antidote to corruption is beauty: it acts as a universal *panacea*, capable of alleviating the pains and sufferings of the present but also of laying the foundations for a brighter future. Importantly, Baratta underscores how Florence remains the real protagonist of the anthology, pointing to Acton's love for the city, which can be compared to an Eden that, just like the Biblical one, constantly risks surrendering to corruption.

In “Distanza, sdegno e trasfigurazione: lo sguardo di Rachel Cusk in *The Last Supper*”, the closing essay of the volume, Giulio Milone analyses Rachel Cusk’s *The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy* (2009). The title of the book evidently recalls the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci, while at the same time referring to two main focuses of the author’s journey to Italy, that is, Italian art and food (p. 227). Cusk is a lingering and ambivalent presence in the text, as the reasons for her journey to Italy are unknown. The reader is only aware of her interest in D.H. Lawrence, as the travelogue opens with an epigraph from *Sea and Sardinia*. Annoyed at the immobility, hypocrisy and bigotry of their fellow countrymen, Cusk and her family leave England for Italy for three months. Milone highlights how Cusk’s journey seems modeled on the nineteenth-century Grand Tour, since it starts in April at the Newhaven port, then passing through France and Italy. During the journey, Cusk engages with Italian culture, reading literary reports and learning the language. The first stage is Liguria, followed by Tuscan Garfagnana. Milone observes how, in Barga, Cusk and her family end up feeling overwhelmed by frustration, which results in an abrupt change of the narrative point of view from the first person to a collective plural represented by her husband, her daughters, and herself. The next stage is Lucca, whose walls seem to divide the internal past from the external present (p. 236). The journey continues through different cities: Assisi, Rome, Naples, and Positano, each of them working as a backdrop where Cusk philosophically reflects on the search for a sense in one’s actions. As Milone points out, *The Last Supper* is not to be approached as a guide to Tuscany or Italy, but as the diary of a troubled mind who is seeking for new meanings and directions in her art by critically observing the world around her.

This book offers precious insights into the role Tuscany has played in the lives of various authors who, starting from the early nineteenth century, visited Dante’s native land and were fascinated by the richness of its natural landscapes and secular history, as well as by its difference from the English and American territories. For them, Tuscany was not only a source of inspiration: it was a life experience which left an indelible mark on their souls, thus influencing not only their works specifically set in this region, but somehow their entire literary production. The colourful territory, which alternates beaches, hills, Apennines and cities, represents a place where people and nature live in symbiosis, even recalling Edenic images of an ideal society. At the same time, though, this garden runs the risk of being destroyed by corrupting forces: if, for nineteenth-century authors, these forces were the political powers that limited individual freedom, today it is mass tourism and pollution that put the environment at risk.

Analysing works belonging to different ages and literary genres, written by both canonical authors and minor literary figures, this volume should be considered as an original contribution to the wide-ranging debate on Anglo-Italian cultural relations, suggesting that much more is still to be discovered about Tuscany and its longstanding appeal on foreign travellers.