

HUNGRY FOR MORE: READING *UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN* AS A GASTROGRAPHY

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ART
in
ENGLISH EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO
MAYAGÜEZ CAMPUS
2011

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Abstract

This thesis examines the best-selling memoir *Under the Tuscan Sun* as an autobiographical narrative in the genre of gastrography that demonstrates how food is used as a metaphor and also as a mode of escape in 21st century women's autobiographical writing. In order to understand the patterns and functions that food serves in contemporary women's writing, this new and original project situates *Under the Tuscan Sun* as a gastrography written in The Prophetic Mode that also incorporates elements of scriptotherapy. These three theories of Autobiography Studies are further used to analyze the relationship between food and life writing, specifically focusing on the memoir *Under the Tuscan Sun*. This thesis uses an interdisciplinary approach to literary analysis that includes aspects of Cultural Studies, and also incorporates the study of recipes as a literary device. Furthermore, this research project also integrates an investigation of readers' responses selected from online audience feedback to the text and subsequent consumer products for the purpose of articulating a societal desire and need for escapism that this text responds to, and in doing so providing an additional layer of support to my argument that Frances Mayes, the author of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, employs food as a metaphor and method for escapism in this text.

Resumen

Esta tesis examina la obra popular *Under the Tuscan Sun* como una narrativa autobiográfica en el género de gastografía que demuestra como la comida es usada como metáfora y como forma de escapismo en la escritura autobiográfica de mujeres del siglo 21. Para entender los patrones y funciones que la comida ejerce en la escritura femenina moderna, este nuevo e innovador proyecto ubica a *Under the Tuscan Sun* como una gastografía escrita en el modo profético que también incorpora elementos de scriptoterapia. Estas tres teorías de estudios autobiográficos también se usan para analizar la relación entre comida y escrituras sobre la vida, específicamente en *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Esta tesis usa un enfoque interdisciplinario al análisis de literatura que incluye aspectos de estudios culturales e incorpora el estudio de recetas como un recurso literario. Además, éste proyecto integra la investigación de opiniones de lectores sobre el texto, específicamente una audiencia en un formato en línea, al igual que sus respuestas sobre otros productos subsiguientes, con el propósito de articular un deseo social y la necesidad de escapismo a la cual el texto en cuestión responde. De esta forma se respalda mi argumento de que Frances Mayes, autora de *Under the Tuscan Sun*, utiliza la comida como una metáfora y método de escapismo en éste texto.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Ricia Chansky for all of her help and encouragement in the writing, organizing and finishing of this thesis, and also for being an inspiring mentor and role model - both as a scholar and as a person. Thanks also to my mother for never ending a conversation without asking me *when* I would be finishing my thesis, and thanks to my Grandma Corty for being a woman who loved to read cookbooks.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“It is impossible, after all, to write about food without writing about the self. But there is a line between soothing readers' anxieties and becoming the Victoria's Secret of the Fourth Estate. Today that line is as fine and brittle as a thread of spun sugar. It divides ...food writing that reflects the reality of its era from food writing that is a fantasy.”

Molly O'Neill

The Book

A family, a home, and a flourishing career...what more could a woman possibly want? Well, for starters, how about a villa in Tuscany? Maybe one with an Etruscan path lined with olive trees in the backyard...?

In 1996, when Frances Mayes' food-laced memoir *Under the Tuscan Sun* was first published, it opened the floodgate for the endlessly emerging memoirs written by successful women who, despite their personal accomplishments, still long for the ubiquitous “something else”. What these memoirs seem to have in common is that they all seem to find their escape through consumption, whether it be eating food or buying a new pair of shoes. Or, like Mayes, perhaps investing in an eight bedroom Tuscan villa.

After *Under the Tuscan Sun* was first published in 1996 it became one of the most popular books in the late 90's and retained popularity unto the 2000's, and spent over two years on the New York Times Best Sellers List. A search for the book *Under the Tuscan Sun* on Amazon.com brings up over 450 customer reviews, with a little over half of those customers (53%) giving the memoir either 4 or 5 stars - 5 being the highest rating possible. In an Amazon review written in 1999, a reviewer wrote that *Under the Tuscan Sun* “was just the escape I needed” (A Customer, 3 Sept. 1999). However, the same reviewer/consumer noted that, “One

thing that could have been left out – the references to Mayes childhood that screamed ‘I’m wealthy!’”; the reviewer also wrote that “the recipes chapters were an added bonus and inspired me to get cooking” (A Customer, 3 Sept. 1999). A customer named “Tuscan Flower” wrote in a 4 star review that he/she gave *Under the Tuscan Sun* that “it is a good book for leisure, relax you from your current job, give you a hope” (Tuscan Flower). As recent as 2010, a customer wrote in their review that “it totally appeals to my utterly romantic notions of running away to live in Europe someday...sigh...” (Donna). Yet, for as many customers who seemed to love *Under the Tuscan Sun* and gave it high reviews, there were also those who were not as impressed. Roughly 36% of reviewing customers on Amazon, a site which allows for anyone to write a public review of a product, gave *Under the Tuscan Sun* a 1 or 2 star review. In the review titled “Rich, smug American gloats about her vacation home” (Goldstein, Margery L.), the reviewer writes that Mayes “has an art-colony view of Italy, where she hangs out with other leisured expatriates and micromanages her environment” (Goldstein, Margery L.). In a one star review, written in 2010, the customer writes that “Frances Mayes comes across as materialistic, shallow and over-privileged. Someone else wrote ‘Martha Stewart does Tuscany’, and that sounds about right” (Fredericks, V.). What the reviewer seems to be implying by comparing Mayes to Stewart is that, like Stewart, Mayes approaches the world with unlimited time and an unlimited pocketbook. As such, a theme in the poor reviews of *Under the Tuscan Sun* seems to involve Mayes’ materialism and the overall impression that “this book stars not Tuscany but Frances Mayes, who treats Italy like a gigantic mall” (A Customer, 6 July 1999). Going hand in hand with Mayes’ level of consumption in the book is an overlapping criticism of Mayes’ patronizing tone in general; one customer writes in a two star review that her personality is indeed the “most painful part of the book” (Alice). In another one star review, a customer wrote “At one point, I threw the book

across the room in disgust” (A Customer, 2 Sept. 2000), their disgust sprouting from Mayes’ “old story of Italian – Americans and British expatriates long for a place missing the messiness and tedium of everyday North American/British life, and invent one in Italy” (A Customer, 2 Sept. 2000). This reviewer also notes that they gave the book to several friends who were equally disgusted and “insulted by her condescending descriptions”, leaving this particular reviewer to wonder: “Did Ms. Mayes ever talk to any Italian who didn’t work for her?” (A Customer, 2 Sept. 2000)

Across the board, both positive and negative reviews on Amazon highlight the issues I wish to address and analyze in this thesis. The reviewers who write positively of the memoir often seem to enjoy it because it offers an escape and, as noted by the reviewer “bookhound”, it caters to the “the daydreams we all have had about packing our bags, leaving the smog, and setting up house on an Italian countryside almost a reality”. On the flip side, people seem to hate it for the same reason: Mayes is rich enough to escape, but she is unbearably and obviously privileged, and comes off as condescending and materialistic to both the reader and Italians. Mayes is not “one of us” nor is she “one of them”; rather, she is above us all.

It has certainly not been lost on Mayes that “...food touches everything and is the foundation of every economy, marking social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions” (Counihan 3), as food plays such a significant role in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. The term *gastrography* was first coined by Rosalia Baena, who “proposed this term to designate life writing in which the story of the self is closely linked to the production, preparation, and/or consumption of food” (Smith & Watson 271). Indeed, *Under the Tuscan Sun* includes all of these elements. Frances Mayes grows her own food, often cooks, and even eats in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. More importantly, she narrates her life around these events. Even though there has

been a sudden boom in food memoirs in the last decade, "...food has been a subject of narrative for as long as there have been cookbooks and eating diaries [, also] the food memoir now enjoys a wide audience in many life writings venues and enables new reflection about the interplay of production and consumption" (Smith & Watson 148). One of the primary ways Mayes seeks out a connection with the reader is through the sharing of recipes inside *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Food and eating in *Under the Tuscan Sun* serve as constant backdrops. By using the technique of incorporating recipes, Frances Mayes is finding a way to connect and make an "exchange" with the reader. While the mere presence of food in literature is by no means a new phenomenon¹, the way we analyze the use of food or the placement of recipes in an autobiographical work, is. Including recipes inside a text is a convenient way for an author such as Mayes to communicate to her reader. In addition, the literary mechanism of using food as metaphors and recipes to tell stories are suitable ones because they ensure the reader they are on a journey – and a good story, above all things "is not about the place but of it" (Folks). Food is *of* a place, and recipes help recreate that place. And so, Frances Mayes seems to have succeeded in pleasing those readers who enjoy *Under the Tuscan Sun* as a means of escape, by incorporating this secret ingredient into her popular memoir.

The Empire

Offering the reader recipes as a way to create their own Tuscan experience is one of the many ways Mayes allows readers to be able to eat, drink, and sleep like she does. She also offers up her own Bramasole² olive oil, picked in "the serene hills around our home", as Mayes describes on the website created for the oil, www.thetuscansun.com. However, the oil is available for purchase only if you join the "Bramasole Convivium", in which case the minimum

¹ One of the very first known works of English literature – the epic poem *Beowulf* – begins with feasting in Mead Hall.

² *Bramasole* is the name of Mayes's villa in the town of Cordona, Italy, in the Tuscany region of Italy.

order is a 12 500 ml bottle case that can be purchased for \$285. Mayes informs interested buyers on the oil's website that "we hand pick our olives" (though it is not entirely clear who "we" entails). While it may be true that Mayes appreciates artisan olive oil, making and selling her own Bramasole brand of olive oil also presents a convenient entrepreneurial opportunity to profit from the popularity of her best-selling book as well. Moreover, it is doubtful that many of the American customers whose feedback is featured on the website for the olive oil would have had any interest in buying this particular brand of artisan olive oil had it not come from "under the Tuscan sun" and from Mayes herself. As Roland Barthes writes in his article *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption* "everyone knows that the product as bought – that is, experienced – by the consumer is by no means the real product; between the former and the latter there is a considerable production of false perceptions and value...this is notably the case with most cooking oils" (Barthes 29), and this is undoubtedly the case with the Frances Mayes' Bramasole olive oil. By purchasing this particular olive oil, the customers are also purchasing a small part of Mayes's Italy.

"*Welcome to Tuscany, Welcome Home*" is the tagline for Frances Mayes's line of furniture available from Drexel Heritage Furniture, appropriately named *At Home in Tuscany Collection*. According to Mayes, it is "their most successful line in twenty years!" (Dream of Italy). The collection includes dressers and chests ("The Signora's Private Chest"), coffee and end tables ("The Pietasanta Table"), mirrors ("Mirror That Sees the Stars"), dining room tables ("The Tavola For A Feast"), and bed frames ("The Bramasole Bed"), among other items. Through the offering of consumer products, Frances Mayes is acknowledging that readers cannot live her dream exactly, but they *can* buy a lesser form of it. In the most symbolic sense, the

message is that readers cannot have Frances Mayes' dream, but they can at least dream on the same bed that Frances Mayes does.

Frances and Ed Mayes also co-authored the book *Bringing Tuscany Home: Sensuous Style From the Heart of Italy*, which “offers a lavishly illustrated book for everyone who dreams of integrating the Tuscan lifestyle—from home decoration and cooking, to eating and drinking, to gardening, socializing, and celebrating—into their own lives” (Mayes, *Bringing Tuscany Home*). In this interior designed based book, Mayes offers several tips and “helps readers develop an eye for authentic Tuscan style” (Random House). Her advice ranges from deciding on “a Tuscan color palette for the home, from earthy apricot tones to invigorating shades of antique blue” (Mayes, *Bringing Tuscany Home*) to choosing “the best Italian vino” (Mayes, *Bringing Tuscany Home*) where “Frances describes lunches at regional vineyards and imparts tips for pairing food and wine” (Mayes, *Bringing Tuscany Home*). The book not only includes bona fide Tuscan decorating and hospitality advice, but also contains “twenty-five all-new recipes, and lists of resources for travelers and shoppers” (Mayes, *Bringing Tuscany Home*) – a kind of *Under the Tuscan Sun* guidebook. It is also curious how the publisher chose to blatantly address both travelers and shoppers simultaneously, as if they are one in the same. The Publishers Weekly review of *Bringing Tuscany Home* states that it is “a grab bag of guess-you-had-to-be-there anecdotes... and suggestions for how readers can, as Mayes and her husband, Ed, do, live the good life in northern California and Italy. (Hint: it takes a lot of money)” (*Publishers Weekly*). Ironically, Mayes also includes in this book a listing of her own “At Home in Tuscany Collection” furniture line, which “adds to the coyly self-indulgent feel” (*Publishers Weekly*) of the book. For Mayes, travel and shopping certainly do seem to be one in the same, or

at least that the *feeling* of travel can be found in buying things – specifically, buying the variety of things that Mayes is selling.

In addition to decorating and eating, you can also literally plan your life around *Under the Tuscan Sun* with the *Under the Tuscan Sun Engagement Calendar* (Chronicle Books). Though a simple daily planner, the *Under the Tuscan Sun Engagement Calendar* is scattered with quotes from the memoir. The calendar includes Mayes' name on the cover, but like her olive oil venture, her level of participation in creating the calendar itself is unclear, aside from the excerpts from *Under the Tuscan Sun* that are included, as a photographer (not Mayes) is credited for the photos in the calendar. Furthermore, Mayes has released three sequels to *Under the Tuscan Sun*, all of which are also memoirs; *Bella Tuscany: The Sweet Life in Italy*, followed by *In Tuscany*, and finally *Everyday in Tuscany: Season of an Italian Life*.

In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes is not just offering us a story; clearly she has much more for sale than simply her story. Alas, we exist in a society where “consumerism is an ideology that says ‘I’m only as good as what I buy’ ...it gives the illusion that I can be “as good as the wealthy if I can purchase what they purchase” (Tyson 60). As consumers, we purchase Mayes' memoir and, in turn, cannot help but crave a little bit of the romantic, albeit unrealistic, life that comes with it – even if it is not ours. While not every woman who longs for an escape can necessarily afford a Tuscan villa, most can afford a \$12.99 book. So whether we purchase Frances Mayes' bedroom set, or just her book, Mayes offers such a variety of items for the reader to consume (buy) that everyone can afford a piece of Tuscany, so to speak. Though not everyone can pick pine nuts from the trees lining the ancient Roman road behind their house, many can find them in a bag at the local supermarket. Through gastrographies such as *Under the Tuscan Sun*, every woman can afford to travel to a new place and “try on” new identities,

exercising their own escapes through whichever means they can economically afford: the villa itself, or the book about the villa; the plane ride to Tuscany, or the drive to the supermarket.

In addition, 2010 has marked the rise of the popularity of Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir *Eat, Pray, Love*. Both Mayes and Gilbert are women who are divorced, and who both admit that their respective divorces are the driving reason behind their re-location to another country. Both emphasize food in their self discovery, and with their respective books, both Mayes and Gilbert have created an empire. Popular when it originally came out in 2006, the book *Eat, Pray, Love* has seen a recent increase in popularity due to the release of the film version in 2010, and it is a book that begins with the author traveling to Italy to find comfort in food. In an article on *The Guardian* online, writer Emma Brockes addresses some potential reasons behind the popularity of books such as *Eat, Pray, Love* and why readers look to them as a means to escape. Her reflections can easily be applied to *Under the Tuscan Sun* as well. Brockes first writes that, "In order to work, the journey at the heart of these books must be presented as a form of rebellion, in opposition to the grinding work culture which threatens to crush our spirits and kill our creativity" (Brockes). As such, the popularity of books such as *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Eat, Pray, Love*, which promote escape, are "partly a function of our demanding times – one strand of a broader publishing trend in how to be happy, once thought a by-product of other diversions and now a pursuit in itself" (Brockes). As to why these particular books might appeal more to women, she suggests that the reasoning "is also connected to the self-empowerment movement, rooted in gym culture in the US, which appeals to a lucrative demographic of urban women" (Brockes). Nevertheless, "one suspects that self-empowerment classes in America today are patronized by women who start from a position of relative advantage (Brockes). Despite the fact we may "buy into" the fantasy of escape which these women are writing about, there still exists

the apprehension of believing such a thing could be a reality for *anyone*, given the underlying sense that Frances Mayes and Elizabeth Gilbert always had more than everyone to begin with.

Like Frances Mayes and her *Under the Tuscan Sun* Empire, Elizabeth Gilbert has also created an *Eat, Pray, Love* Empire as well. Instead of peddling olive oil, however, Gilbert sells jewelry through the company Dogeared, a company that relates "to the theme of a woman's journey for self-fulfillment and happiness, according to a spokesman" (Brockes). This self-fulfillment and happiness may be found in:

the "Eat Pray Love 109 wishes prayer turquoise bead necklace" (\$152), the "Eat Pray Love beauty is everywhere sterling silver reminder necklace" (\$52) and a range called I Deserve Something Beautiful, which includes macramé bracelets, necklaces in the shape of lotus petals, cascade earrings and an "Eat Pray Love meditate sterling silver om bead necklace", which sounds like a meltdown in a Buddhist reading shop. (Brockes)

Additionally, just as Frances Mayes sells her olive oil for readers to be able to cook with her (or at least cook *like* her) despite being thousands of miles away from Italy. Mayes sells a furniture line so that readers are able to, just as she did, remodel their own home – though not *actually* in Tuscany, but to nevertheless look as though it might be. Elizabeth Gilbert sells jewelry for the same reason – though readers cannot take a trip around the world in search of self-fulfillment and happiness, perhaps they can at least buy a 109 wishes bracelet just like “Liz” wore. Despite the economic realities of the individual reader, we keep reading these books for an escape because, as one Amazon reviewer noted, “If everyone had, the wherewithal and the finances to accomplish this then there would be no need for the book. This book gives us dreams, hopes, and recipes” (bernie xyzzy).

Review of Literature

There is unarguably a rich history of autobiographical work written by women on which to draw parallels to *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Gertrude Stein, for example, was one of the first American writers to move abroad and build her life. Because of her inherited financial cushion, Stein was able to choose to move to Paris and build a home and a life. Stein, along with her companion Alice B. Toklas, also wrote about food in intricate and fond detail when documenting their lives in Europe in their respective works *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*.

Julia Child is also an example of a woman whose life and work revolved around food, and whom also spent part of her life living as an expat in Europe. Not only did she revolutionize the way cookbooks were formatted, but she also encouraged the absence of superiority in the kitchen, and in turn, how food was viewed. Like Mayes, both Stein and Child lived outside of the United States and their autobiographies also incorporate food in some manner. Stein and Child both also lived outside the social norms of their times. Stein, a lesbian, moved to Paris – mecca for artists and creative hub of the time. Child, a tall, boisterous woman with a college degree, remained unmarried until her mid-30's. Though she physically did not “fit in” as a woman living in Paris, where she did feel she fit in while in Paris is when she began culinary school and she was cooking. Unlike Mayes, these women do not focus on the “rebuilding” of their lives. Mayes has achieved career success; she has a child, a home, and is financially stable. Despite these life achievements, or “successes”, Mayes is looking to Italy as a place where she will be able to rebuild this life she feels has been broken by her divorce.

Books such as *Under the Tuscan Sun* are a unique kind of memoir that are also part cookbook. Other examples of gastrographies include Marlena de Blasi's series about Italy: A

Thousand Days in Venice, A Thousand Days in Tuscany: A Bittersweet Adventure, The Lady in the Palazzo: An Umbrian Love Story, and That Summer in Sicily: A Love Story, as well as *Extra Virgin: A Young Woman Discovers the Italian Riviera, Where Every Month Is Enchanted* by Annie Hawes. These are just a few examples of the array of memoirs that are written centered around food and that include recipes which can be categorized as gastrographies. All of these memoirs use the production, preparation, and/or consumption of food as a tool to relay their respective life narratives. The gastrography titles I have listed happen to all written by women, and they all also happen to take place in Italy. These two characteristics are not necessary in order for a memoir to be considered a gastrography; there are many gastrographies also written by men and take place in a variety of countries, towns, and villages around the world. However, I have listed gastrographies written by women that are primarily set in Italy only to point out other gastrography titles that are extremely similar to *Under the Tuscan Sun*. In a gastrography, the author is using food as a means of reflection upon the past. Many gastrographies also include recipes in some way or form, whether it be providing actual recipes chapters, as Frances Mayes does in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, or including recipes at the beginning or end of each chapter, or by simply embedding the recipes themselves inside the narrative.

Several key secondary texts have inspired and influenced the direction of this thesis. It can be said that *Under the Tuscan Sun* is a gastrography which is written in the prophetic mode and incorporates elements of scriptotherapy. Rosalia Baena's first used the term "gastro-graphy" in her 2006 article "Gastro-graphy: food as metaphor in Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* and Austin Clarke's *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*", where she writes about the use of food as a metaphor in the two aforementioned memoirs and how "the culinary language employed in the innovative discourse of these text makes the notion of food a metonym of the elaboration of culture and

identity” (Baena 1). The autobiographical genre of gastrography has been further explored by Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith in their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. In the same book, Smith and Watson have also expanded on the research surrounding the autobiographical genre of scriptotherapy.

In his article *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption*, Roland Barthes wrote about the ways in which food is a social institution, and the many ways in which food extends beyond something we simply eat. In short, he began to acknowledge the ideology of food. Jean Duruz’s presents in her article “Adventure and Belonging: An Appetite for Markets” the idea that we can buy the experiences of others, an idea that *Under the Tuscan Sun* embodies and reflects with the abundance of consumer opportunities surrounding it, including the added recipes, and it presents for the reader a way to recreate Mayes’ life. She also notes the metaphorical fantasy that if we eat the peasant food of Tuscany, for example, then we are also ingesting all of which that food signifies and implies.

The book *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* by Janet Theophano focuses on the personal, and also communal, cookbooks of women. She views these cookbooks as autobiographical and historical texts, and explores the different elements of a woman’s life that a reader can construct by reading them. Lastly, Susan Leonardi’s influential article “Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie” was written in 1989, and was influential in that it was one of the (if not the) first scholarly work written that presented the possibility of reading cookbooks as narrative texts. Using the popular cookbook *The Joy of Cooking* as a primary text, in her article Leonardi points out that nearly all cookbooks contain literary devices on some level, such as characters, setting, and plot which aids in creating a dialogue between writer and reader.

Statement of Purpose

Though the genre of gastrography at present is an extensive one, *Under the Tuscan Sun* was selected as the primary text to analyze because it is one of the first published gastrographies that included recipes, and the memoir was enormously popular upon its publication. Furthermore, *Under the Tuscan Sun* has retained a powerful place in the world of gastrography even today, with author Mayes releasing the third sequel *Every Day in Tuscany: Seasons of an Italian Life* to her original memoir in 2010.

Four main questions guide this study.

1. Why is *Under the Tuscan Sun* such a popular memoir? Additionally, why has the genre of gastrography become so popular recently?
2. What function is food serving for both the author and the reader in *Under the Tuscan Sun*?
3. What is the purpose of including recipes in *Under the Tuscan Sun*?
4. What kinds of metaphors emerge when writing about food in an autobiographical context?

The research presented in this thesis is the product of qualitative analysis. The autobiography theories of gastrography, the prophetic mode, and scriptotherapy are used in conjunction with food studies and cultural studies to analyze the use of food as it appears in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. The purpose of this study is *not* to argue or justify the differentiation between “high” and “low” culture within literature, or Literature and literature and where *Under the Tuscan Sun* and other gastrographies position themselves inside these limited categories, nor does this thesis suggest the rewriting of the literary canon to include gastrographies. While these are issues that do merit further research, they are not ones that will be addressed in this study.

Outline of Chapters

This thesis is organized into five chapters, including the current one which serves as an introduction to the main ideas that will be discussed, the theoretical framework applied, previous research that has been done in the field, and also a brief background on *Under the Tuscan Sun*. The second chapter focuses exclusively on the application of autobiographical theory to *Under the Tuscan Sun*. I will look at three genres of autobiography – gastrography, the prophetic mode, and scriptotherapy – and how they all are applied to *Under the Tuscan Sun*. The third chapter explores the various metaphors related to food that arise in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. The fourth chapter looks at the idea of implementing recipes inside a memoir, and what purpose the inclusion of these recipes serve for the author and the reader. The fifth and final chapter of this thesis revisits the initial four questions I have examined throughout the entire thesis and the conclusions that can be drawn from my research, and also presents suggestions for further research on the memoir *Under the Tuscan Sun* itself and gastrographies in general.

Significance of Research

The genre of gastrography has become extraordinarily popular in recent years, yet, to my knowledge, no one has written at length a reaction to the rise of the increasingly popular autobiographical genre of gastrography, nor on the significance an author using food as a central focus (one could say “prime ingredient”) in the writing of his or her memoir. Secondary texts on the study of gastrographies are relatively limited, as is research in the field of exploring the literary and narrative continuities of recipes in general, and their curious appearance in memoirs. Perhaps this is because, as Susan Leonardi asks in her article “Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie”, “Do I erode my credibility with male academics with this feminine interest in cooking, cookbooks, and recipes?” (347).

Research in this area of literature is essential. First and foremost, by nature, humans have a close connection to food, and the autobiographical is rooted in self-reflection. Understanding our relationship with food can indeed help us understand ourselves, as well as the society in which we live. Furthermore, gastrographies is an area of culture and literature that is popular at this very moment. Many kinds of gastrographies are emerging, such as gastrographies written by professional chefs and others who work in the food industry.ⁱ Additionally, the popularity of “Food T.V.” has begun to soar in recent years, and a multitude of programming revolving around food can be found on various networks.ⁱⁱ

Moreover, to my knowledge, the incorporation of actual recipes into autobiographical writing is a new trend that has only recently started to appear in the publishing and literature world. As previously noted, the theme of consuming/consumer/consumption manifests in a variety of ways in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, and Smith and Watson point out that indeed “the food memoir...enables new reflection about the interplay of production and consumption” (148).

Food has forever played a significant role in the lives of human beings, as it has in the realm of literature as well. By examining this phenomenon of autobiographical writing that incorporates both food and also the various acts related to food that are performed in the everyday lives of human beings we are able to better understand the different ways in which human beings use food to understand their past lives, their present lives, and themselves. For both the writer and the reader, gastrographies are texts that demonstrate the important role food plays throughout every stage of our lives, and whether it be through food related metaphors or recipes, they teach us different methods of reflecting upon our own lives and selves within the context of food.

Chapter 2: **Autobiographical Theory in *Under the Tuscan Sun***

“The temporal dimension of cooking is a way for the narrator to connect with the women in her past and present. It becomes an act of loyalty towards them, the acknowledgement of her indebtedness, while she traces a genealogy of women with whom she belongs.”

Giuliana Menozzi

Under the Tuscan Sun is a gastrography that is written in the prophetic mode and includes elements of scriptotherapy. In this chapter, these three theories of Autobiography Studies will be employed in the analysis of the relationship between food and life writing, specifically focusing on *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

The Prophetic Mode

The prophetic autobiographer is one who assumes the role of “prophet” in that they speak to the community (or readership) with an authoritative quality that suggests their life – knowledge, capability, and worthiness of assuming such a role. In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes indeed writes in what Thomas Couser refers to as the prophetic mode. Couser notes in his introduction to *American Autobiography: The Prophetic Mode* that while the “prophetic autobiography is not exclusively American, it is characteristically American” (1), and includes popular historical autobiographies by Benjamin Franklin, Henry Thoreau, and Malcolm X as examples. Couser also describes the use of the prophetic mode in autobiographical works as being “characterized by the conflation of personal and communal history, the conscious creation of exemplary patterns of behavior, and their didactic, even hortatory, impulses,” (1) and thus encouraging “the writers’ tendency to assume the role of prophet in writing autobiography” (1).

As Couser notes, a prophet in the Biblical sense “was a preacher rather than a fortuneteller, a forthteller rather than a foreteller!” (Old Testament as quoted in Couser 3). So, “without necessarily claiming divine inspiration, the prophetic autobiographer, like the Old Testament prophet, interprets the history of his community in the light of God’s will; he speaks, then, for God to his community” (Couser 3). Therefore, a prophet is not a more “divine” being than his fellow community members, but is someone who feels chosen to relay a particular message to his/her community.

Another argument Couser makes is that “the persistence of the prophetic mode of autobiography depends, to some, extent, on the power of the Puritan legacy” (4). There is nothing inherently Puritan in the religious sense about *Under the Tuscan Sun*, or the way in which Mayes writes, though it is indeed an “autobiography with religious dimension” (Couser 4). However, instead of possessing a Puritan religious dedication to God and the perfecting of her morality, Mayes “religion” is instead placed in perfecting the rebuilding and landscaping of her villa. Mayes acknowledges that “The house is a metaphor for the self, of course...And a foreign house exaggerates all the associations houses carry” (Mayes 11). Her house in Tuscany is important for Mayes because she realizes that it represents the beginning of a new life in the aftermath of her divorce. It is also significant because she is starting a new life with a new man, and in the “establishing of a new relationship, this house quest felt tied to whatever new identity I would manage to forge” (12) and that “the new life might shape itself to the contour of the house” (12). If Mayes accepts the house as a metaphor for the self, then she is also signifying that with the changing and rebuilding the house, she in turn is becoming changed as well; if she can physically improve her house on the outside, then she can improve herself mentally and emotionally on the inside.

Additionally, the house also represents to Mayes “something of a *physical* dimension that would occupy the mental volume the years of my former life had” (Mayes 12). The “former life” she refers to is the years of her divorce, and she is looking to her house in Tuscany as a tangible artifact that she has recovered from the trauma of the divorce. In order to ensure her expectations for her new house/life are met, Mayes works religiously on building and maintaining the relationships that this house now represents.

Frances Mayes is also a woman who believes that, if someone should ask, “What is her house like?” (Mayes 15) she really “means what is *she* like” (Mayes 15). Therefore, instead of perfecting her morality in order to characterize the self, Mayes practices perfecting her house, because like religion, that is what she believes in, and even writes that “the circuitous search for a summer home becomes a quest for us” (4). How some people seek divine wisdom from religion, Mayes is on a quest instead for the perfect home. Because Mayes so clearly states that the rebuilding of her house in Tuscany is indeed a metaphor for her attempt to rebuild her own life, specifically her life after divorce, she therefore positions herself as an authority, and therefore a prophetic autobiographer, on the subject of successfully rebuilding life post -divorce to readers. When Mayes and Ed are finally introduced to their future house, *Bramasole*, which Mayes writes comes from “*bramare*, to yearn for, and *sole*, sun” (2) there is indeed a divine sense Mayes feels upon first seeing the house and writes that, “During several years of looking...I never heard a house say *yes* so completely” (11). Once the house has been bought, Mayes and Ed work devotedly on the renovations of their home and tending to the plants on her land; working with such fervency that she writes “after long work, we eat everything in sight then tumble like field hands into bed” (23).

And yet, her pilgrimage to Italy for the perfect home did not come without judgment. Just as Biblical prophets often suffered scrutiny and ridicule, Mayes also received criticism for her decision to buy a home in Italy. Her mother calls it “Ridiculous” and Mayes writes that her sisters “fear I am eighteen, about to run off with a sailor” (2). She imagines that she “can hear my grandfather when I was twenty: “Be realistic. Come down out of the clouds” (Mayes 15). By including the acknowledgment that there are some “doubters”, Mayes positions herself even further as a prophetic autobiographer by showing the reader that she also needed to overcome the doubts others had of her decisions.

Mayes writes of Bramasole that “On the first night, I dreamed that the real name of the house was not Bramasole but Cento Angeli, One Hundred Angels” (25). She doesn’t rename the villa because she thinks it may be bad luck, and this is an example of one of the ways Mayes begins to turn the house into her home. Despite who may have lived in it before, the “old house” is starting to fade away, and she is now beginning to find her own meanings in her new house. In another metaphor that emphasizes the role that the house plays in Mayes’ quest for new beginnings, she notes that “When we first saw the house, it was filled with fanciful iron beds with painted medallions of Mary and shepherds holding lambs...lugubrious bleeding-heart religious pictures of the Crucifixion. The owner removed everything – down to the switchplate covers and lightbulbs” (Mayes 22) and Mayes describes one room in the house as being “as pure as a Franciscan cell” (19). Because the previous owner removed every last thing, Mayes is able to start with a “clean slate” and add to the house whatever relics and meanings she may want it to include. Because the creation of this new home is such an important symbol of the rebuilding of her life post-divorce, it has become something of a sacred symbol of her new “rebirth”.

When Couser says that prophetic autobiographies are “characteristically American”, he is acknowledging the existence of The American Dream mentality. By maintaining a Puritan work ethic, Mayes has achieved The American Dream, and is now pursuing The Italian Dream. Couser notes that in the work *Autobiography and the American Myth*, authors William C. Spengeman and L. R. Lundquist “explored the way in which a wide range of American autobiographies communicate versions of a single myth central to American culture” (Couser 2). In a prophetic autobiography, there is a single narrator who is speaking to a group, and this narrator is someone who finds himself/herself an example of the “exemplary patterns of behavior” (Couser 1) and one who, through “didactic, even hortatory, impulses” encourages their audience to follow their example in order to achieve the same moral/financial/ successes the author has achieved (Couser 1). The narrator in a prophetic autobiography positions themselves as a teacher and a leader to the reader, and the voice of a prophetic narrator speaks as someone who can help the reader achieve The American Dream, whatever that may mean to each individual reader.

Couser writes that a prophetic autobiography is “at once a record of the opportunities and the burdens of being American” (5). So, while Mayes had the opportunity to purchase a Tuscan villa, she yet must also “fix” all that is wrong with it before it can be considered a success. “Rule one in a restoration project”, Mayes tells the reader, is to “be there” (30). One of the burdens of their new villa renovation is that Mayes and Ed are not in at the villa or even in Italy for most of the year, which means they “will be seven thousand miles away when some of the big work is done” (Mayes 30). As the new owners of the house, Mayes and Ed are “in charge”, yet they are physically not present for large parts of the renovation process. Their absence proves to cause problems and confusion of overlapping bills, ever-extending project deadlines, among other new problems that have risen, such as the fact they will not have heat if they return to Italy in the

dead of winter because, as their contractor tells them, “the central heating pipes must be inside the house, not on the back as we were originally told” (Mayes 95). Over all, Mayes writes that since they are not present to preside over the work, it “is clear that we are not there and our house’s work is done between other jobs” (95). This is a thorough warning to anyone else who may have the “opportunity” to take on such a challenge as Mayes has, as well as the feeling that “a hundred years may not be long enough to restore this house and land” (84).

Despite all these problems, it still seems that even if you were capable of owning a villa in Tuscany, it seems impossible that it would be as perfect as Frances Mayes’ villa, which is a place, she lets the reader know, where she and Ed are “dazzled by the remains of a Roman road over the hill covered with wildflowers” (5) and where there is “an Ertuscan (Ertuscan!) wall looming at the top of the hillside, a Medici fortress in sight, a view toward Monte Amiata, a passageway underground, one hundred and seventeen olive trees, twenty plums, and still uncounted apricot, almond, apple, and pear trees” (13). No, the point of *Under the Tuscan Sun* is not to tell you how to fix-up a house, rather its purpose is to allow the reader to live vicariously through Mayes and dream as if his or her life was Mayes’. Frances Mayes indeed shows the reader what she has, but without saying that the reader too, may own a villa one day.

The prophetic autobiographer also, as Couser writes, “functions as a representative of his community – as a reformer of its ethos, articulator of its highest ideals, interpreter of its history, and activist in the service of its best interests” (Couser 3). One of the communities which *Under the Tuscan Sun* speaks on behalf of is a community of divorced women. Mayes herself is a woman who has suffered a divorce and has survived it to again find love and happiness. Mayes’ memoir for her seems to be “a way of measuring individual achievements against cultural standards” (Couser 5). Moreover, Couser notes that “prophetic autobiography flourishes in time

of crisis” (3). What is the crisis behind the popularity of *Under the Tuscan Sun*? In the case of Frances Mayes, the crisis may be divorce and the struggle to pick up the pieces in the years following. Certainly books such as *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Eat, Pray, Love* are more popular among women readers than male ones. Mayes tells a story in *Under the Tuscan Sun* of how a woman whose mother had recently died called her just to ask “What is the downside” (194) of buying a renovating a home? Immediately, Mayes says she “recognize(s) the impulse. I recognize the desire to surprise your own life” (194), and asks the woman if by buying the house she would be “moving into a larger freedom” (196). The crisis of the readers may also be a divorce, or like the woman who called Mayes, the death of a loved one. Or, more generally, perhaps just simply unhappiness and un-fulfillment in their lives, and *Under the Tuscan Sun* offers, as so many Amazon.com customer reviewers have told us, an “Escape to Tuscany for free” (A Customer, 1 July 1999).

Although she is divorced, readers can look at all of the other things that she does have. While Mayes speaks often about her childhood in Georgia, “the strongest bonds seem to come from the currents, only vaguely hinted at, of her adulthood,” where she makes “glancing references to the pain of a divorce after a long marriage” (Becker). In memoirs such as *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Eat, Pray, Love* the authors suggest that the best way to recover and heal from a divorce is by escaping. Though Frances Mayes had been divorced for several years before buying her Tuscan villa, she does note that the “dependable bonds and utility stocks and blue chips from the years of my marriage” (18) are what she uses to pay for Bramasole. So, she is literally trading in her “old” life so she can create a new one, more specially, a new *home*; even more specifically, a new home with a new man. Frances Mayes understands the significance and importance of renovating this new home, and she knows that “the house is a metaphor for the

self, of course” (Mayes 11). Buying a house – a house with a new man she loves – signifies Frances Mayes acceptance at the shortcoming in her first marriage, and that she is ready to build a new life and leave her old “home” behind. In the case of Elizabeth Gilbert’s memoir *Eat, Pray, Love* the solution to post divorce healing is of course found in the title itself: to Eat, Pray, Love – and preferably to do it in a place far away. Interestingly, in both of these memoirs, during the recovery of their divorces, the authors find another man to love. Though Gilbert acknowledges that the ending to her memoir is “an almost ludicrously fairy-tale ending...like the page out of some housewife’s dream. (Perhaps even a page out of my own dream, from years ago.)” (329) she nevertheless insists she “was not rescued by a prince; I was the administrator of my own rescue” (329). Despite these claims, it is perceived from both Mayes and Gilbert’s stories that perhaps one of the ways to recover from a divorce is to, in the end, find another man to love.

What standouts about *Under the Tuscan Sun* as a prophetic autobiography, and Frances Mayes as a prophetic autobiographer, is the manner of authority in which her memoir is written; it is clear Frances Mayes as writing as someone more privileged than “the community” and the readers accept her memoir as an act of sharing and of advice. Mayes wonders if “this much happiness is allowed” (218). Frances Mayes is sharing her story of good fortune with us the readers (her community), and what is interesting is that she doesn’t in any way suggest that we too can obtain a life like hers. Again, in the introduction of the book, she already beings to create a subtle distance between herself and the reader by establishing that the reader is a *guest* into her (the owners) life; that she hopes the reader “...is like a friend who comes to visit” or “a guest on holiday...intent on pleasure” (xvi). She gently acknowledges that she is indeed more privileged than the reader, and that while they will never have her life, she invites them to buy things in an attempt to create a life much like her own. Whether through the sharing of her recipes, which she

is so generous to share with the reader, as they cannot have a Tuscan life of their own, are able to recreate a small fraction of her life. Add the olive oil, furniture, and countless books for sale by the author, one can indeed almost buy Frances Mayes life --- short of the Italian villa. As a prophetic autobiographer, Mayes attempts to position herself as part of the community in many ways. However, because of her prophetic voice, she is also in a position that makes her outside of the group, because unlike the group, Mayes has found a way financial to heal herself.

Gastrography

This term “gastro-graphy” was first coined by Rosalia Baena, who “proposed this term to designate life writing in which the story of the self is closely linked to the production, preparation, and/or consumption of food” (Smith & Watson 271). Indeed, *Under the Tuscan Sun* includes all of these elements. Frances Mayes grows her own food, she often cooks, and consumes as well in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. She also uses food as metaphor, as a way to describe her surroundings (people, places), and Mayes uses food related adjectives to describe as well, such as describing images of St. Agata “holding out her breasts on a plate like two over-easy eggs” (275) when she is relaying to the reader what she sees inside a church she is visiting.

The reasons behind why an author may write a gastrography, or food memoir, are many. In her article, Baena references Margaret Atwood pointing out that “Eating is our earliest metaphor: preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality, and language. We eat before we talk” (Atwood). Because of this universal commonality, food is something everyone can easily relate to. Furthermore, the inclusion and use of food and/or recipes in a text can be used as a literary mechanism which “offers readers tasty pleasures and ‘food’ for self-revision” (Smith & Watson 148).

Why have gastrographies become so popular specifically in the last decade in particular? Smith and Watson predict that “the rise of gastrography may announce a radically personal form of memoir, in which ‘you are what you eat,’ with its provocative suggestion that the subjectivity of another can be ‘cooked up,’ reproduced, and tasted” (150). In addition, according to Smith & Watson, the rise of the popularity of these food memoirs is also a sign that “In the increasingly depersonalized and dispersed communities of late capitalism, readers seek the intimacy of a one-on-one reading experience, imagining a personal connection with a narrator...” (148). Gastrographies in particular often include travels of a distant place and the exotic (and somehow always more appealing) foods they eat which “exaggerates the assets and invites the reader into an intimate alternative world, sometimes complete with a dream house” (Cheever as qtd. in Smith & Watson 127).

Under the Tuscan Sun a gastrography which provides a dream house in the alternate world escape of the reader, and it is also one that includes recipes as a “narrative gesture”, which “offers a kind of gift to readers” (Smith & Watson 149) and also one that heightens the “one on one” connection with the author that the reader is looking for in the text. Furthermore, by the inclusion of recipes Mayes is able to “transform recipes into a highly significant narrative strategy” (Baena 3). So by adding recipes to the text, Frances Mayes offers this “gift” to readers, as she “incorporates food – laced memories that feed readers’ desire the redefine themselves by both imagining pleasures and cooking them up, as a way of enacting the life chronicled” (Smith & Watson 149).

Why authors of memoir choose to focus on food perhaps is because “food is life itself, as it implies to physical process of being and becoming” (Nicholson as paraphrased in Baena 2) and “quite logically, in autobiographical writing, food limns in issue of identity significantly – as in

“we are what we eat” (Baena 2). When Frances Mayes eats Italian food, it is part of her assimilation into Italy and so through the foods she eats, she is “becoming” Italian. In essence, when Mayes eats Italian, she is not only “consuming” Italy, but also ingesting what it means to be Italian. Additionally, in memoirs such as *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes is in a transitional period of creating a new life and thus transforming also into a new person. By creating/cooking food, she is also creating a new life in Italy and “Furthermore,” writes Baena, “to exist is an activity of daily transformation; one continually forms and transforms oneself, and the material by which one performs this act of self-creation is food” (Nicholson as qtd. in Baena 2). Smith & Watson also write that, “A life narrator’s invoking of a particular food may serve multiple purposes. It may reference everyday life and project cultural identity. Or it may transubstantiate an object, changing it into something else ...” (Smith & Watson 149).

In the chapters “Summer Kitchen Notes” and “Winter Kitchen Notes”, Mayes includes little vignettes before each recipe. The act of including these stories demonstrates how “Each dish has a place, and the memory of each dish recalls the memory of a certain place” (Baena 6). This happens in other places in text as well. Mayes establishes trust with the reader as someone creditable culinary-wise in the sharing of her recipes. In the introduction to the recipes featured in “Summer Kitchen Notes”, the very first sentence begins, “One spring when I studied cooking with Simone Beck at her home in Provence...” (126) and continues the story referring to Simone by her nickname “Simca”. This first tells the reader that Mayes has studied cooking with Julia Child’s right hand woman, and perhaps one of the most well known cookbook authors of the century. We can trust her recipes, because she has, in her own words, “studied cooking” with one of the most well renowned women in culinary history. Secondly, she refers to Simone Beck by her nickname Simca, suggesting some sort of informality or friendliness with the cook, so the

reader subconsciously may think that not only did Frances Mayes taking cooking classes from Simone Beck, but that she is also friendly enough with her to refer to her by nickname.

Instead, she invites the reader to join in her way of life via a narrative of her adventure and food. In the preface of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Mayes creates the scene of a reader who is also “like a friend who comes to visit, learns to mound flour on the thick marble counter and work in the egg...and walks down the terrace paths singing to the grapes; who picks jars of plums...who wants to see olives the first day they are olives” (xv). Already in the preface, she is outlining a particular type of reader she expects, as well as what the reader can expect in the coming pages of her memoir. She continues setting the scene, writing of the reader and herself, “Like old peasants, we could sit by the fireplace, grilling slabs of bread and oil, pour a young Chianti...I cook a pan of small eels friend with garlic and sage” (xvi). By just these examples in the preface, it is clear the reader is encouraged to read Mayes’s memoir as if they too were in Tuscany with her.

Even more specifically though, Mayes invites the reader to “join her” through the placement of recipes embedded throughout the chapters, and also in the two chapters in the book, titled “Summer Kitchen Notes” and “Winter Kitchen Notes”, which are chapters that focus specifically on sharing recipes. Mayes establishes herself as a prophetic autobiographer to the reader through the sharing of recipes because, “sharing a recipe is an act of trust” (Theophano 41). It is unspoken that the reader will most likely never buy their own Tuscan villa, as most people don’t have the advantage of “the boon of three-month summer breaks from university teaching” (Mayes 12) or have the “nice dependable bonds and utility stocks and blue chips” that “magically turn into a terraced hillside and a big empty house”, as Mayes does (Mayes 18). Instead, Frances Mayes finds other ways to make the reader feel included and “does not tell us

that we have fulfilled our destiny, but rather that it is still waiting to be fulfilled” (Couser 5). The ways in which readers may be able to fulfill their destiny is suggested to be through the purchasing of the many “Tuscan” products Mayes has for sale. Whether it be buying the olive oil from Mayes’ olive trees, a piece of furniture from Mayes’ *At Home in Tuscany* line, or by buying one of the three sequels Mayes has written to *Under the Tuscan Sun*, the reader is invited to make small steps to fulfilling their own “Italian destiny” by purchasing the products Mayes has for sale.

In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes incorporates in her narrative the act of sharing recipes with the reader, something that suggests it is a “performative culinary memoir that encourages its use as novel and cookbook” (Lawless 221). In this act of giving recipes to the reader she is combining two different texts – personal narrative and recipe – to create one fluid narrative. While recipes can be considered personal texts, they are often also very communal because the narrator often shares them. In addition, “modifications and modernizations of old recipes...represent the combined efforts of many people” (Theophano 12). Although a recipe may be a personal one, once shared it is susceptible to change. Theophano points out that “although many recipes remain nearly unchanged through the years, each new cook adapts some recipes to accommodate altered environments and the changes in fashion...Change is constant” (50). Mayes often includes in the recipes she shares the different changes she has made, normally to adapt them to the ingredients she has on hand. The change in ingredients in *Under the Tuscan Sun* is usually based on where she is living at the time – when she is in Italy, she gives the “Italian version of the fruit cobblers...in the South” (Mayes 139), using pears in Italy as opposed to the peaches and blackberries used in the South. Her recipe for *Rich Polenta Parmigiana* is “more a California polenta than a traditional Italian one” (133), due to the amount of butter she

uses in the recipe. In the recipe for *Roast Chickens Stuffed with Polenta*, Mayes writes that “In Georgia when I was growing up, the Christmas turkey was always stuffed with a cornmeal dressing. This adaptation of my mother’s recipe uses Italian ingredients,” (232) and a quail recipe from her childhood is modified to be braised in balsamic vinegar, instead of the cream and pepper used in her youth. The modification of these recipes alludes to Mayes’ desire to remain close to her roots, but it also exemplifies the transformation of Mayes as represented through a single recipe; though she uses the original recipes, she modifies them to fit her life *now*.

Mayes writes *Under the Tuscan Sun* as a gastrography, an autobiographical genre that revolves around food and, and in the case of this particular memoir, domestic arenas such as the home and kitchen. Not only does food symbolize healing and nutriment, two elements Mayes adamantly admits she is attempting to incorporate into her new home and life in Tuscany, but food in general is very much a part of any home. If a home is broken, there is no nourishment for anyone in the family. However, if a home is *not* broken, there is an abundance of nourishment and food – just as there is in *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

Scriptotherapy

Scriptotherapy is a term coined by Suzette Henke and is used to refer to autobiographical works that “function as a mode of self-healing” (Smith & Watson 279). Henke writes in her book *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life Writing*, that “the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation could offer potential for mental healing” (xii), and that she believes “Autobiography has always offered the tantalizing possibility of reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically inflicted by language, history, and social imbrication” (xv). One way which scriptotherapy can be applied to *Under the Tuscan Sun* is the presence of Mayes’ divorce in her memoir. Quite often Mayes references her

childhood, as well as her new life in Italy, but the large chunk of her life that seems to be skipped or never referenced is her years of her first marriage. Though she mentions her first marriage and the trauma of the divorce, she never does so in great length or detail. So, despite the fact she writes that this new home holds great importance for her largely because she sees it as a new beginning (specifically a new beginning with a new partner), she does not mention many details of her suffering during that period. *Under the Tuscan Sun* then can be looked at as a type of scriptotherapy that allows Mayes to document not so much the pain of her past, but to document the progress of the building of her future life and home.

Memoirs such as *Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Eat, Pray, Love* reinvention seems to be a large theme in the desire to move, both literally as well as to metaphorically “move on from past traumatic experiences. Mayes, as mentioned previously, writes that she has “an entire future to invent” (12). She also realizes that “we are changed by place” (294). In the memoir *1,000 Days in Tuscany*, a gastrography which happens to be very similar to *Under the Tuscan Sun*, author Marlena di Blasi travels to Tuscany with her second husband after selling their home in Venice. In this case, according to di Blasi it is her husband who is anxious to escape Venice, the place he has lived his entire life, and venture to a new town a beginning a new life. Di Blasi writes that her husband Fernando, somewhat innocently and somewhat naively, “thinks old ghosts won’t find their way to Tuscany” (de Blasi 2), while she, on the other hand, seems knows better. A seasoned traveler, di Blasi muses that “People who search for change, new beginnings, another kind of life, sometimes imagine they’ll find it all set up and ready for them simply because they’ve changed address, gone to live in some other geography. But a change of address – no matter how far away, how exotic – is nothing more than a ‘transfer’” (de Blasi 40). Because of this realization, she writes of herself and Fernando that “... if we have a plan at this early point,

it's to invigorate our lives, to reshape them rather than to repeat them" (de Blasi 41). And so regardless, the move to Tuscany is indeed a new beginning for both di Blasi and her husband, even if di Blasi seems to be more experienced pulling up her stakes, she realizes that "...this launch is different. This time our collective stakes have been pulled up" (de Blasi 24). Both Mayes and di Blasi are not alone in their journey to "reshape" and rebuild their lives; as it happens, a large part of the reshaping will be in building a life with their new husbands.

Henke writes that "As a genre, life-writing encourages the author/narrator to reassess the past and to reinterpret the intertextual codes inscribed on personal consciousness by society and culture" (xvi). Marriage, and subsequently divorce, are no doubt codes which both have been inscribed by society and culture. All forms of life-writing, including memoir and scriptotherapy, are mediums that allow the author to "instantiate the alienated or marginal self" (Henke xvi). This ability to reconstruct events and reflections of the self allow for "the newly revised subject, emerging as the semifictive protagonist of an enabling counternarrative...free to rebel against the values and practices of a dominant culture and to assume an empowered position of political agency in the world" (Henke xvi). In a way, this is what Mayes has been able to achieve. Divorce, despite the frequency of them, is arguably not considered yet a social norm. The stigma of failure that is placed upon divorce (for both men and women), in addition to the emotional suffering, adds to trauma of the event as a whole. In the case of Mayes, writing *Under the Tuscan Sun* may serve as a tangible artifact of her recovery of not only the divorce, but also the overcoming of an ideologically driven shame that society had burdened her with. Instead of crumble, Mayes displays in *Under the Tuscan Sun* that she has given up on the archetypal values and practices of modern society and has created a better life for herself thanks to that, she is now in position of authority to speak as a prophetic author.

“Divorce Porn”

Scriptotherapy can be applied to the genre of post-divorce memoirs marketed towards women which writer Amy Sohn dubs as “divorce porn” in her article *I’m Okay – You’re a Disaster*, and Sohn describes the term as “an increasingly popular subset of chick lit: nonfiction memoirs by women whose husbands left, cheated, or died” (Sohn 168). In her article, Sohn questions why this genre has become particularly popular in recent years, and notes that “one way to look at divorce porn is as a product of the recent financial downturn” (Sohn 168), but more broadly speaking, she tunes in to the notion that maybe these novels have become popular simply because “divorce is the shadow lurking behind any modern marriage. Adult love, unlike parent-child love, is conditional” (Sohn 168). According to Sohn then, “divorce porn” is a way for women to prepare themselves for what may also happen to them. However, it is also a way for readers to remind themselves just how good they may have it by comparison. In most of these “divorce porn” tales, Sohn observes that “Ordinary marital malaise is practically jaunty by comparison” (Sohn 169). Sohn writes that it provides an opportunity for otherwise unsatisfied women to compare their situations to those who may have had it worse. A woman reading a “divorce porn” memoir may think to herself “My man might be lazy/non-communicative/slobbish/self-centered, we think, but at least he’s not the phony poet who dumped his wife for the English department’s newest hire. Whew!” (Sohn 169).

Furthermore, Sohn writes that for readers of divorce porn, “the yearning for freedom is what makes the post-nuclear portions of the books so appealing” (Sohn 170). Sohn writes that divorce porn, “beyond giving us the chance to gawk at other people’s problems...may resonate, counterintuitively, as a form of escape fantasy. Due to the cataclysmic crises the narrators suffered, they’re allowed to do two things most women cannot do (or won’t allow themselves to

do): get angry, and get out.” (Sohn 169). In essence, “divorce porn” is a way for readers to live vicariously through the women whose trauma, has also given them a certain freedom to behave in a way that other women in “happy-marriages” may not have; divorce pornists are allowed to be angry because they have a reason to be angry, and so they become “conduits for those of us who don’t feel we have a right to our own. Angry women are ugly. Angry women are selfish. Angry women are nasty bitches no one wants to be married to. Anger is unhealthy. It gives you cancer and makes you die. And so we do anything to purge ourselves of it” (Sohn 170).

Interestingly, Sohn points out that Elizabeth Glibert “left her own marriage for reasons that she leaves vague, suggesting that maybe Gilbert isn’t liberated and brave as much as self-indulgent and impossible to please” (Sohn 179). And, of course, by the end of the book Gilbert had once again found another man who loves her. It may seem ironic that Gilbert’s “search for everything” ends in finding a new lover, as well as predictable in the fairytale ending kind of way, but also perhaps a realistic one, as Sohn points out that “no matter the level of betrayal...longing to be part of a couple doesn’t vanish” (170). This is something she finds “kind of heartening when you think about it. It’s also kind of dispiriting” (170). On one hand, a divorced woman can always hope that she will love again one day, no matter the trauma and scars previous relationships have left her with. However, what the other hand suggests – that women always feel the need to be on the search for a partner -- is far more disturbing: It suggests that, ‘Being alone and liking it is, for a woman, an act of treachery, an infidelity far more threatening than adultery’ (Sohn 170).

Scriptotherapy and Death

More so than her divorce, part of the scriptotherapy Mayes seems to be experiencing is with her childhood. Mayes writes she feels at home in Cortona because it is here Mayes feels

“returned to that primal first awareness of home” (266). She does not just feel “at home” in the simple sense of being under the same roof as your belongings, but instead she feels connected to the land through her memories of her *first* home, where she grew up as a child in Georgia. Mayes continues by describing all the things about Cortona that remind her of her childhood in Georgia:

I feel at home because dusty trucks park at intersections and sell watermelons. The same thump to test for ripeness. The boy holds up a rusty iron scale with discs of different sizes for counterweight. His arm muscle jumps up like Popeye’s and the breeze brings me a whiff of his scent of dry grass, onions, and dirt. In big storms, lightening drives a jagged stake into the ground and hailstones bounce in the yard, bringing back the smell of ozone to me from Georgia days when I’d gather a bowlful the size of Ping-Pong balls and put them in the freezer. (266)

So, in a sense, her search for a new beginning is also a search for her past – not the recent past and her divorce, rather, the part of her past that was happy and which brings her comfort which happens to be her childhood.

Her childhood, however, was by no means all happy. Mayes often questions her abundance in her present life, asking herself “Is this much happiness allowed” (218)? She reflects on the path her life has taken and comes to the conclusion that “... I think, for those of us who came of age with the women’s movement, there’s always the fear that it’s not real, you’re not really allowed to determine your own life. It may be pulled back at any moment” (195). Mayes shares with the reader that her “old scar, this rippling of want and fear” (219) goes back to her childhood, when her “father died on the eve of Christmas Eve when I was fourteen. The funeral day was rainy, so rainy that the coffin floated for a moment before it settled into the

earth” (219). Mayes primary trauma of her childhood which she presents in her memoir is of her father’s death. Mayes writes of how her “father died on the eve of Christmas Eve when I was fourteen” (219). Because of this, Christmas time and “the season of joy comes with a primitive urge that runs deep into the psyche” (219). Mayes has stories and memories of her father scattered inside the chapters and recipes in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, much more than she does of her divorce. In the chapter “A Long Table Under the Trees”, Mayes writes that “I know I want a wooden table” (121). A wooden table is necessary for her, because it reminds her of her childhood, and:

growing up, my father had dinners for his men friends and a few employees on Fridays. Our cook, Willie Bell, and my mother spread a long white table under a pecan tree in our yard with fried chicken cooked right there on our brick barbecue, potato salad, biscuits, iced tea, pound cake, and bottles of gin and Southern Comfort. The noon meal often lasted most of the day, sometimes ending with the swaying men, arm in arm singing ‘Darktown Strutter’s Ball’ and ‘I’m a Ramblin’ Wreck from Georgia Tech’ slowly as if on a tape that warped in the sun.” (121)

The above story is an example of scriptotherapy and gastrography working together in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Many of Mayes’s memories of her father are connected to food, and writing these memories is a way for her to continue to heal, decades later, a traumatic event that occurred. Furthermore, she has named the entire chapter around this specific story of the wooden table.

She writes in the chapter “Rose Walk” she write that *L’etoile de Holland*, a vital heart’s blood red rose, is the flower of my father” (246). She continues on, writing that “he planted a thousand roses” (246) at the cotton mill her managed and that “until he died, our house always was filled with his roses” (246). Mayes also acknowledges her own complicated feelings towards

her father and his death, stating that “to put it mildly, he was a difficult man and to complicate that, he died at forty-seven” (246). Mayes writes that she “can see him at noon coming in the back door in his beige linen suit, somehow not rumpled from the heat... ‘Would you look at these?’ He hands them to Willie Bell, who already is waiting with scissors and vases. He twirls his Panama hat on the tip of his finger. “Just tell me, who needs to go to heaven?” (246) A sad memory, and again we can see by titling the chapter “Rose Walk” she again has named the chapter around a story involving her father. Mayes continues the story of her father and the red roses, writing “Memory cuts and comes again: At the mill, my father kept a single rose on his desk. I realize I have planted only one red one” (246).

By incorporating scriptotherapy into her memoir to express the loss of her father, Mayes is also describing a defining moment of her life where her innocence was lost as well. This early trauma involving the loss of a loved one is then revived when she experiences her divorce, and thus experiences a symbolic loss of a loved one in addition to the loss of a nuclear family unit. The rebuilding of her Tuscan villa symbolizes Mayes’ need and desire to rebuild a home life she feels has been destroyed by both death and divorce.

Chapter 3:

You are what you Eat: Food as Metaphor

“Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.”

[“Tell me what you eat and I shall tell you what you are.”]

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

This famous Brillat-Savarin famous quote, as well as the simplified version of it “you are what you eat” is concept encountered daily. In the metaphorical sense, if I eat caviar, then I embody all it is that caviar implies (wealth, lavishness, luxury) and consequently food then becomes metaphor for identity: the food a person eats is able to reveal essential information about that person, such as a belonging of a particular social or economic class. What we eat indeed in many ways reflects who we are, and that “Through incorporation, food becomes the self. We are what we eat” (Gibson 6).

We often look to food to change, or heal, us from the inside. By ingesting certain foods or liquids when we are sick, we acknowledge our belief that food does contain actual healing properties (whether they are physical or mental/nostalgic). Frances Mayes may not be physically ill, but she is nevertheless using food as a way to change her state of being. Just as when we swallow a pill when we are sick, we expect soon to become well again because of the healing properties the pill contains. In the case of Mayes a metaphor exists in consuming Italian food, Mayes will “become” Italian and in turn the simplicity of the Italian peasant Mayes is so fascinated with. Eating the local food is of course an attempt to assimilate into a new culture, but for Mayes it is also a way to metaphorically “ingest” a simpler way of life - to begin to change from the inside out. This yearning for a simpler and more basic way of living is exhibited in

Mayes demonstrated infatuation with the “peasant-ness” of Tuscan food and way of life. Referring again to the first pages of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, where at the end of the Preface, Mayes imagines herself and her reader-guest settling down to the fire to grill bread and drink a young Chianti “like old peasants” (xvi) and thus begins to set the ground work for the peasant imagery and references that are scattered throughout the memoir. This imagining and preoccupation of the peasant life and peasant food is a reoccurring thread in Frances Mayes memoir. Furthermore, “Because appetite is a drive to consume, it lends itself as a metaphor for power” (Korsmeyer 188).

Ironically, though an American expat and thus an “outsider” in Italy, Mayes does not perceive *herself* as “the Other”. On the contrary, she not only sets up Italians in general as the Other, but more directly she situates the Italian peasant (or her idea of the Italian peasant) as the Other. It has already been established that Mayes moving to Italy to renovate her home is clearly a metaphor for the reconstruction of her own life - one that will include the simplicity she desires and is unable to find in the United States, and this desire for a more simple existence is also apparent in the food she writes about and prepares, focusing on what she believes are “simple” and “peasant” foods.

Encountering the Other

To use Michel Foucault’s metaphor of the Panopticon - the circular prison design which allows all enclosed prisoners to be seen from the same vantage point by a guard - as a social hierarchy as it applies to writers David Spurr writes in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, that:

Like the supervisor in the Panopticon, the writer who engages this view relies for authority on the analytic arrangement of space from a position of visual advantage. The writer is placed either above or at the center of things, yet apart

from them, so that the organization and classification of things takes place according to the writer's own system of value. Interpretation of the scene reflects the circumspective force of the gaze, while suppressing the answering gaze of the other. (Spurr 16)

Since Mayes does not consider herself the Other in land foreign to her, the reader is left with the sense that instead it is Mayes who is in fact the center of the town of Cortona, and the Italian civilians are merely there only to accompany whatever it is Mayes may want or need. She hires local workers to work on her house and her land, and she makes a point to note that she and Ed try to only shop at local markets. Instead of being the Other herself, she instead assumes a savior-esque role of the wealthy American who sympathizes enough with the meager locals that she does them the favor of hiring them to perform manual labor tasks both inside and outside the house, as well privilege them by shopping at their cute little markets any stores instead of “the cheaper supermarket in Camucia” (Mayes 80). Mayes writes that “we go from the bread store to the fruit and vegetable shop, to the butcher, loading everything in our blue canvas bags. Maria Rita starts to go in back of her shop and bring out the just-picked lettuces, the choice fruit” (Mayes 80). Only the best for the Americans, and luckily for Mayes, Rita Maria is flexible with payment, too: ‘Oh, pay me tomorrow,’ she says if we only have large bills” (Mayes 80).

Though her life in San Francisco is by no means seems to be a terrible one, Mayes still is seeking a sort of pleasure from Italy that she has been unable to find in the U.S., and “It is precisely that longing for *the* pleasure that has led the white west to sustain a romantic fantasy of the ‘primitive’ and the concrete search for a real primitive paradise, whether that location be a country or a body”... (hooks 370). In contrast to shopping at Rita Maria's shop, Mayes write that upon arriving back in San Francisco and faced with the task of “Stopping for groceries after

work” (92), she is “temporarily overwhelmed by the checkout rows, the aisles and aisles of bright produce...So much!”(92). Mayes infatuation with the simplicity of Italy and experiencing the Other is a desire which appears to be rooted and repeated in the western world, particularly the United States. In “Eating Other: Desire and Resistance”, bell hooks writes that “The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal way of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (367). Without a doubt Mayes uses the “peasants” of Italy to add diversity and excitement to what otherwise seems like the dull, bourgeois life of an American living in Italy. For the reader, the peasants end up becoming scenery which highlights not only the whiteness, but the arrogance, of Mayes (hooks 372) who writes that “it is easy for foreigners to idealize, romanticize, stereotype, and oversimplify local people” (Mayes 192), but then in the span of two pages, commits her own “tourist” crime of stereotyping and labeling the locals by describing a potential contractor named Nando as “Caravaggio’s Bacchis” (31), another potential contractor, Benito, as having “a strange resemblance to Mussolini (31) and the last prospective contractor, Primo Bianchi, as looking like “one of Santa’s workers (33).

Eating Simple, Ingesting Simplicity

“What must one do in order to grow?” This question from Dante is one Mayes refers back to at numerous occasions in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. The word “grow” is a precarious one, as it can encompass a number of different meanings: to grow physically, to grow emotionally, to grow spiritually, for example. Furthermore, just like people, plants too require many of the same elements as humans in order to grow. One of the most important elements for both is undoubtedly food. In fact, “Food is life itself, as it implies the physical process of being and

becoming” (Nicholson as paraphrased in Baena 2), and that “to exist is an activity of daily transformation; one continually forms and transforms oneself, and the material means by which one performs this act of self-creation is food” (Nicholson as qtd. in Baena 2). Food is something that allows us literally to grow. It is also something that allows us to grow on other levels, as well: “For what is food?” (29), Roland Barthes asks in “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”, “it is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communications, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (29). Food can be used as a tool for reflection, and therefore, like all of us, one of the ways in which Mayes is able to “grow” is by participating in various acts related to the food, most notably through cooking and consuming.

In the same article, hooks writes, “The contemporary crises of identity in the west, especially as experienced by white youth, are eased when the ‘primitive’ is recouped *via* a focus on diversity and pluralism which suggest the Other can provide life-sustaining alternatives”(369). Though speaking of young people, what hooks writes can also easily be applied to Mayes in her clear longing for a more “primitive” lifestyle which she hopes to find in Italy. Like the youth “dissatisfied with U.S. imperialism, unemployment” (hooks 369) and with “no sense of grounding, no redemptive identity” (hooks 369). Mayes too seems dissatisfied with her current life, and in addition to her desire to reconstruct for herself a new life, appears to also desire a more “primitive” lifestyle in Italy than the one she has in California. Mayes’s first experience with simplified living comes when she and Ed begin to live in Bramasole, and occurs in one of the most symbolic rooms of the house: the kitchen. Lacking a kitchen stock full of culinary tools, Mayes must “get back to an elementary sense of the kitchen” (Mayes 23). This first change is not one that comes naturally to Mayes, as she semi-jokes that she is someone

“who has used Williams-Sonoma as a toy store for years” (23). Now, however, she has only the basics: “three wooden spoons, two for the salad, one of stirring. A sauté pan, bread knife, cutting knife, cheese grater, pasta pot, baking dish, and stove-top espresso pot” (23). Mayes further illustrates her scaled down kitchen by adding that for a pasty table, she uses “an abandoned slab of marble from a dresser top”(23) and rolls a tart crust using “one of the handblown Chianti bottles rescued from the debris” (23). Consequently, simplified living also seems to encourage simplified cooking, and the basics is all Mayes seems to need in Tuscany as the first weeks of living in their new home of Bramasole, “three ingredients is about all we manage most nights, but that seems to be enough for something splendid” (23), and Mayes and Ed have learned how “to use the hearth to warm plates and keep food hot, just as my imagined *nonna* must have done” (223), while Mayes imagined “nonna” (or grandmother) appears to be synonymous with Mayes idea of “true” peasant hood.

In conjunction with food being a metaphor for the self, in general “Eating can signal gross indulgence and moral laxity or lusty participation in life’s offerings” (Korsmeyer 185). While Frances Mayes seems to have a particular interest in what she refers to “*la cucina povera*” (210), her classification of what peasant food is seems to be rather contradictory at times. Mayes asks the reader, “What could be more sensuous than a lunch of *prosciutto* and truffles on *schacciata*, a flat bread like *focaccia*, with salt and olive oil, along with a glass of Brunello? The utter simplicity and dignity of Tuscan food!” (164). While this lunch may be simple in *quantity* of ingredients, for someone not living in Tuscany or Italy, it is not simple in *quality*. Truffles, one of the most expensive foods on the planetⁱⁱⁱ certainly could not be considered a lunch of peasants, while Brunello wine^{iv} “generally ranks...among the world's - not just Italy's - best wines” (The Wine News). Examples such as this lunch with such “simplicity and dignity”

(Mayes 164) shows that in some cases, “simple” food does not equal “peasant” food, and that they are in fact at times contradictory of each other. This simplicity paradox appears again in, “Summer Kitchen Notes”, when Mayes writes that “Lavender, grape and fig leaves, and airy fennel greens are fun to use as garnishes” (127) – four ingredients that are not so simple for a cook to find.

Despite these consistently haughty examples, Mayes attempts to cater to the common reader – a lower to middle class white American woman; however, she fails in many instances because she is simply not *common*. She writes in one recipe for *Red Peppers (or Onions) Melted with Balsamic Vinegar* that “a quick sauté...adds zip to any plate” (128), but further down in the same recipe she states that the peppers and/or onions should be cooked *slowly*, for “about an hour” (128). In a world of 30-minute meals, and Minute Rice and it is hard to imagine in what world a meal that takes over an hour of hands on time to make can be considered a “quick” meal. And so it seems it may be quick for Frances Mayes, who happens to have that key ingredient: time. The cookbook market currently is flooded with television shows, such as *30 Minute Meals with Rachel Ray* or Jamie Oliver’s book *Jamie’s 30 – Minute Meals*, the emphasis in the current consumer market for cooking certainly seems to focus on *time needed*, than quality of ingredients. In fact, even Frances Mayes feels the pressure for a quick meal when she is back in the States. When Mayes leaves Italy at the end of the summer and returns to San Francisco to begin work again at the university, she writes that she buys “enough “gourmet takeout” for two days. I’m going to be too busy to cook” (92). Interestingly, she is coming from a summer of renovating her 500 year old Tuscan Villa, a place of which she writes that “a hundred years may not be long enough to restore this house and land” (84) and yet she still found the time and

inspiration to cook wonderful meals. However, now back in the United States, she immediately feels too busy to cook anything.

Many of the recipes she shares also require special kitchen equipment. Again, though the ingredients may be few, the tools needed to complete the recipe can be more complicated. Example: for *Basil and Mint Sorbet*, only 3 ingredients are really needed (aside from water): Basil, Mint, and Sugar. However, the process of making the sorbet cannot be completed unless the cook has an ice cream maker^v. The recipe following for *Cold Garlic Soup* requires a food processor^{vi}. A recipe for “A Sauce of Porcini” again contains few ingredients, but Frances Mayes recommends that “When available, fresh porcini are a treat” (134). However, if they are not in season you can also use dried ones³, though these too “seem expensive, a little bit adds a lot of flavor” (134). Likewise, though Mayes uses fresh mushrooms, she assures that reader that “if you don’t have fresh mushrooms” (229), it is okay to “use a mixture of button mushrooms and dried porcini” (229). Likewise, when she makes *Baked Peppers with Ricotta and Basil*, she writes that “Fresh ricotta, made from ewe’s milk, is a treat” (137). Fresh ewe’s milk ricotta and the variety of other ingredients Mayes mentions themselves speak to a particular class, notably an upper-middle to upper class who would be able to find and afford them. However, the adaptability of recipes allows for anyone, readers of a much lower class than Mayes, for example, to substitute ingredients as necessary and therefore, despite financial limitations... actively negotiate[d]...within the context of their own experience” (Day 194).

“Winter food makes me understand Tuscan cooking at a deeper level”, writes Mayes, and this deeper understanding is of the underlying “poverty” of many of the traditional dishes. She muses about “*la cucina povera*, the poor kitchen, as the source of the now-abundant Tuscan cuisine” (210). The Tuscan soup, *tortelloni in brodo*, “seems like a sophisticated concept...but

³ \$32.99 (not including shipping costs) for 8 oz. Grade AA dried porcini mushrooms from Amazon.com

really, what is more frugal than to combine a few leftover *tortelloni* with extra broth?”(210). Bread, however, is what Mayes decides “is the basic ingredient of the repertoire” (210), and the “bread soups, bread salads, which seem rich and imaginative in California restaurants, were simply someone’s good use of leftovers...” (210) and come to the conclusion “that Tuscan cooking has remained so simple is a long tribute to the abilities of those peasant women who cooked so well that no one, even now, wants to veer into new directions” (211). Mayes points out that in Italy, “since bread must be bought everyday, Tuscan cooking makes good use of leftovers” (118), and this mention of leftovers is a point she highlights in several of the recipes she includes in chapters “Summer Kitchen” and “Winter Kitchen”. In the same recipe for sautéed peppers and onions, Mayes writes that “leftovers are good on pasta or polenta. With cheese and/or grilled eggplant, very savory sandwiches can be made quickly” (Mayes 128). Recipes such as this one seem to contain contradictions within them – a “quick” sauté cooked *slowly* for an hour, but the next day you can make “very savory” sandwiches with the leftovers.

While Mayes seems to appreciate and understand the history of “la cucina povera”, the stories she shares with the reader seem like an awkward comparison of her life to that of the peasant/laborer. For when her daughter arrives in Tuscany for a visit during the holiday season, Mayes decides to make a “big pot of *ribollita*” (210). Ribollita is, Mayes explains, “like so many peasant dishes, a soup of necessity: beans, vegetables, and hunks of bread” (210), and “is a soup for ending a day of fieldwork, or, as I think of it, for arriving from New York” (210). By comparing the work of farmers or manual laborers to the “work” of taking a long flight from New York to Italy for a vacation, Mayes portrays herself in a rather insensitive – as well as ignorant – light.

In her article *Adventure and Belonging*, Jean Duruz quotes Paul van Reyk, who explains that :

We sometimes seek out foods from cultures to which we can ascribe an Arcadian wholesomeness. Eat the peasant food of Tuscany and we ingest honesty, simplicity and rustic health. That may be true, as long as we have access to the high quality of medical care and the wide pharmacopeia that your average peasant doesn't, and don't spend our life in bone-wearying manual labour. (van Reyk as qtd. In Duruz 432)

Mayes further distances herself from the reality of *la cucina povera* in her effort to make *castagnoccio*, "the classic Tuscan chestnut flour cake" (217) that Mayes decides she wants to try and make for Christmas. Despite a warning from her neighbor, who tells her that her grandmother used to make the cake when they were extremely poor, and that Mayes shouldn't bother, Mayes moves forward with her plans to make it. She learns that the main ingredient of the cake, chestnut flour, is "a staple of *la cucina povera*" (217). Later, when Mayes and her family try and *castagnaccio* for dessert, it is "flat and gummy" (218) and she notes that it was 'probably the exact taste of a Christmas dessert during the last war, when chestnuts could be foraged in the forest" (218). They ditch the *castagnoccio*, and instead "trade it for a platter of walnuts, winter pears, and Gorgonzola, a dessert for the gods" (218). In this account, Mayes is plainly rejecting the "peasant" dessert and instead injecting a different one she considers better and even "god like". By rejecting the traditional Tuscan dessert is she now admitting she is *not* like the peasant, and instead is in a position to pick and choose when she wants to partake in the "peasant" lifestyle, and to what degree? Furthermore, is she instead even suggesting that she is in fact "above" them? As Duruz also mentions in her article, the idea and the act of "eating authentic" are two different things, and that "I like the *thought* of an authentic eating experience (the illusion of transparency) more than an authentic eating experience embedded in any sort *material* reality (the illusion of opacity)...", and much like what Mayes portrays in the above

example, “Cosmo-multiculturalists such as myself want to become the other, but not what the other is, instead, what we imagine it to be” (Hirst as qtd. in Duruz 433). Simply put, Mayes enjoys the *notion* of the peasant lifestyle, but it is not one she can wholly embody; therefore she exerts the power she holds as a non-peasant in choosing which aspects of the lifestyle to participate in.

Trying on Peasant- hood

Mayes without a doubt has a flair for romanticizing daily experiences in such a way that makes everything, even the most common foods or mundane activities seem better in Italy. Upon visiting a market, Mayes passes by a man selling black grapes “that have been warmed all morning in the sun” (Mayes 113), and Mayes writes that “she is stopped by the winy, musty, violet scents” (113). Because Mayes has “chosen auto/biographical rather than fictional discourse, the authors make referentiality central, thus stressing, among other things, the notion of daily experiences: eating of talking become emblematic experiences as they are inserted in the context of the transcultural condition of the authors” (Baena 2). She takes a bite of this Tuscan grape and concludes that “she has never tasted anything so essential in my life as this grape on this morning” (113) and that their flavor is “older than the Etruscans” (113). Clearly grapes like these certainly cannot be found anywhere in the United States, and that only in Tuscany can one find grapes that “even smell purple “(Mayes 112), leaving the impression of the certain superior quality of Tuscan grapes as opposed to ones found in the United States. While the superior quality of this grape in comparison to any other one she has ever eaten in her life may legitimate, it also suggests that in general living in Tuscany as a whole is far superior than the United States, and thus since Mayes is the one in Italy, she too must be superior to those who are stuck in the boring and vulgar U.S.A. Furthermore, by eating grapes that are “older than the Etruscans”

(113), Mayes is also attempting to rewrite her entire history, notably a better one that does not include a painful divorce. If she eats a grape which is “older than the Etruscans”, then in a way she too becomes older than the Etruscans, and events in her life, such as her divorce or the death of her father, have not happened yet and can be *prevented* from happening. She can write a new life for herself, one that is free of pain and disappointment. This notion of place is one that is important when it comes to discussing food, as the actual place is at times more important than the food itself, as noted in the above example with grapes. Were the grapes really that spectacular? Or, more likely, perhaps it was that they merely seem that spectacular to Mayes the moment she bought them, because they were from an Italian man out of the trunk of his Fiat in the middle of Tuscany instead of in a crowded, air conditioned supermarket in California.

By buying a home in Tuscany, Mayes has taken an anonymous *space* which has a vast history and was at different points in time significant to various people, and turned it into her *place* (Creswell 2). Creswell suggests that one can achieve this transformation from space into place by adding our own possessions, such as books and furniture, in an effort to “make the space say something about you” (3). And such, “places then, are material things” (7). Creswell quotes John Agnew, a political geographer, who outlined three “fundamental aspects of place as a ‘meaningful location’” (7):

1. Location
2. Locale
3. Sense of place

While the first two are somewhat self-explanatory, the notion of “sense of place” is what Creswell refers to as “the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place. Novels and films (at least successful ones) often evoke a sense of place – a feeling that we the reader/viewer

know what it is like to ‘be there’” (8). So, to experience “sense of place” you do not actually have to physically be in a particular place. This “sense of place” is essentially something Mayes manipulates in her memoir for several different purposes. One, it is indeed a way for the reader to gather a “sense of place” for the Italy Mayes is describing. There is no doubt that Mayes’ memoir was extremely successful, and to her credit she does effectively convey an effect “sense of place” for the reader who is not in Italy with her.

Furthermore for the reader, the evoking of place – specifically the attempt to recreate the same place that Frances Mayes has created – can be done by simply purchasing products Mayes has for sale. In essence, the reader can buy the sense of place that Mayes is selling. First and foremost, with the purchase of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, the reader is also given recipes inside of the book which they may then recreate in an attempt to evoke a sense of place for the Tuscany Mayes describes. On a more commercial level, the *At Home in Tuscany* furniture collection designed by Mayes for Drexel Home Furniture offers tangible items for consumers who are looking to replicate the fantasy of France Mayes’s Tuscan world in their own homes. As well as decorating their homes and following Mayes’s recipes, they can also use the exact same olive oil Frances Mayes uses to cook with by purchasing a membership to her “Bramasole Convivium”, which bestows onto its paid members bottles of olive oil harvested from, Mayes writes on the website, “the serene hills around our home” (thetuscansun.com). So not only is it the same olive oil Mayes uses, but it is in fact Mayes who grows and harvests it as well. With buying the olive oil, customers then are literally ingesting from the inside part of Mayes’s life. Not only are readers connecting with Mayes, then, but also, like Mayes, are able to imagine “that each spoonful of sublime oil connects us to the roots of life in these ancient Tuscan landscape...” (thetuscansun.com). The olive oil venture is interesting, because it technically switches Mayes’s

role of consumer, into one of worker. While customers of the Bramasole olive oil may be purchasing the fantasy of Tuscany along with it, on a more demented note, the customers (as the buyers) are now in the more “entitled” position, as Mayes is now subject to the paying customers needs, wants, or complaints. Realistically, Mayes probably plays a very small role in the production and distribution of her olive oil, and it’s certainly hard to imagine her fielding customer complaint emails or phone calls. Nevertheless, just as the appeal of the olive oil itself is at least part is reliant on the fantasy of Tuscany, so too may be the customer psychology of being *able to* buy something from Frances Mayes – she is the “worker” and they are the privileged consumer.

When Mayes and Ed first purchase the home and begin cleaning and working on it, she writes that “after long work, we eat everything in sight then tumble like field hands into bed” (23) and that, despite being a “lifelong insomniac”, she sleeps ‘like one newly dead every night’ (25). After a day of picking olives, Mayes writes that “my body is jarred into awareness. Today: shoulders! Nothing would be nicer than a long soak in a bubble bath and a massage. I have left my body oil to warm on the radiator in anticipation (202). Again, Mayes seems to totally neglect what the reality of the peasant/worker is. Do the Italians who pick olives consistently every year as a means of income look forward to bubble baths and hot oils every night when they return home from work? At the same time, the effects of this labor on Mayes seem to reinforce the American Dream-esqe idea that to work is to be alive. Not only is Mayes body “jarred into awareness”, but she also writes that after a week of work she “has the energy of a 12 year old”.

Later in the book, after hauling boulders from her property with Ed and their team of hired help, Mayes calls to mind an image of herself when she is at home in San Francisco, “in my burgundy leotard, I lift and lift, and one and two, and lift...but this is work versus workout.

Bend and stretch --- easy when I'm clearing a hillside. Whatever, I'm worn out by this labor and I also like it tremendously" (255). Adorno and Horkheimer's term the "culture industry" is one that "refers first of all to a fusion of work and leisure" (Day 192), and is a term that embodies Mayes project of home renovation, while "Both work and leisure reinforce one another to promote the values of capitalism" (Day 192). After the work has been done for the day, "The men come down and we drink beer on the wall. Look at what we've done. This is really fun!" (255). However, she also writes after a long day of working on the villa renovations, she "will never feel the same toward workers again; they should be paid fortunes" (Mayes 102).

Surely digging up and hauling boulders around a yard is not a typical notion of "fun"; likewise, it is doubtfully an activity considered "fun" to anyone who is required to do it on a consistent basis, and for a paycheck. For Mayes, hauling rocks around her yard for a day may seem "fun", most likely because it is her yard (her foreign yard) and she can stop doing the work whenever she wants – she is, after all, "the boss". Even if Mayes does acknowledge the intensity of the workers duties and admits they should be paid fortunes, she is still the figure of authority and "in charge" of the projects that the workers are doing. So, "even where the Western writer declares sympathy with the colonized, the conditions which make the writer's work possible require a commanding, controlling gaze. The sympathetic humanitarian eye is no less a product of deeply held colonialist values, and no less authoritative in the mastery of its object, than the surveying and policing eye" (Spurr 20). For the Italians who are working for her, hauling boulders is surely not "fun". However, it is their *job* to haul the boulders, where as Mayes finds herself enjoying the activity for the exact opposite reason – it is not her job, rather, her "project", and one she contributes to as she sees fit.

Eating Italian

Along with eating simple or peasant food as a way to internalize what it is these terms embody, Mayes also looks to Italian food as a way to internalize Italy itself – to become more Italian from the inside out. She pays particular attention to the peasant worker/farmer and the lifestyle which they have. At the market, she examines the local men, writing that “The men have the look of their lives...Hard work, their faces and bodies affirm” (111). Duruz writes that “Certainly, Mayes acknowledges lives and bodies shaped by manual labor and limited public health care” (432), but many of her encounters with the locals, particular those who work for her and those she encounters at the market,

suggests not only the different economic and cultural standpoint of its narrator but also an aestheticization of bodies and of work itself. This in turn represents mystification of the conditions of production of these bodies and their labor, and their representation primarily as “interesting” figures and activities in Mayes’s own imagined geography of “home.” These figures in fact become “totally present, unhidden and alive” *for her* (432)

Mayes aestheticized view of these of these men – men who have experienced physical labor that she never will – romanticize the reality of their actual lives. Because she is fascinated by their “otherness”, she indeed, as Duruz notes, mystifies the reality of their unknown lives. Mayes often uses food related adjectives to describe *people* – specifically, to describe the Italians she encounters. While at the butcher shop buying sausages, Mayes notices another customer in the store who she writes, “has a sausage-shaped nose himself” (203). This could merely be a charming coincides, however, in the chapter “A Long Table Under the Trees”, Mayes writes in length about her journey to the marketplace in the town of Camucia where all the locals there

also seem to resemble different items of produce. The scene of the foreign marketplace is place often written about by tourist and expats in travel writing, as they are “transformed by our collective gaze into evocative sites of visual/sensory culture, repositories of the romance of community and belonging, theatres for acts of consumer cannibalism” (Duruz 428). Furthermore, for the privileged writer, such as Mayes who is in the position to observe and criticize freely the landscape around is also viewing everything from a gaze which “...marks an exclusion as well as a privilege: the privilege of inspecting, of examining, of looking at...” (Spurr 13), while the peasants who are “gazed upon, they are denied the power of the gaze; spoken to, they are denied the power to speak freely” (Spurr 13).

Mayes continues with these animalistic comparisons, describing the men of the market as one would the perfect cut of meat: “All are lean, not a pound of extra fat anywhere. They look cured by the sun...” (Mayes 111). David Spurr comments on Western writers’ tendency to be drawn to examining the body of the Other, writing that “Under Western eyes, the body is that which is most proper to the primitive, the sign by which the primitive is represented. The body, rather than speech, law, or history, is the essential defining characteristic of primitive peoples” (Spurr 22). While the Italians at the market may not be “primitive” peoples, they have certainly been “othered” by Mayes, and they do represent an “authentic” Italy for her. Duruz writes:

Interestingly, as Mayes sketches the human figures positioned in her narrative landscape, she echoes descriptions of the market’s produce. “One of the lords of the *porchetta* wagons,” she observes, “looks very much like his subject: little eyes, glistening skin, and bulbous forearms...short and porky [fingers]...with bitten-down nails”; meanwhile, the farmers gathering outside the bar are drawn

with faces and bodies shaped by long hours of manual labor—they “look cured by the sun, so deeply tan they probably never go pale in winter. (Duruz 431)

And so, Duruz writes “... these are figures on display for our consumption, almost transformed into food products themselves, as their skin glistens like roasting pork or their faces become “cured” like aged cheese. Commodification, indeed a form of consumer cannibalism, is invoked by this parade of peasants in nature...”(Duruz 431).

Aside from using food terms to describe people, throughout *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Mayes also often uses food related words to describe other things as well. She describes the color of the houses painted in the fresco on her villa wall as “biscuit-colored” (83), and later in the book describes her grandmother as “biscuit faced” (287), while the façade of the villa with layers of “lemon, rouge, and terra-cotta”(11). Visiting a church, she sees St. Agata “holding out her breasts on a plate like two over-easy eggs” (275), while on a summer day she steps into a car that is as “hot as a pizza oven” (19) and describes a moonless night alone in Cortona being “as black as inside an egg” (75).

The analysis of food as metaphor in autobiographical works is valuable since “as it mediates memory, this metaphor provides an axis for understanding the authors’ explorations of their cultural backgrounds and inscription of subjectivity” (Baena 1). Furthermore, “writing about living anywhere other than one’s native turf evokes recollections of food – even when it is scarce, weird, or unpalatable – the occasions, for better and worse, on which it was eaten, and by implication, if not analysis, their significance” (Bloom 351). In general, Mayes utilizes food metaphors for this reason exactly: they serve as a romanticized way of reflection, as opposed to the previous woman American expats, such as Gertrude Stein and Julia Child, who both use a more direct approach to conjuring memories. Contrary to Mayes, Stein, who in *The*

Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas does not write using foods as metaphors to “mediate memory” and instead writes in a very straightforward and matter-of-fact voice about her experiences living abroad. Unlike Mayes, Stein does not romanticize her life in her writing. Couser notes that Stein is an American autobiographer who “tests the concept of prophetic autobiography” (149). Stein does not necessarily write from the prophetic mode, but still Couser considers her a prophetic autobiographer in the sense that Stein’s “autobiographies record the making of a prophet...a prophet of modern art and recorded self-transcendence achieved through a special intimate relationship” (Couser 163). That is to say that in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein is not writing in a prophetic mode, but rather is portrayed as an *actual* prophet of her time: she “discovered” Picasso and Matisse before anyone else appreciated their work. Stein was also not your standard woman for her time. She was one of few women admitted into John Hopkins medical school, and though “Women were by that time gaining admittance to a few formerly all-male institutions, but most still attended women’s medical colleges. None of the nation’s other medical schools— male or female— were particularly admired by the founders of Johns Hopkins, who aspired to a higher standard” (Rudacille). Stein “relished her role as provocateur” (Rudacille) and during her time in medical school she also fell in love and became romantically involved with a woman for the first time (Rudacille). Stein was a lesbian who never got married, nor did she work aside from her writing. After moving to Paris, she collected paintings and served as a mentor and financier for less-well off artists. Stein was able to transcend these rules of society and live by her own rules, not only because she was a great force as a person, but also because she was financially cushioned to be in the position to do so. She was able to attend medical school because of her family money; she was able to move to Paris because of her family money; she was able to collect paintings and volunteer her services as an artist mentor

because of her family money. Like Mayes, who never directly states it in her memoir but gives enough examples, such as the fact they employed a cook Willie Bell, her father was in charge of a running a mill, for one to be able to confidently infer the level of wealth held by her family, was able to transcend gender and social boundaries because of this money. Mayes writes that her grandfather used to say “If you can’t go first class, don’t go at all” (16), and this indeed seems the motto Mayes also lives by. On the other hand, Julia Child seems to enjoy the opposite, as evident in a tale she writes in her memoir *My Life in France* of her father visiting her and her sister in Europe:

Dort and I grew restless on those days of driving and driving and eating and driving and eating at the biggest-best restaurants and sleeping at the biggest-best hotels. To hell with it! It seemed like we’d never really *been* anywhere or *done* anything and the whole point of the trip was for Philapop to get back to Pasadena and say, ‘I’ve just been through France and Italy.’ In fact, I didn’t like traveling first-class at all. (86)

Like Stein, Child reflects on the realities of her life spent in France, also does not assume the role of a prophetic author who is offering advice of some sort to her readership. Surely Child does use food to mediate memory; however she never uses in the metaphorical sense. Like Stein, Child was also a prophet in the making, as she would not only paved the way for the many cooking shows hosted by women today, but also create a revolution by demystifying French food and adapting it to fit the American palette. Like Stein, Child also did not live a “standard” life for her time: she was a college graduate, worked for the government, was over six feet tall, and was not married until she was almost 40 years old. In her memoir, Child writes that “I *wanted* to look

chic and Parisian, but with my big bones and long feet, I did not fit most French clothes” (Child 80).

Child’s battle was convincing women they not only could anyone cook, but they could also cook well; in a sense, she liberated women *in* the kitchen. Child demystified, as well as declassified the idea of “gourmet” cooking. Furthermore, she assured women that it not only was okay to make mistakes in the kitchen, but also that they should never apologize for them either. In addition, with the publication of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, the way in which cookbooks were written was given a total overhaul by Child and her publication partner Simone Beck, who were congratulated by their editor Judith Jones for “our innovations, such as our notes on how much of a recipe one could prepare ahead of time, and our listing of ingredients down a column on the left of the page, with the text calling for their use on the right” (Child 223).

The food we eat is indeed capable of revealing who we are – and also so much more. Ingesting food also means internalizing ideologies regarding class, ethnicity, power, and gender. Furthermore, the use of food as metaphors is significant in *Under the Tuscan Sun* because “... food holds an intermediate position that serves as ground for a variety of inter-ventions and operations vis-a-vis other people. In a sense, the narra-tor's knowledge of herself and others is gained through food” (Menozzi 218). This is something Mayes repeatedly seeks out in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, and as shown in this chapter, often uses food as a means to achieving this and understanding herself. Additionally, “When the narrator cooks, she is a subject physically and mentally engaged in the production of meaning, representation, and self-representation” (Menozzi 220). One way that Mayes engages in this by the simple act of cooking, she is “asserts her independence” (Menozzi 219) by proving “she can nourish herself” (Menozzi 219). The simple act of creating something edible signifies a level of independence and empowerment. If

someone can cook for themselves, then they are capable of nourishment and thus of maintaining life. Mayes also attempts to show also in *Under the Tuscan Sun* that she is (perhaps less equally) capable of building a home. Thus, if the three things we need to live are food, shelter, and water, Frances Mayes proves in *Under the Tuscan Sun* that she is capable of providing at least of these items.

Chapter 4: The Use of Recipes as Literary Devices

“Stir vigorously and allow to sit five minutes”

Jonathan Culler

Jonathan Culler uses the above quote to point out that *how* we read a particular text depends “a good deal *where* you come across it” (Culler 23). When we are confronted with a line, or several lines, which appear to be out of context, we as readers then “cast around for possibilities among uses of language familiar” and rely on surrounding artifacts to signify to us how we should interpret what we are reading. Standing alone, a statement such as “stir vigorously and allow to sit five minutes” (23) can be read in a variety of ways. Perhaps it is a poem about love, or anger, or maybe “Is it a riddle, asking us to guess the secret? Might it be an advertisement...?” (23). While these are all possibilities, the reader will also recognize the action word “stir”, followed by the direction to allow the stirred item to sit for a specific amount of time. Thus, the most familiar assumption is that perhaps this statement was extracted from a cookbook, and it is indeed part of a list of directions on how to prepare some sort of food dish. Thus, we read this phrase as a recipe.

In memoirs such as *Under the Tuscan Sun*, as well as other gastrographies, writers have also taken recipes out of the normal context we are used to reading them in, which is the traditional cookbook format. Instead, they have incorporated recipes throughout their stories, both in this “traditional” format (dedicating entire chapters to simply writing out recipes), but also by embedded them inside their narrative. This re-working of the method for sharing recipes indicates several phenomenon’s happening in the realms of food and literature, but “they suggest, first of all, that when language is removed from other contexts, detached from other

purposes, it can be interpreted as literature (though it must possess some qualities that make it responsive to such interpretation)”(Culler 25). Thus, by taking recipes out of the usual context we are used to seeing them in (cookbooks), Mayes memoir *Under the Tuscan Sun* is allowed to be categorized as literature rather than cookbook, even though it is clear that is indeed both.

Literary Elements in Cookbooks

The line between novel and cookbook is a fine one, and rightfully so: the several overlapping qualities of each making their differentiation ambiguous at times. After all, it isn't uncommon to hear someone say of cookbooks that they can “read them like books”, and indeed Susan Leonardi illustrated in her landmark article “Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster a la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie” the “possibility of reading such a text for its narrativity” (Bower 11). Like novels, cookbooks often offer their own literary elements, such as characters (narrator), setting (French, Italian, the American South, etc...) and plot (what is the purpose of the book? 10 Minute Meals? *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*?). And why should they not? As Leonardi declares, “I think I can safely claim that a cookbook that consisted of nothing but rules for various dishes would be an unpopular cookbook indeed” (340). How right she is. Furthermore, when reading a conventional novel, it becomes apparent that “because eating is a daily necessity, one finds scenes of food distributed liberally about the plots of stories, sometimes as the dramatic focus of an event, sometimes as background, sometimes as incidental detail, sometimes merely implicitly” (Korsmeyer 185). Literary elements appear in cookbooks, just as food and scenes of eating or cooking appear in works of literature, and while novels and fiction in general have always contained culinary bits, maybe the description of a dinner party or restaurant, but until recently they have not contained exact recipes in the form we are used to seeing to cookbooks today – it is not until the last 25 years this phenomenon has started to

surface in fiction, particularly women's fiction (Calta). In her 1992 article *The Art of the Novel as Cookbook* published in the New York Times, Marialisa Calta writes that "Barbara Haber, the curator of printed books at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women at Radcliffe College, finds it no accident that the phenomenon is recent and that the writers are women" (1), considering that "Women are the transmitters of culture, through recipes and the teaching of the young" (1). Haber goes on to state that recipes, in fact, were private matters and taboo to talk about until recent decades, and that "Until the 1970's, food was part of women's sphere, and that was a private sphere. It was not considered very polite to talk about such things as recipes and ingredients" (Calta 1). "Food can be sensuous, sexy, adventurous, plain. It can really set the tone for the action. And it evokes in readers such a physical and emotional response" (Carroll as qtd. in Calta).

Thus, by "linking the act of narration and the act of cooking", *Under the Tuscan Sun* becomes a cookbook. Not only does *Under the Tuscan Sun* include recipes formatted cookbook style into specific chapters, but author Frances Mayes also includes recipes embedded into the text of her memoir. Not only does the memoir include recipes for food, but it can also be said that *Under the Tuscan Sun* is a giant recipe for life. Certainly including recipes for making food allows for readers one way to tangibly "access" the Italian fantasy by simply visiting their kitchen, but the entire memoir itself is a recipe (metaphor) for life and finding happiness. Written in the prophetic mode, it can be read as "a how-to" guide, or more specifically, a "how-to be like me" guide (Lawless 220). *Under the Tuscan Sun* is not only a "how to" in regard to the fantasy of Italy: how to renovate a crumbling villa, how to landscape/plant/garden/harvest olives, how to cook Italian dishes, how to live like *I* live – but also in the sense of "a how-to-book on surviving..." (Lawless 220), in Mayes case a divorce, but as we also see, how to survive the

death of a father. And so, the reasons of the addition of recipes in *Under the Tuscan Sun* is really two-fold: they allow the reader a way to “be there” via cooking, to recreate Mayes’s Tuscany in their own homes and lives, but the memoir as a whole can be read as a recipe for life. A recipe and guide on how -to obtain this life I have, but also how- to survive life’s tragedies when they occur.

A Prescription for Escape

One cannot begin to analyze recipes as a text without first acknowledging, as nearly all scholars who write about recipes do at some point in their writings, that the Latin origin of the English word *recipe* is “*recipere*”, which “implies an exchange, a giver and a receiver” (Leonardi 334). Recipes are therefore a prescription for “taking action” (Eamon, as quoted in Theopano 89). In his article *Recipe, Prescription, and Experiment* Jack Goody writes that the word recipe “Etymologically...derives from the Latin verb, to take (as does the cognate, receipt), and was originally used by physicians in the abbreviated form of R or Rx” (83). This root then suggests several things. First, that recipes were originally of medical significance, and in time were “soon supplemented by the culinary usage” (83). Eventually, recipes were “collected in one place, classified, then serve as a reference book for the doctor or the cook, for the sick or the hungry” (Goody 83).

The connection here is the food was used to heal, and often still is even today. Even in the days of modern medicine, nothing is better for a cold than a bowl of chicken noodle soup, one of the most popular “comfort foods” in history. Indeed we often use food to both comfort and heal us, and if *receipts* or *recipes* were originally things that contained a healing prescription, then it is no wonder many early cookbooks contained household remedies alongside food dishes.

Historically, food has been used to heal, and it still is even today. Aside from the practice of using herbs and plants as healing medicines, we also look to actual food dishes for the (supposedly) physical and emotional comforts they can bring someone who is ill. Even in the days of modern medicine, sometimes nothing feels better when you have a cold than a bowl of chicken noodle soup, one of the most popular “comfort foods”. We often use food to both comfort and heal us, and if recipes were originally things that contained a healing prescription, then it is no wonder many early cookbooks contained household remedies alongside of food dishes. In an edition of *White House Cookbook* which was published in 1905, there is a chapter titled “Health Suggestions”, which included recipes to cure ailments such as colds and hoarseness. For a cold:

put into a saucepan a pint of the best West India molasses, a teaspoon of powdered white ginger and a quarter of a pound of fresh butter. Set it over the fire and simmer it slowly for half an hour, stirring it frequently. Do not let it come to a boil. Then stir in the juice of two lemons, or two tablespoons or vinegar; cover the pan and let it stand by the fire five minutes longer...some of it may be taken warm at once, and the remainder kept at hand for occasional use. (Gillette 503)

Healing and rebuilding are both metaphorical themes for Mayes in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Recipes and food are also important to Mayes personally. She writes that she and Ed have “poured so much energy into the kitchen because a dominant gene in my family is the cooking gene” (115) and that “these familial connections give me a helpless feeling: Cooking is destiny” (116). Her own interest in food is probably one of the reasons Mayes was compelled to include so many recipes in her memoir. Just as recipes are an “exchange” between giver and receiver, one doesn’t cook unless they are able to share it with another person. In *Under the Tuscan Sun*,

Mayes eats with her family and friends, and since they readers are not there with her, she shares the food she enjoys with them through recipes. She invites the reader to escape with her, or at the very least share in her experience in some way.

At the taproot, to seek change probably always is related to the desire to enlarge the psychic place one lives in. *Under the Tuscan Sun* maps such a place. My reader, I hope, is like a friend who comes to visit, learns to mound flour on the thick marble counter and work in the egg, a friend who wakes to the four calls of the cuckoo in the linden and walks down the terrace paths singing to grapes; who picks jars of plums, drives with me to hill towns of round towers and spilling geraniums, who wants to see the olives the first day they are olives. (xv-xvi)

Reading Recipes as Autobiographical Artifacts

Recipes are artifacts that “acknowledge all the time women spend cooking for and feeding other people” (Calta), because, as playwright Ntozake Shange points out, “It is time that the world at large often doesn't see as significant” (Shange as qtd. in Calta). Cookbooks can also be particularly revealing in regard to women and the lives they lead, since a cookbook was, after all, a *woman's* manual. Janet Theopano writes in her book *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote*, “the cookbook was a way to demonstrate the wealth, prominence, and status of their social network” (8). Because of this communal aspect of the cookbook, the addition of recipes to one's cookbook often reflected the social network that they were a part of. Who was it they received the recipe from? This information told of not only their social circle, but consequently their social status. What ingredients did the recipe call for; did it constitute of simple, readily available ingredients? Or perhaps it called for a spice that average family would find unaffordable. By having certain recipes present in their books, they are

suggesting that these ingredients are what they can afford to buy and so “Cookbooks, then, besides describing foods, are records of women’s social interactions and exchanges” (Theopano 13).

It is when she writes about recipes that the reader really finds out about Frances Mayes. We are able to learn a little about her childhood in the South, and what kind of family she came from. We find in the recipes not only who Frances Mayes is, but also who she *was*. So, as much as the recipes are a way for the readers to become a part of Mayes’s “visit” of Italy, it is also a way for Mayes to visit her past. Though most of the recipes she includes in the chapters *Summer Kitchen Recipes* and *Winter Kitchen Recipes* are specifically Tuscan based she does often include mention of her past in the South as a child, and in California as an adult. Together, the combination of all these places is what creates the recipes she uses in her present life. For example, in the chapter *Winter Kitchen Notes*, she includes a recipe for *Quail, Slowly Braised with Juniper Berries and Pancetta* :

My father was a hunter and our cook, Willie Bell, often was lost in a cloud of tiny feathers as she plucked a mound of quail. The drooping little heads all fell in the same direction. I wouldn’t eat them, even after she smothered them with cream and pepper in the huge covered frying pan on the outdoor fireplace. When more equanimity, I’ve met them in a new guise. The balsamic vinegar should come from Modena. Those that are labeled *Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena* and are marked *API MO* are the real thing, aged for at least twelve years. Some of the ancient balsamics are so fine that they’re sipped like liqueur. I think Willie Bell would approve of these quail. (231)

She continues the recipe by acknowledging her modifications to the way quail was served in her Southern household, and introduces a Mediterranean take on quail by substituting the

cream and pepper sauce of the South and offering readers a Balsamic Vinegar and pancetta rendition instead. The modification and changing of recipes is common, and “Like a narrative, a recipe is reproducible, and further, its hearers-readers-receivers are encouraged to reproduce it, to revise it and make it their own...Unlike the repetition of a narrative, however, a recipe’s reproducibility can have a literal result, the dish itself” (Leonardi 344). Mayes can share her stories of her childhood, her recent past, and her new adventures in Italy with readers. However, by adding recipes, readers are able to create a tangible object as a way to “be there”. Not only can they read about Frances Mayes and her *Roast Chicken Stuffed with Polenta*, but they can create the exact same dish, and thus literally consume Mayes’ narrative (and thus her life), as well as Italy itself. In the recipe for *Roast Chicken Stuffed with Polenta*, with a simple introduction to the recipe, Mayes again refers to her past in the South, and also adapts a recipe to use Italian ingredients. In the recipe for *Lemon Cake*, Mayes simply explains that this recipe is “a family import...one I’ve made a hundred times”(238), and while the recipe for the cake does not vary, the accompaniments to it do. In Tuscany, the “thin slices seem at home here with summer strawberries and cherries or winter pears -- or simply with a small glass of one of the many fantastic Italian desert wines”(238).

What else do these recipes reveal to us about the author beside her own autobiography? Issues of class, for one. First, in the above quail recipe, we can gather by the mentioning of “our cook” that Frances Mayes and her family were financially secure enough to employ a household cook. Quail itself is not a dish commonly found on the blue-collar plates. Further down in the recipe, she specifies a particular kind of balsamic vinegar to be used, directing the reader that, “The balsamic vinegar should come from Modena”, and that “those that are labeled Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena and are marked API MO are the real thing, aged for at least

twelve years" (232). Clearly for most readers, their selection of balsamic vinegar is going to be limited to the 3 or 4 labels found on the supermarket shelf, most likely none of which will reign from Modena or have been aged twelve years.

It is important to remember that food carries with it social connotations. Today, the words *organic*, *whole grain*, and *fresh* characterize an ideal standard of eating for most at this point in history. Of course, it wasn't always popular to shop at local markets for fresh and organic produce grown by local farmers. Food trends are constantly evolving and Roland Barthes points out this fluctuation in food trends by referring to coffee, writing that:

There is no better illustration for this trend than the advertising mythology about coffee. For centuries, coffee was considered a stimulant to the nervous system (recall the Michelet claimed it led to the Revolution), but contemporary advertising, while not expressly denying this traditional function, paradoxically associates it more and more with images of 'breaks,' rest, and even relaxation". (34)

Not long ago, culinary items such as Wonder Bread, Jell-o, and canned vegetables signified social refinement and success. However, "as prepared and refined foods became cheaper and more available, that affluent classes began to want unprocessed foods, which had formerly been associated with pre-industrial peasants" (Seid, as quoted in Bailey 449). As such, the cheaper dried, frozen, or canned options (as opposed to the fresh) now "gets linked to lower class vulgarity, irresponsibility, and closeness to the body, while more expensive, rare organic food gets linked to affluence, bodily transcendence, and moral righteousness" (Bailey 449). This connection between food and social class is particularly relevant due to Mayes's emphasis on using fresh ingredients in the recipes she shares. Additionally, the ever changing ideologies placed upon certain foods represent "America's deeply cherished fantasies of transformation, in

which the desire for social change gets displaced onto individual bodies” (Bailey 457). Just as Mayes chooses to ingest the simplicity of the peasant while eating Italian food, readers also look to the belief that they too are able to transform themselves via food.

Slow Food

The release of *Under the Tuscan Sun* also coincided with the growing popularity of the Slow Food Movement in the United States. The movement was founded by Italian Carlo Petrini in 1986, and the organization’s motto is “good, clean, fair” and functions under the philosophy that “everyone has a fundamental right to pleasure and consequently the responsibility to protect the heritage of food, tradition and culture that make this pleasure possible” (Slow Food International). The slow food movement also started “as a loose coalition opposed to the introduction in Italy of American-style fast food chains” (Leitch 382) as well as one “against the homogenization of taste, which is what fast food symbolizes” (Leitch 393). The first slow movement office in the United States opened in 2000 in New York City. The movement itself is certainly not a middle class idea, and in fact sometimes even reeks of elitism. It is written on the “Our Philosophy” page of the website that “We consider ourselves co-producers, not consumers, because by being informed about how our food is produced and actively supporting those who produce it, we become a part of and a partner in the production process” (Slow Food Movement). So by being “aware” of how the farmers grow the food that they purchase and consume, they are able to somehow transcend the label of “consumer” – despite the fact they are clearly still consuming as well as promoting consumption.

In the United States even today, who provides food or how they do it is not an issue many are concerned with, as long as it is convenient and it means their families are fed for another day. As the name of the movement illustrates, one of the key necessities for the

following of the movement is *time* --- something most Americans do not have in abundance. Those who do have time are those who can afford it. In Mayes case, both she and Ed both work in academia and have the “boon of three-month summer breaks from university teaching” (Mayes 12). This luxury of time is not common for most Americans. In fact, more often than not the more money you have the more time you can “afford”. Surely a factory worker or secretary who work a consistent schedule of 40 or more hours a week, five days a week do not have the luxury (or even the option) of taking 3 months vacations from work. Despite her obvious love for food and her constant cooking, baking, and eating in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes admits that “in our normal life in San Francisco, everyday cooking becomes, at times, a chore” (116). So what is it about Italy that renews her inspiration and motivation her to cook nearly constantly while she is there? In Italy, Mayes writes, “I have that prime ingredient: time” (117).

The movement itself, with its focus on fresh, organic, local foods allows for itself to become a metaphor for the self, or how one views the self or hopes to change from the inside out. Mayes, of course, becomes engaged in the idea of the peasant food in Italy as a way to simplify her own life; by eating simple foods, her life would in turn become less complicated. Furthermore, the very title of *Slow Movement* is in direct correlations with Mayes’s desire to, in fact, slow down: something she can afford to do, because she has the time.

And so, in tune with the Slow Food Movement rules, Mayes emphasizes the importance of using the freshest ingredients the recipes. When reading the memoir, there are so many instances where she is plucking something to eat from around her house readers wonder if she hasn’t planted the entire catalogue of edible botanicals in her own front yard. It is universal knowledge that using fresh ingredients to cook with is ideal, but that doesn’t mean they are always possible. Not only do most people not have the room, they don’t have the time to plant

and maintain a garden. If a person can buy a packet of dried oregano or basil for less than two dollars at the supermarket that will probably last the better part of the year, why go through the time consuming process of planting your own? In the chapter “Summer Kitchen Notes”, Mayes notes at the end of her introductory narrative that “All herbs in these recipes are fresh” (127). Likewise, in the complementing chapter “Winter Kitchen Notes”, Mayes reminds the reader again that “freshness does make a tremendous difference” (226). It is understood that using fresh ingredients is far preferred than using anything bought canned, dried, or frozen. Unfortunately, however, cooking and eating fresh is not always the most cost efficient choice. Not only are canned options often cheaper in grocery stores, the nonperishable aspect is also beneficial for those who do not have the time to grocery shop every week, and since canned goods do not rot or mold, the possibility of food (and in turn, money) waste is far less.

Likewise, Mayes puts great emphasis on the use of local products and produce. In the recipe for *Baked Peppers with Ricotta and Basil*, she notes how “fresh ricotta, made from ewes milk, is a treat. The special baskets for making it imprint the sides of the cheese with a woven pattern. We often buy it at farms around Pienza, which is sheep country and also the source of *pecorino* (136). Mayes would buy semolina gnocci “from a woman down in the valley until I found out how easy they were to make (131). In the recipe for *Wild Mushroom Lasagna*, Mayes writes that “Dried lasagna in boxes leaves me cold -- those wavy edges like tractor tires, the gummy pasta. Thin sheets of fresh pasta create a light, light lasagna” (229). She herself has “watched a real pro with pasta in a local shop” (229), and in another recipe for *Pici with Quick Tomato Cream Sauce*, she uses “local pasta, which is almost as thick as a pencil” (231). Though a fresh selection may be more appealing, unfortunately purchasing a boxed variety from a grocery store is significantly cheaper than buying it fresh from a specialty shop. This rings true

for all of the fresh ingredients Mayes suggests to use throughout her recipes. The focus on fresh, “pure” foods in Mayes’s recipes lends to “notions of ‘cleanliness’ and ‘purity’” (Bailey 455) attached with the importance of freshness. In opposition, it also reveals “class-based anxieties” (Bailey 448) by suggesting that freshness is equivalent to health while non-fresh in opposition signifies fat/unhealthy/poor.

However, on the opposite end of the spectrum, another interesting aspect of these recipes is that in many of them, Mayes tells the reader how to get the most out of the recipes. For example, the recipe for *Roast Chicken Stuffed with Polenta*, she mentions that leftover stuffing can be baked separately. A classic Italian dish is risotto. In the recipe Mayes included in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, she writes at the end of the recipes that “If any risotto is left the next day, heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a nonstick pan, spread and pat down the risotto, and cook over a medium flame until crisp on the bottom. Flip over with a large spatula and crisp on the other side. A fine lunch” (133). So in this instance, she also offers a recipe inside of the recipe for cooking with leftovers. Suggesting the use of leftovers is an idea that appeals to a new demographic of cooks: women who perhaps do not have the time to cook new meals each day, and choose meals that can fit into their busy schedules. Moreover, suggesting the use of leftovers also appeals to a budget conscious reader, who may feel more comfortable engaging in the act of cooking one of Mayes’s recipes if they know they are able to stretch some of the more expensive ingredients required for the recipes.

In the recipe for *Faraone (Guina Hen) with Fennel*, she suggests “the bones make a rich stock for soup the next day” (232). Leftover polenta stuffing from *Roast Chickens Stuffed with Polenta* “can be baked separately in a buttered dish” (232). In the recipe for the heart soup *Ribollita*, Mayes writes that “leftover pasta, green beans, pancetta, and potatoes all can be added

to the pot the next day” (231). By suggesting alternative dishes and substitutions, Mayes is not only encouraging the adaptation of her recipes to suit her reader, but also catering to the reader by suggesting leftover uses and making the dish stretch as far as it can.

The recipe which follows the risotto is for *Rich Polenta Parmigiana*, which Mayes admits is “more of a California polenta than a traditional Italian one” (133). She also notes that “Leftover polenta...is sublime when sautéed until crisp” (133). In the recipe for “*Turkey Breast with Green and Black Olives*, Mayes again notes that, “I use the rest of the breast for distinctly un-Tuscan stir-fry with peppers” (135). She also acknowledges in this same recipe that turkey is popular in Tuscany year round, however the use of flattened chicken breasts also works. This addition and modification of Tuscan recipes to fit the custom of an American cook is intriguing, because if the recipes offer a means of escape for the reader, to pretend they are in Italy instead of in their New Jersey kitchen for example, then would they not want to use an authentic recipe? In this recipe specifically, while olives are primarily thought of as an “Italian” ingredient, Mayes herself says that what makes this dish authentic is the use of turkey breast, which is popular in Tuscany. So, by making this same dish by using chicken breast instead, does the recipe cease to be less authentic in a way? The same question can be asked about all the recipes which Mayes modifies. For example, the recipe for *Rich Polenta Parmigiana*, which she says is “more of a California polenta than a traditional Italian one. So much butter and cheese!” (133). In the recipe for *Everything Pasta Salad with Baked Tomatoes*, she admits she has “never seen pasta salad on an Italian menu, but it’s a marvelous American import” (131). She assures the reader though, while the recipe is not Italian per say, that she has “served this version to Italians and they’ve loved it” (133). So, even if her version of the recipe isn’t “real Italian”, at least real Italians have enjoyed eating it.

The use of recipes is a means of escape for the reader, and a way to offer the reader a way to “be” in Italy. In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, the premise of the book is describing the renovation of her new home, the adaptation to a new culture, and the trying of new food. She gives the reader descriptions of the surrounding scenery and delivers in ornate detail the process of revamping her villa. Of course, one way in which the reader can cook even more “authentically” is by buying and using Frances Mayes’s olive oil. This focus on consumption is not a point that goes unnoticed by all readers. One Amazon reviewer in fact suggested that perhaps *Under the Tuscan Sun* translated better to a 1997 audience than it does a present day one due precisely to Mayes’s own focus on consumption and material objects in her memoir, writing that it “looked better in 1997 when first out than it does in post-boom 2009. I think folks who still have the aspiration for a similar lifestyle will love it, and those of us who have reservations about the emphasis on material things in “la dolce vita” will admire the style but cringe at some of the content here” (Miz Ellen). The most obvious benefit of including recipes inside novels (or in the this instance, a memoir) is that “Like a narrative, a recipe is reproducible, and, further, its hearers-readers-receivers are *encouraged* to reproduce it and, in reproducing it, to revise it and make it their own” (Leonardi 344), and so “a recipe’s reproducibility can have a literal result the dish itself” (Leonardi 344). The recipes in *Under the Tuscan Sun* are a way for the reader to escape everyday life and to “recreate” Tuscany in their own kitchens; the recipes offer the reader a way to “be” in Italy through the consumption of the same food Frances Mayes cooks and eats in Italy, without having to buy a plane ticket. And so, the recipes allow “Outsiders who would like to know other cultures voyage there through cookbooks that enable them to discover or recover a national or regional cuisine and its past, often depicted nostalgically as timeless” (Theophano 272). It should also be noted, however, that “Cookbooks are, in large part, aimed more than ever at a

financially secure audience, with the leisure and the money to pursue upwardly mobile eating and cooking” (Neuhaus 264).

Mayes writes to the reader “here are a few quick, personal recipes that guest have raved over or that have sent us secretly to the fridge the next morning to taste the leftovers” (127). Here, she establishes a connection with the reader by sharing with them her own “personal recipes”. The reader is led to believe these are the very recipes Mayes herself uses (and they very well could be) inside her Italian villa, and that Mayes is sharing with them something personal from herself – the first time the reader feels anything more personal about Mayes other than stories of renovated and cooking over her indoor fireplace, or shopping in a market. The reader is led to believe these recipes are not only tried and trusted by Frances Mayes, but also from the others she has cooking for. She has received their approval from other diners in addition to her own personal preferences.

In “Winter Kitchen Recipes”, Mates shares a recipe for *Wild Mushroom Lasagna*. She strongly suggests using fresh lasagna, and that she herself has gotten to “watch a real pro with pasta in a local shop” (229). Again, Mayes lets the reader know that she learned how to make pasta from not only a “real pro”, but a real *Italian* pro. Similar mentions of the secret of how Italians cook are mentioned in following recipes. For example, in the same recipes for lasagna, she instructs the reader to “add a spoonful or two of the pasta water to the sauce if you’ve used too much on the first layers, and reassures the reader of this direction by saying that “Tuscan cooks usually use some of the pasta water in their sauces” (230). A recipe for Ribollita includes the advice “to include the heel of the *parmigiano*” from Maria Rita, a local shop owner (230). By including authentic advice from the local Italians, Mayes is assuring the reader of the authenticity of the recipes, as well as sharing some hidden secrets.

In Marlena di Blasi's memoir *A Thousand Days in Tuscany*, the author, like Mayes, incorporates recipes inside the text, and also includes a recipe at the end of each chapter of the book – usually for a recipe for a dish she has just written about eating in the chapter. In the first chapter, she gives an entire recipe for *polpettone* as a piece of dialogue from an Italian woman named Floriana, writing in Floriana's voice:

A piece of veal, one of chicken, one of pork, a thick slice of mortadella are hand ground at least three times until the meat is a soft paste. Then add eggs, Parmigiano, garlic, and parsley before patting the pasta out into a rectangle, laying it with slices of *salame* and hard-boiled eggs, then turning it over and over on itself, jelly-roll fashion. Bake it, seam side down, until the scent makes you hungry. You know, until it smells done. (di Blasi 19)

Unlike Mayes, the recipes di Blasi includes at the end of her chapters have accompanying story or suggestions written with them; it is simply the list of ingredients and instructions of cooking. However, the story behind the recipe is instead inside the entire chapter that preludes it. Nevertheless, including recipes still serves the same purpose as Mayes in that they are a way to make the reader feel included in some way. In a given chapter, di Blasi will mention a dish or food – even sometimes in passing – and then include the recipe at the end of the chapter, so the chapter and recipe always tie together in some way. For example, in the chapter “Figs and Apples Threaded on Strings”, Borlozzo is telling a story how “the walls were lined with...peaches and cherries and apricots preserved in jars, *sotto spirito*, under spirits” (43)...di Blasi writes that ‘Having understood him say ‘*Santo Spirito*’, I tell him I’d surely like to have to Holy Ghost’s formula for putting up cherries” (43). At the end of the chapter, the recipe di Blasi includes is titled “The Holy Ghost’s Cherries”.

Recipes, of course, are not the only way Mayes encourages the reader to feel included, and in fact several Amazon.com reviewers note the inclusion of recipes as a “bonus” to the book itself. One reviewer writes that “Several pages are notched for dishes I want to make again” (N. Priff). As mentioned in the previous chapters, Mayes has several different venues of encouraging readers to consume (i.e. *buy*) her lifestyle. The book and its enclosed recipes are only the tip of the iceberg in a Tuscany literary empire that now includes furniture, olive oil, datebooks, and several sequels. The exchange of recipes “appears to be a way for women to cross boundaries of race, class, region, and generation” (Theophano 41), and Mayes somewhat exhibits this, not just with recipes, but by including such a wide variety of products that encompasses nearly all economic demographics. If you only have \$12 to spare you can buy the book. If you have \$20 you can maybe make one of the recipes, if you have \$200 you can buy the olive oil, \$2,000 the Bramasole bed, \$12,000 take your own trip to Italy.

The story of Signor Martini and the *torta della nonna* is the perfect example of how recipes can, and often do, intermingle the past and the present for a person. Furthermore, it is a perfect example of the powerful intermingling of food, memory, and love. One day, Frances Mayes’s contractor, Signor Martini mentions to her that she has pine trees around her driveway, and thus an endless supply of pine nuts. While picking up the pine nuts, Signor Martini simply states “*torta della nonna*”, which gets Mayes thinking about a possible *nonna* that had lived at her villa Bramasole before her and made “all those heavy *pinolo* studded tarts” (63). As Signor Martini and Mayes collect the pinecones and make casual conversation, Signor Marini suddenly mentions that his mother passed away a few years ago, and now “No more *torta della nonna*” (64). Aside from the chapters decided to solely dedicated to presenting the reader with recipes in a more traditional “cookbook format”, this narrative-turned-recipe that is embedded inside

Mayes actual narrative is another example of a way recipes are presented in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. When Mayes has found the *torta della nonna* recipe she wishes to use, she begins the by writing “First, I make a thick custard with two egg yolks, 1/3 cup flour, 2 cups milk, and ½ cup sugar. This makes too much, for my purposes, so I pour two servings into bowls to eat later. While the custard cools, I make the dough” (65), and so on until both the narrative and recipe are complete. In this style, the recipe is shared in a more conversational tone, as if the reader is standing in the kitchen with Mayes making the dish with her while also chatting about something else on the side. The conversation and the recipe become intertwined. It is reminiscent of Mayes introduction to the book, how she hopes her reader “is like a friend who comes to visit” (xv). As a reader, it makes you for a moment think that maybe you are in the kitchen with her, working that egg into the mound of flour on the thick marble countertop.

The sadness of Signor Martini expressing “no more *torta della nonna*” is of course another way of saying, “no more mother”. His sadness at the loss of *torta della nonna* becomes a metaphor for expressing his sadness of the loss and absence of his mother. The *torta della nonna* that Mayes made for him was not his mother’s recipe, but the exact recipe was irrelevant because the *memory* of eating a homemade *torta della nonna* was enough to make Signor Martini feel connected to his mother. By making *torta della nonna* for Signor Martini, Frances Mayes engages in the transformative act of becoming a mother figure for Signor Martini via food. Not only does she make the same dish his mother used to make, but she also takes on the role of caregiver by providing food for Signor Martini.

Gertrude Stein and Julia Child

Similar to Mayes, Julia Child also found a way to incorporate recipes into her narrative. While Child’s memoir, *My Life in France*, does not contain a specific “recipes” chapter, as

Under the Tuscan Sun does, it nevertheless does include instructions embedded inside Child's stories. In this example, it is not only a recipe, but also includes a practical cooking tip inside the story of how Child herself learned about it. She writes of her teacher at L'École du Cordon Bleu, Chef Max Bugnard, who was "a wonder with sauces, one of my favorite lessons was his *sole à la normande*" (69). She continues the story by giving the recipe for the sauce:

Put a half-pound of sole fillets in a buttered pan, place the fish's bones on top, sprinkle with salt and pepper and minced shallots. Fill the pan with liquid just covering the fillets: half white wine, half water, plus mussel and oyster juices. Poach. When the fillets are done, keep them warm while you make a roux of butter and flour. Add half of the cooking juices and heat. Take the remaining cooking juices and reduce to almost nothing, about a third of a cup. Add the reduced liquid to the roux and stir over heat. Then comes Bugnard's touch of genius: remove the pan from the fire and stir in one cup of cream and three egg yolks; then work in a mere three-quarters of a pound of butter. I had never *heard* of stirring egg yolks into such a common sauce, but what a rich difference they made. (69)

Integrating recipes into the stories she is telling seems to be fitted for Child, as it reflects the reality of her life. For Child, food was a natural part of the flow of her everyday life, and this is how it is represented in her memoir with the embedding of recipes inside of stories. She did not feel the need to create separate recipe chapters, though indeed recipes do exist inside her writing.

Stein, on the other hand, does not include recipes anywhere in her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. However, this seems to be fitting in a sense, considering *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in reality is in fact Stein's autobiography, and Stein did not cook -- Toklas did. Nevertheless, food does play an important part in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*,

particularly in symbolizing social class. Stein writes of a dinner party she hosted for some painters whose pictures she had bought, including Matisse. In the voice of Toklas, Stein writes that “I wanted to make them happy so I placed each one opposite his own picture, and they were happy so happy that we had to send out twice for more bread, when you know France you will know that that means that they were happy, because they cannot eat and drink without bread and we had to send out twice for bread so they were happy” (Stein 15). In another story of Matisse, Stein writes of how her maid H  l  ne did not like Matisse, and if he was staying for dinner, H  l  ne would say, “in that case I will not make an omelette but fry the eggs. It takes the same number of eggs and the same amount of butter but it shows less respect, and he will understand” (Stein 8). This anecdote is later repeated in *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*, where Toklas writes that “If you wished to honor a guest you offered him an omelette souff    with an elaborate sauce, if you were indifferent...an omelette with mushrooms and fine herbs, but if you wished to be insulting you made fried eggs” (Toklas). Words such as “happy” and “respect” are directly attached to food in these stories. In the case of the dinner party, the amount of happiness and success of the party is judged by how much bread is eaten. Likewise, a silent message is conveyed by preparing of eggs one way as opposed to another, and food is used as a direct form of to communication.

Neither of these earlier authors uses food in the same way Mayes does in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. For Mayes, writing about food is part symbolic, part metaphoric, and part gimmick. Like so many things today, even a book is first and foremost a product to be sold and Mayes exemplifies this with the countless products she sells related to *Under the Tuscan Sun*. She goes beyond food, offering products that really have nothing to do with the book (the furniture line, for example). By buying a villa to restore in Tuscany, Mayes was in turn really able to build an

entire empire rooted in the fantasy of Italy. There is clearly a market for the fantasy, given not only the popularity still of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, but also recently interest in other escape memoirs written by women, such as *Eat, Pray, Love*. Mayes was able to write *several* sequels to *Under the Tuscan Sun*, which she titled *Bella Tuscany: The Sweet Life in Italy* and also *In Tuscany*. More recently, undoubtedly encouraged by the *Eat, Pray, Love* wave, released another “Italy” book in 2010, titled *Every Day in Tuscany: Seasons of an Italian Life*. Curiously, as I have pointed out in this and preceding chapters, food happens to play an important role in these memoirs, due to “that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others” (Fisher), and as such food happens to be a universal theme that all readers can access and relate to as well as something they can create themselves.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

“The thousands of people who buy ... the customers in a supermarket, the practitioners of urban space, the consumers of newspaper stories and legends – what do they make of what they ‘absorb,’ receive, and pay for? What do they do with it?”

Michel Certeau

In each chapter of this thesis, I have outlined the various functions food serves in reading *Under the Tuscan Sun* as a gastrography and the theoretical frameworks which have been used to analyze this topic. Returning to the initial questions purposed in the Introduction chapter of this study, I will now outline the answers to each of these specific inquiries.

1. Why is *Under the Tuscan Sun* such a popular memoir? Additionally, why has the genre of gastrography become so popular recently?

Gastrographies differ in many ways, such as the part of the world they take place and the personal stories related to food that the authors decide to share in their autobiographical writing, but the one constant in all of them is the presence of food in some form. As they often incorporate travel or take place in a foreign country, gastrographies also invite and encourage readers to escape. The idea of reading to escape is not a negative criticism of *Under the Tuscan Sun* in general, nor to readers who enjoy this memoir. However, the presence of escapism is a pattern that appears and one that appeals to readers, as evident from the Amazon.com reviews presented in the Introduction of this thesis. As one Amazon reviewer/consumer noted in the Introduction, *Under the Tuscan Sun* gives readers hope and offer them an escape from their own lives. At this cultural moment, divorce happens to be rather common and a trauma many women (and men) experience. The role of escapism in the memoir is one of divorce and a broken home. If divorce is the breaking of the home, then *Under the Tuscan Sun* represents the building of the

home, specifically post-divorce. In many ways, home is equal to nourishment and when the home is broken, it also signifies a lack of nourishment for the people who belong to that home. As Frances Mayes is rebuilding a new home in Italy, she is also internalizing the nourishment that comes with the home, and she portrays her literal re-nourishment via the food she grows, prepares, and eats and by offering recipes in her memoir she is giving readers the option to do the same.

Gastrographies have burst into the literary market in recent years, so they question also must be asked “why now”? One possibility is presence of “America’s deeply cherished fantasies of transformation, in which the desire for social change gets displaced onto individual bodies” (Bailey 457). At times of social unrest, individuals manifest their feelings or confusion surrounding social disorder onto themselves because while they cannot have control over politics or government, they can take control of themselves in an effort to change. In 1996 when *Under the Tuscan Sun* was first published, the United States was only five years removed from the first Gulf War. Currently, the United States is in the midst of another war in the Middle East, which media outlets frequently refer to as the second Gulf War. As such, we live in an international climate that paints a country such as Italy a more attractive, idyllic, and safe tourist destination in comparison to other more politically charged locations, such as the Middle East and the Arab world. There are many places in the world that citizens of the United States in particular do not feel safe traveling to right now, but Italy remains a safe place. In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Mayes is able to build on this idyllic idea of Italy to compensate not only for her broken home in the United States, but also for her country, which also in many ways has been altered, if not broken, by war.

Furthermore, because gastrographies are based in the realm of food and everything that surrounds it (markets, kitchens, gardens), they are therefore very much rooted in everyday acts, such as cooking and/or eating. Food is closely connected to the self, and it serves as a common ground for everyone. As such, this focus on food and “the everyday” makes gastrographies accessible to a wide range of readers.

2. What function is food serving for both the author and the reader in *Under the Tuscan Sun*?

For Frances Mayes, food serves as a means of autobiographical reflection and self-identity. Frances Mayes acknowledges that one of her earliest traumas was the sudden death of her father while she was early in her teens. Mayes writes about memories of her father, and many times these memories also incorporate food. Mayes writes, “I know I want a wooden table” (121) and follows by writing of dinners her father held for his male friends and employees where they ate at a long white table under a pecan tree in their yard. She also includes memories of her father in the recipes she shares, such as her recipe for quail – a bird her father often hunted. Moreover, In *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes includes recipes from her childhood in the South which she has altered to fit the context of her new life in Italy showing that as Mayes changes, so do her recipes.

The genre of gastrography is a fascinating genre of memoir to examine, as its authors specifically look to food as a way to examine their own histories. Food is a common ground between human beings. By using food in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Mayes makes her unique life and situation of buying a home in Italy a relatable experience and one that is more accessible to readers. Gastrographies, with their endless references to food and food acts, are primarily rooted in everyday acts, such as cooking and eating. Likewise, *Under the Tuscan Sun* also becomes a

space for women in particular to mediate their feelings within the familiar context of food, just as Mayes does via scriptotherapy when writing about her father.

3. What kinds of metaphors emerge when writing about food in an autobiographical context?

Roland Barthes writes in “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”, “for who would claim that in France wine is only wine?” (28). Indeed, both food and beverages, such as wine, are in fact institutions that “necessarily imply a set of images, dreams, tastes, choices and values” (Barthes 28). Food so clearly contains so much more significance than simply nutritional value, and Frances Mayes makes this clear in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Perhaps because every day food continually becomes a literal part of us; because if it were not for food, we would not be able to live, the idea of “food” means so much more to us than simply an item to be eaten, and the “Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and soon as this happens, we have communicated by way of food” (Barthes 30). This idea of food as communication is a thread that runs throughout *Under the Tuscan Sun* and gastrographies in general, and genre of gastrography allows for women to mediate and reflect on their past as well as communicate these reflections with other readers.

Mayes is a woman who was able to literally escape to Italy, and then metaphorically rebuild her life by rebuilding the rundown Tuscan villa she purchased. One way in which food becomes a metaphor is that it allows for ability to change from the inside out. For example, for Mayes ingesting the peasant food of Tuscany is also a way to ingest simplicity, and fulfill a need to simplify a life which has become too complicated. Moreover, when Mayes focuses on eating dishes that are traditionally Tuscan, she is also internalizing a culture along with the food, becoming Italian from the inside out.

At one point in *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Mayes eats a grape that tastes “older than the Etruscans” (Mayes 113). By eating (ingesting) something that is greatly older than her own self, Mayes is attempting to rewrite her own history. By eating something older than herself, she is then becomes a part of history that precedes the traumas she has suffered throughout her life. Specifically, Mayes indicates in her memoir one trauma she would like to separate herself from is her divorce. Not only is Mayes vague in her limited references of her previous husband and the divorce itself, she also neglects to mention any recipes from the time of her first marriage, as if that time really did not happen at all. The recipes Mayes includes are primarily ones from her childhood, from her present life, or a combination of both. She does not mention any recipes or food related memories that attach her to the time of her first marriage. In addition, the other prominent trauma Mayes touches on in her memoir is the death of her father. The way she approaches this trauma in *Under the Tuscan Sun* is almost opposite of how she deals with the memory of her divorce in that she includes several recipes that specifically recall memories of her father. The memoir itself alludes to the fact she is rebuilding her life, and if she is able to ingest something older than the Etruscans, then she will be able to start her new life with a clean slate.

Food also serves as a way for Mayes to “try on” another culture. Even when she rejects dishes from *la cucina povera*, such as she does the chestnut cake on Christmas Eve, writing that “flat and gummy, it probably has the exact taste of a Christmas dessert during the last war, when chestnuts could be foraged in the forest” (219). Mayes has the ability to “try on” the peasant life, but she does not have to adopt it as her own identity.

Mayes also has the opportunity to try on the peasant culture by working as one, such as hauling rocks with the men she has hired. Mayes writes of hauling the rocks that “this is really

fun” (255), however at the same time the role of the worker/laborer is an identity she is able to temporarily adopt, or try on, and also shed whenever she wants. Aside from the inclusion of recipes in her memoir, Mayes also creates an opportunity for the readers to try on *her* life by offering an array consumer goods related to her life such as the Bramasole olive oil, the *At Home in Tuscany* furniture line, and the interior design book *Bringing Tuscany Home: Sensuous Style from the Heart of Tuscany*, which she co-authored with her husband Ed.

4. What is the purpose of including recipes in *Under the Tuscan Sun*?

As Bakhtin once wrote, “By taking food into the body, we take in the world” (Bakhtin, as quoted in Molz 88), hence the important of the presence of recipes in *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Even if a reader cannot be in Italy Mayes invites them, via making Italian dishes, to symbolically be there with her. Recipes are historically a female domain, not to say it is one forbidden to men. Sharing recipes is an intimate act, and this act of giving and receiving recipes extends far beyond simply an exchange of measurements and ingredients and is “not simply ...the list of in-gredients and the directions for assembling them (Leonardi 340). If the reader allows it, this process of reading a recipe has the potential to extend far beyond the idea that a recipe might contain a little more than just the chemically correct combinations of ingredients and timing that it takes to produce an edible product. Recipes have stories to tell that lie beyond a simple list of ingredients that create a product, because recipes are created by human beings who have background and their own stories for creating, modifying, writing, or following a particular recipe. Theophano writes that food and “literature of the kitchen” (280) are artifacts which obscure “the boundaries of past and present, private and public, self and other, cerebral and corporal. Reading a recipe, preparing and consuming it are, in the end, the word and body become one” (280).

Recipes offer a tangible way for a reader to reproduce the life of the author. In the case of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, the recipes also allow for the reader to not only recreate elements of Mayes's life, but also symbolically travel to Tuscany by recreating the Tuscan recipes that Mayes shares. The recipes are therefore then also a way for the author to form a connection with the reader. In the recipes, Mayes is personal in that she offers advice and suggestions to the readers. For instance, she suggests alternate ingredients that may be used, and also includes ideas for meals that can be made using leftovers from a recipe.

The recipes are also the beginning of the *Under the Tuscan Sun* Empire Mayes has created, in that they are the first product offered to readers inside the book itself. Mayes ensures everyone can afford *something*, it just depends on what kind of escape can you afford. For \$12 you can buy the book, \$20 you can make a recipe, \$200 the Bramasole olive oil, \$2,000 for The Bramasole Bed, \$12,000 to take your own trip to Italy, or \$2 million to buy a house of your own in Italy. Today there is a vast variety of options available to choose from for women who are seeking an escape, whether it is from either the monotony *or* the stresses of everyday living, and they are more abundant and wildly diverse than ever. There are yoga retreats, spas, shopping malls. Within the realm of *Under the Tuscan Sun*, there is the recipe, the olive oil, or the villa. All of these things provide a sense of escape, and they all cost a very different amount of money.

Scholarly interest in various areas of Food Studies is continually growing. It is also an area in academia that has been considered taboo to some extent. As Susan Leonardi asks: "do I erode my credibility with male academics by this feminine interest in cooking, cookbooks, and recipes" (347)? The information we are able to learn about ourselves, other, and the world in general through the critical study of our relationship to food is immense. Stigmas in regard to the validity of research that is done on cookbooks, recipes, and other areas of food which appear in

traditional domestic arena need to be eliminated. Furthermore, in-depth studies on the literary and autobiographical elements of cookbooks is a topic that will always require continued studies, especially into the 21st century, as the popularity of cookbook style memoirs keep emerging.

The area of food and its presence in autobiographical writings in particular calls for further research in several areas. In the context of this particular project, one suggestion for elaboration on this topic would be to include Frances Mayes's three sequels to *Under the Tuscan Sun* in research in order to observe possible parallels between all four books. Further research on the pattern of the foreign home appearing in many gastrographies is an interesting occurrence that unfortunately exceeds the breadth of this thesis; however, it is one that warrants an entire study dedicated to this phenomenon alone. Furthermore, the vague appearance of the male partner (or husband) in the gastrographies written by women is another reoccurring aspect, and the elusive roles of these semi-present male characters in the story could be discussed. Finally, demographic information regarding the age, gender, and median household income of women who purchase gastrographies is information that could provide more concrete evidence that could answer theories of the socioeconomic class of women who are primarily purchasing and reading gastrographies.

Mayes writes that "to bury the grape tendril in such a way that it shoots out new growth I recognize easily as a metaphor for the way life must change from time to time if we are to go forward in our thinking" (xiv). Lucky for her, she is able to actually live her own metaphor and grow a variety of produce, flowers, and herbs to help her along in her pursuit of personal growth, or what she refers to as "going forward in our thinking". Of course, growing can happen anywhere; one does not need to actually be in Italy (or any other place) in order to grow. But on the other hand, it seems that the warmth of the Tuscan sun couldn't hurt, either.

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Notes

ⁱ Anthony Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential*, *On the Line* by Eric Ripert, *Heat* by Bill Buford, and *Blood, Bones, and Butter* by Gabriel Hamilton

ⁱⁱ Top Chef; Celebrity Chef; Iron Chef; Hell's Kitchen; Kitchen Nightmares; No Reservations; Diners, Drive-In's and Dives; Everyday Italian; The Barefoot Contessa

ⁱⁱⁱ \$206.05 for a 13 oz. jar of dried black truffles on Amazon.com, not including shipping

^{iv} prices starting at \$52.95 for a 2004 Vitanza Brunello di Montalcino on <http://www.snooth.com>

^v the cheapest one listed on the Williams Sonoma website is \$59.99. *Williams-Sonoma*. Cuisinart Ice Cream Maker with Extra Freezer Bowl. 4 March, 2011. Web.<http://www.williams-sonoma.com>

^{vi} \$117.95 for the least expensive standard size processor from Williams Sonoma. *Williams-Sonoma*. Cuisinart 7-Cup Food Processor, White. 4 March, 2011. Web. <http://www.williams-sonoma.com>