

## 11 On the Relationships between Agriculture and Landscape

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The subject of this essay is not the influence of agriculture on the landscape, as its title could suggest. A topic of this sort could hardly be discussed in general terms, especially by a scholar of philosophy. The landscape transformations brought about by agriculture, particularly in countries home to ancient civilizations such as European countries, are so extensive, far-reaching, and firmly entrenched that illustrating them requires painstaking investigation and in-depth competences. In countries like Italy, for example, agriculture has contributed to shaping, organizing and transforming the landscape for many centuries (Sereni 1961).

The topic of this chapter is much narrower: it concerns not the alterations made to the actual landscape, but those alterations that have taken place in our own attitude towards nature and the landscape. I will outline two central trends, taking place at different times.

I will show how for a long time the nature that was loved, perceived as agreeable, and hence appreciated within the landscape was a nature developed by humans, the object of agriculture or at any rate of human labour – in other words, the cultivated countryside. Broadly speaking (and leaving aside certain antecedents to which I will later return) it was only over the course of the eighteenth century, that wild, inhospitable and hostile nature came to be appreciated. Over the last two centuries this idea of wilderness has become the dominant paradigm for natural beauty as a whole. The kinds of landscapes to be admired have been identified with those less affected by human intervention.

Only in recent times – over the last couple of decades have we witnessed a second, reverse trend: a rediscovery of the value of the cultivated countryside as a landscape, restoring its centrality in relation to our perception of natural beauty in general. It would not be far from the truth to argue, then, that while it took us two millennia to develop a love for the wilderness, we have only been following the inverse path, back to a love for the cultivated countryside, for a few years.

This paper will examine first the appreciation of cultivated land in the antiquity e Middle Ages (parts 1 and 2), then the rise of love for uncultivated nature and its triumph in the Romantic Age (part 3); finally, the rise of a renewed appreciation of agricultural environments in our days (final part).

### The appreciation of cultivated land in the antiquity

Greek and Roman antiquity harbored suspicion and repulsion towards the wilderness, whilst being aware of its charm. The issue of landscape perception in Antiquity might be discussed at length, and many different opinions have been expressed on the matter, starting from J. Ritter and A. Berque's theses that the notion of landscape is essentially a modern one (Berque 1995; Ritter 1963), and the opposite views held by M. Venturi Ferriolo (2002). Certainly, the ancients possessed a keen sense of space and of what we may describe as a *feeling* for nature, as shown by the connections they constructed between given places and myths, by the very establishment of temples, sanctuaries and oracular sites in highly evocative places, and – in Rome at least – by the arrangement of space for military or urban purposes (Baldo and Cazuffi 2013).

In antiquity natural beauty was detected either in nature *as a whole* or in individual natural beings (e.g. in the human body), rather than in a specific, concrete aspect of nature, as it may be suggested by talk of ancient landscape sensitivity. What is highly revealing, in this respect, is the almost total lack of individualizing representations of places, either in the figurative arts or in literature and poetry. What is most commonly found are rather stereotypical depictions of abstract places, such as rural environments in Theocritean poetry and the representation of ideal landscapes in Hellenistic and Roman painting, for instance in the so-called Odysseus series now in Vatican or in some frescoes in Pompeii.

Now, if we keep to the level of stereotyped descriptions, it is possible to identify an underlying opposition, in antiquity, between the *locus amoenus* (roughly, the lovely place) on the one hand, and the *locus horridus* (roughly, the dreadful place) on the other. This amounts to a contrast between an environment congenial to human life and often shaped by humans, and an environment hostile to human life and impervious to humans.

A pleasant environment may take the form of a verdant meadow strewn with flowers, rich in running water, and offering travelers the cooling shelter of shady trees. An example would be the spot on the shores of the Ilisos, where Socrates and Phaedrus meet in the Platonic dialogue that takes Phaedrus' name. By contrast, a *locus horridus* is marked by a lack of vegetation, reflecting the aridness and sterility of its soil, by vastness and a lack of points of reference – as in Lucan's description of the Libyan desert.

No doubt, the *locus amoenus* is not always a cultivated place. However, it is an idyllic rural and bucolic setting, typically inhabited by shepherds. In this respect, the *saltus* that these shepherds inhabit is distinguished from the *silva* (the forest). The former is a congenial place, the latter is perceived as alien and dangerous. Alongside the pastoral landscape we find the cultivated field (the *ager*) and the garden (*hortus*), which were the ancient Romans' favored natural settings. For the Romans the best vantage point for the observation of nature was provided by the country *villa*, the rural dwelling of wealthy citizens.

The perception of agricultural space is always associated with the perception of the concrete activities that take place within it, what we would call the agricultural industries, as in Horace's celebrated ode:

*Relationships between agriculture and landscape* 133

That corner of the world smiles for me beyond all others, where the honey yields not to Himettus, and the olive vies with green Venafrum, where Jupiter vouchsafes long springs and winters mild, and where Aulon, dear to fertile Bacchus, envies not the clusters of Falernum. That place and its blessed heights summon thee and me; there shalt thou bedew with affection's tear the warm ashes by thy poet friend!

(Horace, Odes, II, 6)

An antecedent of the modern view of the landscape may be found in Pliny the Younger's description of the environs of a country villa at Tifernum Tiberinum. The author here stresses the beauty of the place, speaking of "regionis forma pulcherrima" (Letters, V, 6). In the writing of agricultural theorists from Varro to Columella, considerations regarding the fertility of the soil and high yield of agricultural estates go hand in hand with an acknowledgement of their beauty as an added value, as it were. When having to choose between two equally productive estates, one should opt for the most beautiful one, since *utilitas* and *voluptas* must not be separated and, most importantly, they should never be thought of as mutually exclusive. As Emilio Sereni has noted, "in Varro, aesthetic requirements coincide with rational and utilitarian ones" (Sereni 1961, 60).

Another typical feature of the ancients' outlook on nature that deserves notice is the link often drawn between inhospitable areas and faraway places, particularly ones inhabited by enemy peoples. Examples are the interior of Anatolia which provides the setting for Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the German forests described by Tacitus, and the wilderness of Caledonia that Hadrian chose to cut off from colonized Britain.

### **Appreciation of nature in the Middle Ages**

Representations of open natural spaces are rare in the Middle Ages. What is relatively common instead, especially from the twelfth century onwards, are depictions of agricultural labor, particularly depictions concerned with the so-called "cycle of the months", for instance the cycle sculpted by Benedetto Antelami in Parma. In these representations natural space is often reduced to a minimum and almost allegorized through the inclusion of an ear of wheat or vine shoot, as in the sculptural calendar adorning the so-called "Porta della Pescheria" of the Cathedral in Modena.

Moving closer to the modern age, however, and directing our gaze to Northern Europe, we can begin to catch a glimpse of some landscapes. For instance, the representation of the month of February in *Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry*, an illuminated manuscript from the early fifteenth century, now at the Condé Museum in Chantilly, in northern France, offers a view of snow-covered hills under an overcast sky and of a valley dotted with village rooftops. To be sure, what stands in the foreground are agricultural tools, a sheep pen and women huddling around a fireplace, whereas the stark forest on the right is shown in relation to the woodcutter who is collecting wood for the fire. In other pictures

134 *Paolo D'Angelo*

of the same manuscript the background only consists in a single building and its walls, as in the depiction of springtime haymaking and ploughing.

In Italy, the most famous – and almost unparalleled – instance of the representation of a territory in relation to the agricultural work performed within it is no doubt the large fresco painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena in 1338–1339 to illustrate the effects of Good Government. Here too we find a broad view of a hilly landscape. A procession of knights makes its way through the walls of Siena, as a country dweller moves in their direction and other farmers carry produce into the city on mules. In the foreground, reapers are scything hay, while other men are busy harvesting wheat. In the distance, rows of vines already dot the hills. The co-presence of agricultural tasks typical of different seasons clearly betrays the allegorical character of the scene, which, after all, does not illustrate any identifiable stretch of the Sieneese countryside.

What we have, then, is not genuine landscape painting: this only emerged in the West one century later in relation to experiences of a different sort, not primarily related to the representation of the cultivated countryside. Thus Van Eyck's famous *Madonna of Chancellor Rolin* (about 1435) offers the view of a river winding its way through forest and city; Antonello da Messina's *Crucifixion* in Sibiu (about 1460) clearly shows the gulf and harbor of Messina in the background of Mount Golgotha with the three crosses; and the imaginary landscapes by Patinier (about 1483–1524) are all fanciful ones made up of dense forests, crags and caves.

Indeed, if the prototype of modern landscape perception is to be found in Petrarch's (1304–1374) description of his ascent of Mont Ventoux, as suggested by Burckhardt (1860), then in this landscape we see the very opposite of cultivated farmland. Petrarch ascends the mountain against the advice of a shepherd, who warns him that only thorns and stones, sweat and toil are awaiting him. The emphasis is on the wild and inhospitable nature of this place, a high mountain that offers nothing agreeable to humans.

What emerges, then, is the contrast between a feeling of nature that for centuries was destined to remain the prerequisite of a tiny fraction of the population – to be found among educated people –, and common man's perception of nature. Petrarch does not provide the only example of love of the mountains, of an environment not marked by human labor and indeed hostile to the presence of humans. The Swiss Humanist Konrad Gessner loved the mountains as well, and devoted a short book to the subject, *De montium admiratione* (1541). Similarly, painted landscapes often feature, if not high mountains, at any rate a glimpse of semi-wild nature.

Things are rather different in the case of the common man: for many centuries still, travelers and writers continued to show appreciation only of the nature that had been made productive by man. In his *Journal de Voyage*, written in the late sixteenth century, De Montaigne warmly describes the beauty of the Po Valley. Almost two centuries later, Charles de Brosses waxes lyrical over the same landscape – “the land extending between Vicenza and Padua alone is probably

worth the whole journey through Italy. No art scene is more beautiful and embellished than such a countryside" (De Broses 1858, I, 153).

The kind of landscape that elicited admiration from, and was contemplated with most pleasure by, the majority of people was the cultivated plane, not the inhospitable mountain landscape. At the same time, the horror of the wilderness and the fear of threatening places endured. These feelings gave rise to popular legends about "accursed" mountains home to monstrous creatures. A traveler such as John Evelyn, describing in his Diary his journey through Italy in 1646, spoke of the Alps as nothing but a rubbish dump in which nature had piled up all the filth and horrors from the plains. Particularly revealing, in this respect, is the curious geological theory developed by Thomas Burnet, the author of *Telluris theoria sacra* (1681), who posited that the Earth was originally flat but then was corrugated, creating the mountains, as a divine punishment.

It was only in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century that this view of the mountains started changing even in the common perception. What is often mentioned as a first sign of this change is the journey across the Alps made by the Englishman John Dennis in 1686. For the first time, an author here speaks of "delightful Horror" and "terrible Joy" (Dennis 1693, 33). The feelings of fear and bewilderment caused by a threatening landscape are no longer exclusively presented in negative terms, but are also regarded as a source of pleasure, albeit of a different sort than the pleasure caused by beauty. The feeling of the sublime in those years passed from the rhetorical domain, to which it had been confined for 2,000 years, into the broader aesthetic sphere, becoming a central element of seventeenth-century poetics. Albrecht Haller's 1732 poem on the Alps marked the consecration of the new outlook on wilderness, paving the way for countless literary variations as well as – at a later stage – a new pictorial *vogue*. This was given full expression and widely promoted by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who in the novel *Julie, or the New Heloise*, sang the praises of high mountains and their moral influence on man (Rousseau 1761, letter 23).

Alongside the sublime, a new aesthetic category emerged in the eighteenth century as a way of marking a break from what had hitherto been understood as "beautiful" nature – that is a nature that is well-arranged, chiefly for cultivation. The new category was that of the *picturesque*, a term which originally meant "suited to making a fine subject in painting". In particular, it referred to rough, jagged, dark landscapes, in contrast to the smooth, regular and sunlit countryside.

One example of picturesque art is first of all provided by Salvator Rosa's *vedute*, in which a varied and irregular nature, often filled with forests, crags and caverns – a fine shelter for brigands and other villains – provides a new paradigm for the landscape. Unlike the sublime, which Kant (1790: § 28) described on the one hand as the boundlessness of nature – unreachable mountains and ocean expanses – and, on the other, as nature's power – storms, volcanoes and floods – the picturesque more modestly emphasizes irregular nature, a rugged, jagged land as opposed to an orderly, flat or only slightly sloping landscape. A round and gently sloping hill or a flowery meadow will be regarded as beautiful; a moor dotted with clusters of trees and streaked with gorges and ravines will be perceived

136 *Paolo D'Angelo*

as picturesque. The cultivated countryside, then, might still be considered beautiful, but neither picturesque nor sublime.

A neat exemplification of this change of taste may be found in the history of the garden. While the architectural, geometric, well-ordered garden to some extent represents an extension of the cultivated countryside, and vice-versa, the Mannerist garden – exemplified in Italy by the Pratolino gardens and even more by those of Bomarzo – identifies a “third” nature, that is a mixture of wild and cultivated nature, in which the artificial aspect of the whole is clearly visible.

However, the most decisive break with the paradigm of beautiful cultivated nature was surely made by the picturesque garden and the English garden. Significantly known as “the landscape garden”, this was designed in such a way as to conceal its underlying artificiality and to create the impression of pure, wild nature. The gardens surrounding villas and castles, or the country mansions of English aristocrats, were not conceived as agricultural estates – unlike French and Italian gardens, which in a way stood for an intensification or magnification of agricultural processes – but were rather intended to be perceived, as far as possible, as a disorderly and spontaneous nature.

The landscape garden anticipated by a few decades the Romantic garden, which was to establish as mainstream the predilection for wild, rugged and dark nature – as represented in the arts by a new love for mountain vistas (with the paintings of Alexander Cozens in the eighteenth century), frozen landscapes (as in some of Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings) and of stormy seas (as in Turner’s seascapes). What we find here is no longer the serene nature favored by the Classical landscape painting of Poussin, Lorrain or indeed – well into the eighteenth century – Hackert; we rather find a violent, inhospitable nature. It is no longer a pleasant and charming landscape in which one would like to live, but a barren, stark or threatening landscape.

The idea of conceiving the actual landscape as a projection of landscape painting started spreading precisely in the early nineteenth century and completed the process whereby the “beautiful” landscape had gradually come to be separated from the agricultural one. The gap thus created between the kind of landscape to be admired, painted and described, and cultivated farmland was destined to remain open for almost two centuries. In fact, judging from the works of some contemporary environmental artists, like Richard Long or Denis Oppenheim, fond of hiking and dizzying heights, we might say that the gap remains open to this day.

### **The fall of love for agricultural landscapes and the rise of the romantic passion for wilderness**

There are many reasons why agricultural landscapes have ceased to be considered “beautiful”. First of all, what contributes to the disrepute of the agrarian landscape is the still widely held assumption that the only landscapes of genuine aesthetic worth are “extraordinary” landscapes – uncommon, rare and exceptional ones. This tendency obviously runs against the perception of the agricultural landscape

as an aesthetically pleasing one, since by definition it is a well-arranged landscape, shaped by everyday practices. If only landscapes of outstanding beauty are regarded as worthy of consideration, then what will be privileged will invariably be landscapes foreign to common human transactions, landscapes that we can only find by moving away not just from the city but also from the countryside – for example by climbing the great heights of mountains or venturing into dangerous areas.

A second reason is probably to be sought in the endurance of an opposition entrenched in common perception: the opposition between the useful and the beautiful. Although everyday experience teaches us that the two values, usefulness and beauty, do not necessarily stand in mutual contrast, and that an object, such as a building, may very well serve a specific function while at the same time constituting an artwork, with regard to the landscape the prejudiced assumption is still that only a landscape serving no utilitarian end can be beautiful – a landscaped not designed for human well-being, an unproductive one.

A third reason, which in a way is the counterpart of the second one, emerges from the observation that usually people who live and work within a given landscape, exploiting it for their own purposes, have no eye for its beauty. One might recall here Cézanne's observations on Mount Sainte-Victoire: Cézanne portrayed it countless times, with boundless love and devotion, on each occasion seeking to delve a little further into his beloved landscape. Yet when speaking with local farmers, he found it impossible to elicit the faintest hint of wonder or admiration for the mountain from them. That was the place of their everyday labor, not a magnificent setting. Farmers, at any rate traditional farmers, typically did not appreciate the "landscape" as such. Indeed, the landscape was usually only "discovered" and valued by burghers who spent their leisure time in the countryside, or by nobles who chose to leave their city palaces for their country mansions. The love of the landscape went hand in hand with the spread of an urban culture: paradoxically, it was city living that nourished the love of the countryside.

In the case of the European landscape (and the Italian one in particular) what has partially balanced the loss of repute of the agrarian landscape, even in the past, has been the acute awareness of the historical and cultural character of the landscape, and hence some appreciation of the role played by agricultural labor with respect to its transformation and conformation. But elsewhere these scruples were missing. Let us think, for instance, of the extent to which the national conscience of the United States has been shaped by the myth of the wilderness, and by the identification of the national spirit with the *natural* and *wild* roots of the environment in which it developed. While the protection of nature emerged in Europe as the protection of natural beauty, in North America it took the form of the conservation of the pristine environment, of nature yet untouched by human labor. The first large natural parks were established in America in the second half of the nineteenth century: *nature*, in a way, replaced *history* as a communal bond. Hence, it represented a nature utterly *different* from history – not the kind of nature that encompasses human labor but the kind that rules it

138 *Paolo D'Angelo*

out or, at any rate, makes it impossible on account of its own boundless might and vastness. This is the nature of the big parks of Yellowstone and Yosemite, for example.

Even landscape laws have long borne witness to this marginalization of the cultivated landscape. Consider the case of Italy, where a pervasive and indissoluble link exists between landscape and agriculture and yet the protection of the landscape has long revolved around the idea of *natural* landscape rather than that of an extraordinary combination of natural elements and artificial, historical ones. The undoubtedly significant Italian law 29 June 1939, n. 1497, on the protection of natural beauties, still had *picturesque* beauty as its point of reference, since it explicitly referred to “panoramic beauties regarded as paintings” (Law 29 June 1939, n. 1497, art. 1). Clearly, as one would expect, this law was still based on an acknowledgement of *exceptional* beauty, since it focused its conservation efforts on “fixed features that possess *conspicuous* qualities of natural beauty or geological uniqueness” (Law 29 June 1939, n. 1497, art. 1).

Even the far more recent, and equally praiseworthy, law 8 August 1985, n. 431, in defence of areas of relevant environmental interest, operates within a context in which no trace of the agrarian landscape is apparently to be found. This law protects the coastline and the shores of inland waters, particularly “mountains above 1600 meters in the Alps and above 1200 meters in the Appennines”, along with “glaciers, parks, forests, volcanoes and wetlands” (Law August 1985, n. 431, art. 1). One might say that conservation begins where agriculture ends.

### Recent trends in the appreciation of nature

Over the last 25 years things have taken a somewhat different turn. Farmland is no longer perceived as something opposed to the landscape from an aesthetic perspective. Beauty is no longer exclusively sought in areas where we can harbor the illusion that no visible traces are left by mankind. Of course, I am not referring to the awareness by landscape theorists that European landscape is a *cultural* landscape and hence a *cultivated* one – such awareness has always been widespread. What I am referring to is a newly common appreciation of the countryside, including farmland, as a landscape.

We can easily identify some of the reasons behind this change too. We immediately come across two reasons that may seem irreconcilable at first but are in fact compatible. The first may be described as the relinquishing of the privilege formerly assigned to *exceptional* landscapes. Not just current theories but also current views of the landscape increasingly tend to assign value even to ordinary landscapes, not only to places of exceptional beauty. What is increasingly taking root is the belief that the landscape can be described as an interconnected network, as opposed to the sporadic emergence of beauties as extraordinary as they are mutually unrelated.

A typical example of this new way of perceiving the landscape is to be found in the assumptions made by the *European Landscape Convention* (ELC) of 2000. The ELC tends to consider the landscape as being coextensive with the local

territory, incorporating both agricultural landscape and wilderness. The Convention, moreover, explicitly acknowledges that any stretch of a given territory carries an aesthetic identity, thereby acknowledging the existence not just of excellent landscapes but also of common or degraded ones.

This is something that we experience in our everyday lives as well. Most of us agree that a landscape conveys an aesthetic experience not just when we are elated at the sight of landscapes of outstanding beauty and harmony, but also when we are saddened at the sight of spoiled, disfigured and desolate landscapes in which we would never want to live.

By acknowledging the landscape as an essential component of peoples' living environment, the ELC liberates the agrarian landscape from its minority status, just as the Italian *Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio* does by identifying the landscape as a "territory that expresses an identity" (D.L. 22 January 2004, n.42, art. 131). The presence of different degrees of value within the landscape is reflected by the multiplicity of possible courses of action identified by the ELC: from the *protection* of landscapes of exceptional significance and beauty to the *management* of common landscapes to the *planning* of degraded ones (ELC, art. 2 and 3).

The second reason for the rise in appreciation of the agrarian landscape, which apparently stands in contrast to the one just illustrated, is the fact that farmland has now become a *rare asset*. In developed countries there is less and less farmland: the number of cultivated plots of land is constantly dwindling. The case of Italy is particularly instructive. Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA) in Italy has decreased by 17.6 percent between 1990 and 2005 (Settis 2010, 8). Contrary to what people often believe or write, this drop is not only due to over-development, that is, to the construction of new houses, roads, shopping malls, sports centers, and the like. In fact, in quantitative terms the main factor accounting for the shrinking of UAA in Italy is the extension of woodland, which has increased considerably in recent decades. From an environmentalist perspective, this might seem like a positive development; yet it is worth bearing in mind that these lands are often unmanaged and thus exposed to fires, poor water control, the spreading of non-native plants turned weeds, and other environmentally undesirable phenomena.

Ultimately, the dwindling of agricultural land in Italy is not so much due to over-development but rather to the depopulation of the countryside and the abandonment of marginal areas, especially mountain ones, which turn into unmanaged woodlands. After the peak in cultivated land reached in the mid-twentieth century, the number of agricultural plots of land has steadily decreased.

These data concerning farmland should further be combined with those pertaining to the number of agricultural workers, which is also progressively diminishing. The number of people working in the agricultural sector dropped from 4.9 percent in 1999 to 3.6 percent in 2013 (ISTAT 2014). In 1950, agricultural laborers still accounted for 30 percent of the overall workforce.

The cultural consequences of this decline are not always adequately taken into account. Whereas two generations ago most families still had a close connection

140 *Paolo D'Angelo*

to the countryside (for instance, by having a father or mother with a rural background), today almost the whole of the Italian population (but this is true in many other developed countries) has no direct connection with the world of farming, which has therefore become elusive for most people. As a consequence, many now perceive the cultivated countryside as a new and unusual environment worth discovering. Perceptual factors too contribute to this new assimilation of the agricultural landscape to the unproductive one conventionally associated with aesthetic experiences. Silence and solitude, which are defining features of standard views of the beautiful and congenial landscape, by now are also associated with the cultivated countryside – at any rate, with the extensive one in which the agricultural labor is concentrated in a few days per hectare, with a small number of farmhands.

Yet another reason for the renewed appreciation of the agrarian landscape has to do with environmental concerns. Agriculture increasingly appears to be, to many Italians at least, a crucial way of safeguarding the landscape. No matter how widespread the mistrust towards agriculture that entails the use of chemicals, it still remains true that agriculture, in all its forms, is *the only artificial use of soil that is also reversible*. Agricultural land is always available land, whereas developed land is lost forever (on a human timescale) unless expensive and complex land reclamation procedures are adopted.

This points to an interesting feature of the Italian landscape, a feature that is however not unique to Italy and should thus stimulate reflection in many other countries as well. Precisely because the Italian landscape is almost entirely shaped by the relation between agricultural labor and nature, agriculture is crucial to conservation. This is shown by the spread of woodlands that I mentioned above: this will form a “natural” landscape where humans have no hand, but that landscape may be extremely *unnatural* for Italy, as it lends its territory a configuration that is utterly alien to its traditional layout. Generally speaking, within the world of agriculture an increasing awareness of this responsibility has emerged, along with methods of cultivation compatible with the local environment and landscape. Environmentalists, too, are beginning to appreciate agriculture as a means to conservation, at least when it comes to landscapes.

The next reason for the renewed appreciation of agrarian landscapes is the demise of a once more clear-cut contrast between city and countryside, urban dwelling and country home. Here we refer not to the phenomenon of urban sprawl, which rather leads to a degraded, “third” type of landscape (to employ the term introduced by Gilles Clément), but to the increase in residential mobility and new forms of rural habitation whereby a considerable percentage of city dwellers choose the countryside as their fixed or frequent abode.

Alongside the new perception of the countryside displayed by outsiders who choose it as their place of residence essentially for its aesthetic qualities and wholesomeness, we are also observing a more marked emphasis being placed on immaterial values in agricultural economic activities, such as those connected to landscape inhabitation, transformation, and management. One example is the growing phenomenon of agri-tourism, where the attractiveness of the landscape

clearly plays a prominent role. But let us also think of the emphasis on environmental and landscape qualities that comes with many typical food products, as a way of lending them a unique “aura”. By now, even EU policies are taking into account the environmental and landscape function of agriculture (as opposed to its exclusively environmental one), by promoting traditional methods of cultivation, cross-compliance and “greening practices” (Regulation (EU) 1307/2013, art. 43–47).

The *European Rural Heritage Observation Guide*, for example, explicitly associates the value of the landscape with the preservation of agricultural environments, including not only the countryside and methods of cultivation, but also rural buildings and artefacts connected to these activities (CEMAT 2003). The emergence of a new sensitivity is further reflected by the fact that many recently established parks are not merely “environmental” parks located in uncultivated areas, but also include agricultural areas. Italian examples are Parco delle Cinque Terre in Liguria and the Parco del Ticino between Piedmont and Lombardy.

A recent book and two films can provide a confirmation of what we have said. The book is Giorgio Boatti’s *Un paese ben coltivato* (Boatti 2014), which explores several Italian regions to identify the new kind of farmer, far from indifferent to the landscape and its safeguarding, whom I have referred to as a new rural dweller. The two films, both of the same year 2014, are centered on country life: Alice Rohrwacher’s *The Wonders* and Jonathan Nossiter’s *Natural Resistance*. In these films, the directors successfully combine an interest in particular settings with a focus on two typical agricultural productions, possibly the most ancient ones within our civilisation alongside oil production – honey and wine. These two tales, associating the most deep-rooted rural traditions in Italy with new, unexpected protagonists, support the main claim of this paper: namely, that a new sensibility for landscape is becoming more and more widespread in Europe, expanding the appreciation not only of wild nature but also of cultivated land.

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142 *Paolo D'Angelo*

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