

Sanctions, then, are in no sense a substitute for war. They are a warlike act and a cowardly and deeply immoral means for the United States to inflict pain on hapless civilians without suffering any sort of retaliation. Perhaps one day, in some far-off future, the worm may be able to turn, and the sanctioned country may be able to turn the tables. It will be interesting to see how the President, and the permanent-war pundits, would react to a little sanctioning themselves.

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The Business of Escape

by Christine Haynes

Peter Mayle's Provence

Peter Mayle has dominated the non-fiction best-seller lists in recent years with his chronicles of life in the south of France. *A Year in Provence* and *Toujours Provence* (both published in the United States in 1991) even spawned a four-part television series, which was produced by the BBC and has run regularly on the Arts & Entertainment Network since its debut in the spring of 1993. Mayle's name has graced (and sold) picture books and calendars featuring paintings of Provence, and his first novel (set in—where else?—Provence) received a favorable write-up in the *New York Times Book Review* when it appeared last fall.

Mayle's recent literary fame—and fortune—has only enhanced the already comfortable life he was leading as a former advertising executive-turned-writer. In an interview with Mayle last October, *Publishers Weekly* described his writing career as “one stroke of luck after another.” Mayle ended a 15-year career in advertising (split between London and New York) in 1975, after he sold his manuscript for an illustrated children's sex manual entitled *Where Did I Come From?* to a publisher in 15 minutes. (The book is still in print and has been trans-

lated into 17 languages.) This success inspired 12 relatively lean years of writing in Devon, England, before Mayle and his third wife Jenny decided to move to Provence, where they had vacationed for years, in 1986. Both *A Year in Provence* and *Toujours Provence* recount how they refurbished an 18th-century farmhouse near Ménerbes and adapted to new physical, linguistic, and gastronomical surroundings.

Mayle follows a long line of both French and foreign writers about Provence, and many of his observations have already been made by others. This makes them no less true—or amusing. Mayle makes good use of his senses, following the example of Lawrence Durrell, who “experienc[ed] the country with [his] feet as well as [his] tongue.” He shows an appreciation for the grey crags, green brush, blue sky, and yellow light that comprise Provence's scenery, as well as for the garlic, melons, goat cheese, herbs, asparagus, olive oil, thick-crust bread, and robust wine that constitute its cuisine. Indeed, food and drink are as much of an obsession for him as they are for the French themselves. Mayle's *Year in Provence* begins with a New Year's Day lunch and ends with a Christmas dinner of leg of lamb at a nearby *auberge*. In between are trips to various markets and *boulangeries*; lessons in truffle gathering, game hunting, olive pressing, and rabbit husbandry; and introductions to cherry picking and grape harvesting. As M.F.K. Fisher once observed, even the lower classes in France eat well, and Mayle's descriptions of a truck driver's lunch or a peasant's evening meal make an American reader wish for a day in the life of a French worker or farmer.

But Mayle's books offer more than menus. In both his fiction and his non-fiction, Mayle is a modern-day Henry James in his attention to the habits and characteristics of France's natives. He does a particularly nice job of conveying what Durrell termed the “conversational salt” of the Midi. His accounts of the Provençal language (“... it was a rich, soupy patois, emanating from somewhere at the back of the throat and passing through a scrambling process in the nasal passages before coming out as speech”), greetings (“To be engulfed by a Provençal welcome [is] as thorough and searching as being frisked by airport security guards”), and gestures (“... jerky aerobics ... accompany any heated conversation in Provence—shoulders twitch-

ing, arms waving, hands wagging in emphasis, eyebrows threatening to disappear upwards into [one's] cap”) border on caricature, as critics of both his books and the TV series have argued; but, exaggerated or not, these images elucidate the personality of a people.

Yet such comments reveal only the comic side of the Provençal character; as Jacques Chabot noted in a book called *La Provence de [Jean] Giono* (1980), there is another more somber and secret side to this character, especially among the inhabitants of the mountains of Upper Provence. Mayle's sketches exhibit only a superficial understanding of both the natural elements and the human history that shape life in Provence. To be sure, Mayle refers to the intense heat and bright light of summer days here, but for him they mean no more than the necessity to spend afternoons by the pool. In reality, such heat and light affect perhaps the most important—and certainly the most precarious—resource in Provence: water. The viewer of Claude Berri's film *Jean de Florette* (based on a novel by Provence's most popular native-son, Marcel Pagnol) can sense the torridity produced by a summer without rain in frames of hazy sky, withered stalks, and dead rabbits accompanied by a sound-track of chirping cicadas. (As Alphonse Daudet—another native-son—remarked, the shrill cry of the cicadas “seems the very resonance of the immense luminous vibration” of a July afternoon.) Jean's long, painful, and—ultimately—fatal struggle to supply his household and small farm with water after his neighbors have plugged the spring on his property illustrates why Pagnol's compatriots consider water to be “liquid gold.” Lack of water in summer can mean seemingly interminable droughts (and sometimes forest fires), while too much water in springtime can yield dangerous floods. This and similar dualities (as between the burning heat of the sun and the frigid gusts of the “Mistral,” a wind that sweeps from the Alps down the Rhône Valley to wreak havoc with the hats—and temperaments—of all Provençaux) profoundly influence both natural and social life in Provence.

Jean Giono, among other Provençal writers, recognized the “cycle of eternal return” inherent in these dualities. Nature to Giono is sensual, and days as well as seasons are not linear but round. Man's labors follow nature and are there-

fore round as well: plowing leads to planting, which in turn leads eventually to harvesting, until the cycle is completed and plowing begins again. Lawrence Durrell, steeped in the Greek and Roman past of the region, noted the “momentous simultaneousness” of history endlessly repeating itself and recycled Giono’s geometrical metaphor in the title of the last chapter of his book *Caesar’s Vast Ghost: Aspects of Provence—“Le Cercle Refermé”* (“The Circle Closed Again”).

History also suffuses the poetry of Ezra Pound and Frédéric Mistral. Pound took a “voyage through time and space” for the notes that became *A Walking Tour in Southern France* (edited by Richard Sieburth). For him, the land of the Troubadours is a land “thick with ghosts,” and his journey takes him back to his poetic origins: “[I]f we are to understand that part of our civilization which is the art of verse,” he wrote, “we must begin at the root, and that root is medieval. The poetic art of Provence paved the way for the poetic art of Tuscany; and to this Dante bears sufficient witness in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.” Mistral likewise seeks his roots in Provence, although (in contrast to the expatriate Pound’s) his connections to the region are not only poetic, but physical, linguistic, and social as well. In his memoirs, Mistral recounts how at the age of 21 he returned from Aix-en-Provence, where he had attended law school, to his father’s farm to rediscover these roots for himself and others:

Then and there . . . with my foot on the threshold of my father’s house and my eyes turned toward the Alpilles, I made a silent vow to myself: first, to raise and revive in Provence the traditional spirit that was being destroyed by all the schools and their false and unnatural education; second, to promote that revival by restoring the natural and historical language of the country, against which all the schools were waging a war to the death; third, to bring Provençal back into fashion through the benign influence and divine fire of poetry.

It is Mistral’s familiarity with the history of his family (an old line for which the great wind is named) and his region that inspires his writing.

Poetry and farming are both sacred arts to Mistral; he is a troubadour in the truest sense of the word, “one who seeks to find” the spirit of a place—or of mankind. It is this sense of place and self that writers like Mistral, Durrell, Giono, Pagnol, Pound, and M.F.K. Fisher express so eloquently—and that Mayle unfortunately seems to lack. Unlike other writers who have made Provence even temporarily their home, Mayle has made no effort to cultivate either nature or himself. Mayle does not see, as did Durrell, that Provence is a “place of revelations”; he does not experience, as did Pound, any “epiphanies”; his memories do not, as did M.F.K. Fisher’s, become part of his “spiritual marrow”; his Provence is not, as was Giono’s, the setting for a universal tragedy based on the “terrible joy of existing.” In contrast to another Englishman now living in Provence, Julian More, Mayle does not have “southern France in [his] blood.” More’s pictorially and literarily gorgeous book *Views From a French Farmhouse* consequently reveals more of the region’s essence in its reflections on four seasons there than any number of sequels to *A Year in Provence* ever will.

The reason for this is simple: Mayle does not comprehend that quality of life is based on more than physical comfort; he fails to see that it also requires spiritual enlightenment. Mayle’s novel *Hotel Pastis* demonstrates his fondness for the former and his neglect of the latter. While *Hotel Pastis* is certainly an entertaining book, it offers no enlightenment (except maybe a hint to stay away from hotels run by and for the rich and famous) but only escape. *Hotel Pastis* is the story of Simon Shaw, a British advertising executive who, like Mayle himself, flees the harried and glamorous life he has been leading in London to settle into a (at least initially) more tranquil existence in Provence. While Simon supports himself by opening a hotel rather than by writing a travelogue, the parallels between him and his creator are transparent—his financial worries are trivial (nonexistent), his female companion is a gourmet cook, his contact with locals consists mainly of conversations with the architects and workers he employs to fix up his property, etc. Although there is an adventure with some bank robbers thrown into the mixture this time around, Mayle essentially repeats the anecdotes about life as a newcomer to the region that he relayed in *A Year in*

Provence and Toujours Provence.

Hotel Pastis is not merely repetitive; it is blasé, and Simon’s recurrent whining about the ennui he feels first as part of London’s wealthy and beautiful set and then as the owner of a hotel that attracts this set is tiresome. In escapist mode, Mayle identifies Provence with “no executive committees” and “perfectly tanned cleavage.” While he aims to show the superiority of the business of living over the business of business, it is business pure and simple that wins out in the end—in both the novel (when Simon abandons his hotel to handle advertising for a Texas millionaire) and the life (the 50-something Mayle is reportedly a millionaire himself now). Mayle cannot break out of his role as a propagandist for consumer society; ever the adman, he approaches Provence as if it were a product to be marketed, and his books have all the slickness of a promotional brochure.

Mayle will never be more than a permanent visitor to Provence, and his picture of the region is that of a tourist. Jacques Chabot, in his examination of Giono’s Provence, warns against such obliviousness to the mysterious, solitary, haunting, and painful side of the place: “it is necessary—under risk of letting oneself fall into the ideological flatness of I don’t which Edenic-touristic Provence—to savor *all* the salt of that immediate and concrete existence which would change, in the absence of death (the salt of life), into insipidity.” Mayle, who never contemplates much of anything beyond his next meal, fails to find any salt in his paradise.

But, then again, his books do make for a fun read, which is more than can be said of most best-sellers these days. And maybe it is enough that he has renewed interest in a region that embodies so much of the West’s poetry and history—and that has so much to teach us not only about death, but about life: how to walk slowly, work hard, eat well, enjoy nature, and converse with our fellow men. As Matthew Arnold wrote in *Empedocles on Etna*:

Is it so small a thing
To have enjoyed the sun,
To have lived light in the spring,
To have loved, to have thought, to
have done . . . ?

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The Hundredth Meridian

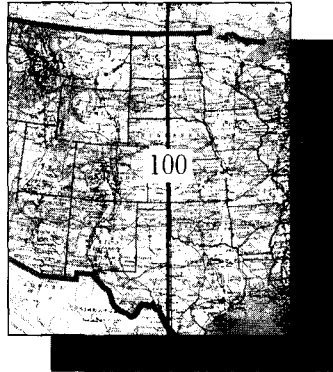
by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

Work Suspended

If compensation is possible for a summer so brief that the growing season is limited to 55 days at best, it is the most beautiful Indian summer on earth climaxed by elk season in the last two weeks of October.

While friends of mine, here and elsewhere, seem politely convinced that writing is merely a reasonably transparent excuse for hermitism and other forms of indolent and antisocial behavior, nevertheless the writer's trade is, always has been, and ever will be among the most arduous means invented by man to answer and assuage the call of his inner vanity. As much as his neighbor toiling in the coal mines or contemplating the rear ends of a hundred head of cattle from the back of a tired cow pony, the writer requires his respite; his period, however brief, of rest and recuperation. Come the 13th of every October my work, finished or not, is done for the following week or ten days, and I have joined the majority of able-bodied men in town, all of them buying supplies from the IGA store, sighting in their rifles, attempting to catch their horses on the back forty, loading their pickup trucks and backing them up to their horse trailers and campers, and kissing their wives and children goodbye, while trying to look sorry about it.

By late morning on the 14th of October 1993, I was on my way west to Twin Creek to collect my animals, and by midafternoon we were rumbling along the dirt roads north from Kemmerer through Pomeroy Basin, across the braids of the Oregon Trail, under the steep long brow of Sheep Mountain, across South Fork of Fontenelle Creek, past Krall's ranch, over the cattleguard that marks the National Forest boundary, and along the base of Absaroka Ridge to Fontenelle Crossing. Here the horse trail begins its ascent by Bear Trap Creek to my perennial spike camp beneath Indian Mountain, but having been caught out in the past by snowstorms and mud I have learned to continue another six miles, following Little Fall Creek down to La Barge Creek and parking in a meadow beside the gravel road. Of course this ex-



tends the ride in and out by 12 miles, but peace of mind is worth it. Last year I had a wrangler, Linda Meller, along to handle the horses for me while I devoted myself to the hunt. Since she bred them both and sold them to me for enough money to pay for her children's orthodonture, she ought to know as well as anyone what she is doing.

Except for writing, every one of my activities is about gear. We spent 45 minutes saddling the horses; loading on the packs that straddle the croup behind the cantle; attaching the lariats, canteens, bedrolls (tied into the saddle strings ahead of the horn), and the guns slung in their leather scabbards from the D-rings and tucked beneath the skirts; and making the necessary adjustments and balancings. As we were about to depart a game warden, on loan for the season from another part of the state and unknown to me, drove up and asked to see my permit. We rode out from La Barge Creek, where Joseph La Barge was killed by Indians in 1825, at just past five o'clock on a ten-mile ride through the shortened light of a mid-October evening.

We made good time on the clay road, arriving an hour and a quarter later at the crossing. The trail begins as a jeep track ending at an old hunting camp, beyond which it narrows to accommodate a single horse before going on above the floodplain of Bear Trap Creek, where the curious beaver swim in slow circles behind their dams. The slope rises steeply on both sides of the creek, sagebrush and aspen on the south-facing aspect, black timber and talus on the north. Clinging precariously to the bank, the badly eroded trail crumbles in places beneath the horses' hooves. I have never

aspired to be rolled on by a fully loaded horse. At the third or fourth turn we came upon a cow moose who stubbornly held the right of way for several minutes; as twilight approached I reined in to glass the long ridge high above, where the big bulls hold. Where Bear Trap descends through a pass on the left, the trail goes right and the angle of ascent becomes more acute. Breaking from the heavy timber, we watched a herd of doe deer browse their way peacefully through a stand of aspen thin as cobweb in the deepening dusk. By the time we had struggled up the steepest stretch to the treeless saddle, the light was almost gone. Within the pine forest on the other side of the saddle it was entirely gone, yet a strange glow persisted as if rising out of the ground, which rang with a hollow sound beneath the hooves. By it we made our way on to camp, unloaded the horses, raised the tent, and gathered wood enough for a small fire to heat our supper of canned beans and chile.

The alarm sounded at six-thirty in total darkness within the nylon tent. Linda had slept badly in her lightweight bag and could not be roused. I slipped from my own bag, fully dressed except for my boots, crawled from the tent into a faint dawn streaked with a few high clouds and brightening above the spires of the trees, and lifted my orange coat and rifle from the snag where I had placed them the night before. The air was cold, but not cold enough to have frozen the cold sweet water in the canteen. Moving carefully, I walked off from camp through the subaqueous light in the direction of Indian Ridge, already turning pink at the top where the horse trail goes over. More carefully still—three steps forward: halt, look; three steps forward—I began to flank the ridge, a 45-degree slope of red clay and shale intermittently covered by deadfall, a few windblasted old pine trees, and clumps of supple new growth replacing them.

A movement like the drop of an eyelash caught my attention: a tail whisking somewhere among the young trees. I put the glasses on these and found a cow elk and two calves, their cream-colored scuts turned to me. Searching farther, I saw a second cow; farther still and a thin ray of sunlight assumed material form