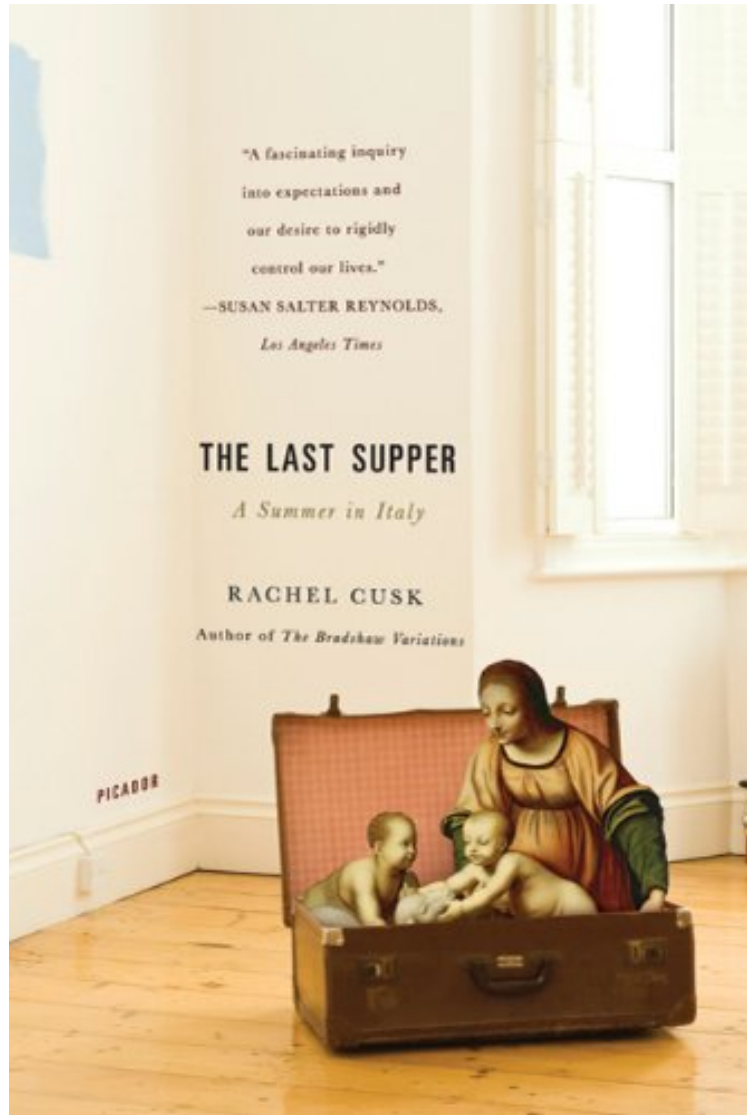


[Free pdf] The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy

## The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy

*Rachel Cusk*

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**Rachel Cusk : The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Should have been forewarned By Me Critique? The first three words in the title might have told me something about Ms. Cusk but I was unprepared for her unhappiness with the values of others. You might share her biases--even find them reinforcing--but after 10 pages you may also tire of her metaphors, analogies and other descriptive excesses. I bought it to read on travel to Tuscany but discarded it by the time we reached Heathrow. We were on our way to a magical family celebration--wish she might have had a more positive life

and story to tell. (I read Russell Baker's "Growing Up" on the same trip--a beautiful contrast to Ms Cusk's unhappy memoir.) 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Disappointing By Betty-Anne Olton I expected to like `The Last Supper - A Summer in Italy much more than I ultimately did. When I first read the blurb on the back, it seemed to promise everything I would enjoy ... a personal-style memoir, a family trip to an exotic locale - namely Italy, with its heritage of wonderful food, beautiful locations and inspiring art. However, the book never lived up to that promise. Rachel Cusk undertook the summer trip to Italy with her husband and two young children as a way to stave off the boredom and tiresomeness of her life in England. Sadly, she seemed to have taken that boredom with her, carried it around for the entire trip and ultimately wrote a book about it. I have to be honest and say that I ended up skimming some parts of it, when the utter depressiveness of Cusk's descriptions of particularly the people she met began to fight with my desire to finish the book. None of the people in Cusk's book come alive in any way at all. Everyone, including her husband and children, seem to be cardboard cutouts, and there is no way to relate to them in the least. The people who the family meets during their trip are all strange, vaguely frightening, and not particularly likeable either. The author appears to be at once bored with and slightly contemptuous of all of them. That makes for a ponderous read that felt like a lot of hard work for not much reward. The one redeeming thing about this book is the descriptions of the art which the family have also gone in search of, in order to bring some kind of beauty back to their lives. Cusk seems to have saved all her passion for the artwork, the descriptions of which are wonderful and fascinating, making me want to see them for myself. The book thus might appeal more to a lover of art than someone who wanted more of a story relating the family's feelings about their experience. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An Edgy, Writerly Trip Through Italy By Nemoman An English writer and her family escape England's climate for a three-month sojourn in Italy - mostly at Villa Fontemaggio on the Umbria/Tuscany border. Cusk is an award winning fiction writer and she brings a nice "writerly" approach to the book. Sometimes she does go over the top with respect to her use of language. She thinks about what she sees, hears or eats, reflects on it and writes intelligently about it. She is at her best in describing paintings, and thankfully includes reproductions of the paintings at the pages where they are discussed. A hurried sidetrip to Naples and the South is hurriedly written and probably should have been expanded. This not your run-of-the-mill travel book that is simply written and lighthearted. I enjoyed it; however, if you are looking for something Peter Mayleish, you will be disappointed.

A vivid and elegant account of a family's season abroad by one of our finest contemporary authors Casting off a northern winter and an orderly life, a family decides to sell everything and go to Italy to search for art and its meanings, for freedom from routine, for a different path into the future. The award-winning writer Rachel Cusk describes a three-month journey around the Italy of Raphael and rented villas, of the Piero della Francesca trail and the tourist furnace of Amalfi, of soccer and the simple glories of pasta and gelato. With her husband and two children, Cusk uncovers the mystery of a foreign language, the perils and pleasures of unbelonging, and the startling thrill of discovery -- at once historic and intimate. Both sharp and humane in its exploration of the desire to travel and to escape, of art and its inspirations, of beauty and ugliness, and of the challenge of balancing domestic life with creativity, *The Last Supper* is an astonishing memoir.

From Publishers Weekly English novelist Cusk (Arlington Park) delivers a relatively humorless account of traveling with her husband and two children over three warm months in Italy, from Tuscany to Naples and Rome. She was in search of beauty, because she felt afflicted by England's bland obtuseness nurtured by a cold climate and unappetizing food, and felt Italy's pull through the characters in Tintoretto's painting *The Last Supper*. Driving through Italy, the family (her husband is mentioned only once; thereafter he is only part of the collective we) stayed longest in Arezzo, a pastoral spot in eastern Tuscany, where Cusk found herself on a trail named after the 15th-century painter Piero della Francesca; she felt herself on the edge of an ocean of knowledge that required complete immersion. Armed with Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, she trekked to find these early Renaissance works of art, many reproduced here (as well as the family's own picturesque snapshots) and records her sympathetic impressions; of Cimabue's tremendously moving portrait of St. Francis, she writes what could also be the artist's visionary declaration: I am nothing. I am everything. Her observations of the ex-pat community and foreign tourists are critical and grumpy, and the last leg, through Pompeii and Rome, feels anticlimactic. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Bookmarks Magazine Without doubt, Rachel Cusk is a talented writer and one of the sharpest commentators working in fiction today. In the tradition of Frances Mayes, Peter Mayle, E. M. Forster, and D. H. Lawrence -- writers enchanted by the siren call of Italy -- Cusk records her observations in *The Last Supper*. The book works best in the travelogue passages, when the author dissects details with surgical precision. Many sections, though, devolve into a less-coherent analysis of Cusk's own plight, a terminal case of ennui amid "the endlessly repeating blankness" of life in Bristol. Her family is conspicuously anonymous, and the author takes a particularly jaundiced view of the tourists and expats she sees along the way, an irony not lost on many of the book's critics. "[A] fine, exultant book . . . Praise be . . . for novelist Rachel Cusk, who brings to her three-month sojourn in Italy a characteristic strangeness and charm." ?Olivia Laing, *The Observer* (London) "Elegantly written and astutely

observed . . . Cusk's assessments of art are wonderfully idiosyncratic . . . Rigorous and compelling." ?Kirkus s "A writer of almost electrifying intensity . . . [Cusk's] rigorous intellect is always at play, whether she's writing about a tomato or a tomb, and it is this very archness, this passion, that gives her beautiful, moving book such power. Indeed, her detailed examination of the tiny nuances that embroider family life gives her account of her Italian summer the kind of luminosity she seeks, and finds, in visual art." ?Hilary Fannin, *The Irish Times* "Cusk is often bracing and rigorous, . . . applying her phrases like the brushstrokes of the masters she so admires. This is the finest memoir of Italy I have read since--twenty years ago more or less--Jonathan Keates' *Italian Journeys* made Italy suddenly seem irresistible and present in all its dimensions. Cusk makes Italy sing." ?Tom Adair, *The Scotsman* "The traumatic juxtaposition of sublime paintings and tourist tat inspires Cusk to writing that will sit honourably in an anthology with Byron and Forster . . . Travel writing about Italy might be an oversubscribed genre, but *The Last Supper* more than earns its place at the table." ?Celia Brayfield, *The Times (London)* "[Cusk] writes with the intelligence, wit, and keen eye for detail demanded by any kind of reporting." ?*The New Yorker* "Each sentence is crisply perfect, binding brilliantly detailed descriptions to sensitive, sharp observations." ?Bookforum "A fascinating inquiry into expectations and our desire to rigidly control our lives." ?*Los Angeles Times* "There's a reason for the unrelenting stream of literature about moving to Italy--it's everyone's fantasy. Cusk details her family's three-month tour of the country in this delightful romp through rented villas, Amalfi beaches and plenty of pasta and gelato." ?More "Engaging. . . 'The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy' is not your typical rosemary-scented, ready-for-cable ode to renovating a rustic house and rubbing shoulders with jolly peasants. A very talented novelist and observer, Cusk has a knack for drilling down into the thick of things and finding strangeness in even the most ordinary experiences. . . . The author approaches everything she sees through the prism of history and literature, allowing herself to be captivated by her surroundings even while she is trying desperately to detach herself from the tourists all around. Cusk may hate tourists -- her descriptions of them are usually hilarious and sometimes cruel--but she makes a passionate, sharp-tongued tour guide in this book about fleeing the ordinary in search of something beautiful." ?Salon "Charming, restless, idiosyncratic hybrid of classic family road trip and probing personal essay where the roadside attractions include Pompeii, the Basilica of Saint Francis and Etruscan tombs, and the big questions on aesthetics and truth and human nature that such sites elicit are smartly explored . . . improvisatory and sensual." ?*San Francisco Chronicle* "Unlike day-tripping tourists, the thoughtful visitor doesn't know in advance what will seize her attention. A basket of bread and tomatoes, a Raphael Madonna, a storm that breaks with terrible beauty over the Ligurian coast, the progressively gothic hostelrys through which the travelers wend their way home: All are fleetingly illumined by Cusk's exquisite prose, though none more hauntingly than the predawn English countryside, "like a sleeping baby . . . somehow new and unmarked," from which they set off for their summer abroad." ?*Boston Globe* "Cusk takes us from Tuscany and Umbria south to Naples and Capri, writing throughout in the present tense, which makes the journey more immediate, and in the minimalist shorthand of a Raymond Carver short story: 'The fireflies scatter in drifts, like embers'; 'There is a bang at the door: It is a man.' There are several nice takes on food, history and landscape, and splendid observations on artists, as when she writes of Cimabue, that 'he restored to the painted human form its softness and mortality, its animal nature and the grandeur of its emotion.'" ?*Providence Journal* "British novelist Rachel Cusk's *The Last Supper* is a perceptive account of the pleasures and perils that resulted from uprooting her family from England to the Italian countryside for a winter" ?*Travel + Leisure*, "Great Summer Reading" "[Cusk]'s got guts . . . The traumatic juxtaposition of sublime paintings and tourist tat inspires Cusk to writing that will sit honourably in an anthology with Byron and Forster . . . Travel writing about Italy might be an oversubscribed genre, but *The Last Supper* more than earns its place at the table." ?Celia Brayfield, *The Times (London)* "What Cusk does not learn, and doesn't need to learn, is how to write. As always in her work, there is a scattering of archaisms ('commence,' 'venture,' 'outlay') that sometimes gives the prose an archness verging on the pretentious, but the intensity of her gaze can also give rise to descriptions of beauty and precision. Alert to nuance, she will catch the 'blanched severity' in a face, the sadness 'that you see in the eyes of people who were unhappy children,' the self-consciousness of an American honeymooner with 'the faux-heroic look of a Kennedy.' And her descriptions of Italian food--pizza 'like a smiling face' that 'assuages the fear of complexity,' dough 'as pliant and soothing' as a mother's breast--are pure joy." ?Christina Patterson, *New Statesman*