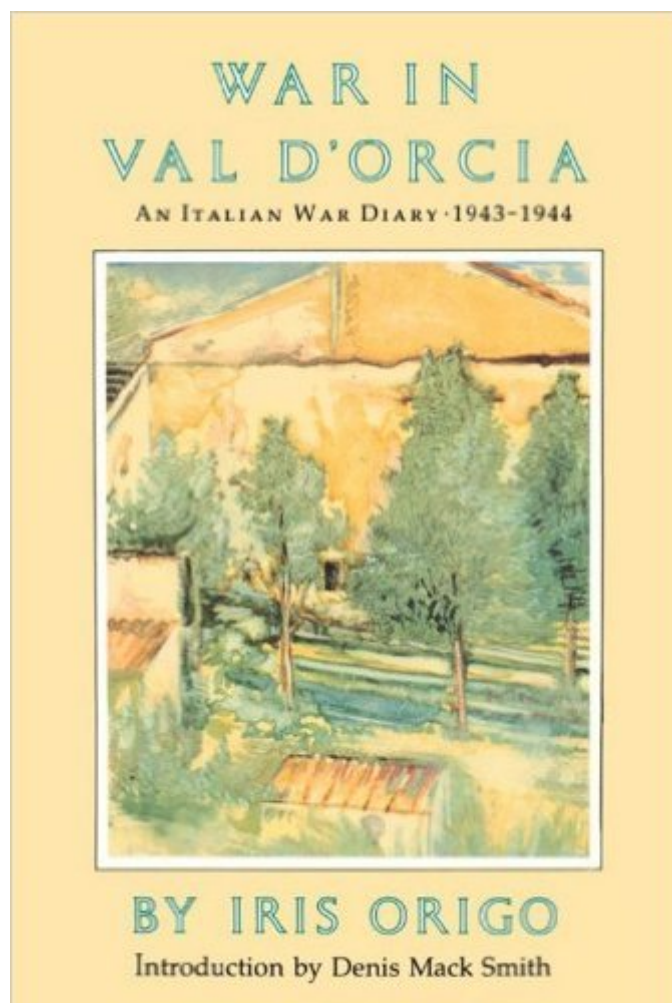


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# War In Val D'Orcia: An Italian War Diary, 1943-1944



## Synopsis

A classic of World War II, and in its first American edition, *War in Val d'Orcia* is Iris Origo's elegantly simple chronicle of daily life at La Foce, a manor in a Tuscan no-man's land bracketed by foreign invasion and civil war. With the immediacy only a diary can have, the book tells how the Marchesa Origo, an Anglo-American married to an Italian landowner, kept La Foce and its farms functioning while war threatened to overrun it and its people. She and her husband managed to protect their peasants, succor refugee children from Genoa and Turin, hide escaped Allied prisoners of war and somehow stand up to the Germans, who in dreaded due course occupied La Foce in 1944 and forced the Marchesa to retreat under a hot June sun. Fleeing eight impossible miles on foot, along a mined road under shell fire, with sixty children in tow, she sheltered her flock in the dubious safety of a nearby village. A few days later, official Fascism disappeared, and La Foce was ransacked by the retreating Wehrmacht. Here, as the restoration of La Foce begins, her book ends. Beyond praise and above mere documentary value, *War in Val d'Orcia* belongs to the literature of humanity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is not a journal in the contemporary sense; the author is not exploring her feelings or finding

herself. This is an almost daily record of how WWII affected a small farm in Tuscany, as the owner and tenant farmers watched and waited for the war to arrive at their doors. In the meantime, they coped and dealt with everyone else who arrived at their door--15 orphaned children, Fascist mayors, German troops, British prisoners of war, Italian partisans. All needed help and the Origo family gave what they could. German officers/soldiers were literally arriving at the front door while allied prisoners of war were escaping out the back, with food, blankets or boots. At all times, Iris Origo knew exactly where they were, where she was, what she had to do and what the consequences were. In clear, direct language, Origo makes the case that the people living in the hills of Tuscany were the true heroes who endured changing governments, axis and allied soldiers who looted and pillaged, bombing of their villages, loss of their children and way of life; all the while giving what they could to any individual who asked for help, regardless of affiliation. This is a straightforward account, without embellishment or added drama, of a woman with a strong sense of responsibility--she rose to the occasion and did what needed to be done. On top of that, she faithfully attended this journal in the middle of the chaos of war. An admirable woman and a genuine account. END

a beautiful, heartfelt account of two years of war in my native Tuscany:1943-44, a page of history surely unknown outside Italy. A crazy dance of events, a dance macabre, I would define it. A daily war diary written by Marchesa Iris Origo, an English woman married to an Italian and living near Siena. Marchesa Origo gives us an account of facts which happened in Italy in those times and were directly or indirectly related to her and to her family. Tragedies and hardships suffered by Italian civilians by the hands of a bloodthirsty German army whose only aim seemed to be the slaughter of harmless people and a more than crazy fascist horde the "repubblichini"; all together they succeeded in destroying great part of Italy and in murdering hundreds of Italian civilians and foreign allies. The bombing of Italian towns like Rome, Florence, Naples by the hands of allied armies trying to destroy the German headquarters. Marchesa Origo sheltered in her "villa" and in the adjoining farms all the Italian and foreign refugees who were able to escape the maddened German SS or the vile "repubblichini". The courage of a woman who risked her life to protect children, women old people and refugees from allied armies from the fury of the enemy. Stories told also by our parents or grandparents who happened to go through the crazy tragedy of World War II. A beautiful read which I would recommend to everyone, in order not to forget.

"Greater than the sum of its parts" accurately describes this remarkable diary set in Southern

Tuscany during World War II. Written as a daily record during the tumult of war, Origo does not dwell on emotional reactions to the horror around them. What comes through is the generosity, compassion, and nobility of Spirit that we all are capable of during wretched times. This diary has had a greater impact on me since after reading it. A book which had lingered with me and one in which I may never forget, I have been moved to visit La Foce and the region in which this book takes place this Fall. Highly Recommended.

The enthralling story of life on the Origo's estate "La Foce" (just South of Montepulciano in South Tuscany and on the main route of the advancing Allied 8th Army) during the years 1943 and 1944. The contadini farmers and workers on the estate, living in conditions closer to the Middle Ages than the mid Twentieth Century, had no interest in or involvement with the forces of war but equally had no option but to suffer its consequences. They, led by Iris Origo and her Marchese husband, juggled simultaneously playing host to refugee Italian children, escaping British airmen and prisoners of war, partisan fighters, and a German officers' mess, not to mention day to day dealings with fascist officialdom. All this in the knowledge that the penalty for a "mistake" was summary execution. An easily readable "must read" not just for those who love Italy and a good story, but for anyone who would like to reaffirm their faith in humanity in the context of a greater understanding of the reality of occupation and war.

"War in Val D'Orcia" is a rather terse diary of events throughout Italy in 1943-1944 written by the English-born wife of a wealthy landowner in Tuscany. As an account of life under Nazi rule it's not nearly as profound or fascinating as Victor Klemperer's "I Will Bear Witness" but after the first 100 pages (or so) which are somewhat strangely detached and impersonal ("In Rome to have the baby"), and mostly an account of Italian national politics at that time, I literally couldn't put it down. Until I read this book I had often wondered why there are so many abandoned farm buildings in Tuscany: I now understand that until relatively recently there was a feudal system in place, where farmers did not actually own their land but instead worked it for the landowner in exchange for half of their production. "War in Val D'Orcia" exposed me to aspects of Italian culture that I had never even really thought about before. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the history and culture of Italy and Tuscany in particular. This is the first book by or about Iris Origo that I have read but it won't be the last.

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