



D.H. Lawrence and Italy: Twilight in Italy/Sea and Sardinia/Etruscan Places

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A collection of three travel sketches on Italy, written when Lawrence was at the height of his creative powers. This edition features an introduction by Anthony Burgess.

D.H. Lawrence and Italy: Twilight in Italy/Sea and Sardinia/Etruscan Places Details

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From Reader Review D.H. Lawrence and Italy: Twilight in Italy/Sea and Sardinia/Etruscan Places for online ebook

Melissa says

A superb collection of travel essays and stories, starting with a trek southward across the Bavarian Alps past scores of crucifixes, a sojourn in a lakeside inn, and ruminations on viticulture. The second part of the book is mainly Lawrence's rather artistic reflections on Etruscan tomb culture and what their funerary art has to say about the human condition. Writing that is somehow both wonderfully descriptive of place, mood, and people and still stunning in its power to shock and enthrall.

Joseph Kugelmass says

(Note: This is a review of Sea and Sardinia. I'm linking it to the Penguin edition because that's the most common version in print in the United States.)

D. H. Lawrence: when he's good, he's great, and when he's bad, he's awful.

Having just finished Grazia Deledda's *Reeds in the Wind*, I was excited to return to the same landscapes through a different pair of eyes -- Lawrence is one of my favorite novelists. What I got, however, was the worst of Lawrence. I had a distinct sensation of reading pages that Lawrence had to somehow get out of his system in order to be a finer writer in his other books. He should have written this and then cheerfully burned it to ashes.

The book begins with Etna and ends with a traditional Italian *commedia dell'arte*, but its unspoken subject is the state of Europe in the aftermath of WWI, and both the mountain and the stage show turn out to be symbols of that conflict. Lawrence is miserable about the effect of the war on Europe's cosmopolitan culture. As he travels through Italy and Sardinia, he is always reminded that he is an Englishman, first and foremost. To an Italian he is indistinguishable from other Englishmen, because of the galvanizing nationalisms that led to WWI -- chasms that only got worse during the uneasy peace of the 1920s and 1930s, in part because of the devastated Italian and German economies. This erasure of his precious individuality sends Lawrence into a rage:

I can't walk a stride without having this wretched *cambio*, the exchange, thrown at my head. And this with an injured petulant spitefulness which turns my blood. For I assure them, whatever I have in Italy I pay for: and I am not England. I am not the British Isles on two legs..... And still, for all that, I must insist that I am a single human being, an individual, not a mere national unit, a mere chip of l'Inghilterra or la Germania. I am not a chip of any nasty old block. I am myself.

The simplest scenes, like one description of a man eating noisily, become strangely infused with mourning for Europe's fractured family: "'Mother, she's clapping!' I would yell with anger, against my sister. The German word is *schmatzen*." It's almost Lawrence's version of *The Butter Battle Book*: animosity over nothing, over differences of table etiquette.

This all probably makes Lawrence sound more humane and sensitive than he really is. In fact, he tries to keep himself going by adopting every single one of these harmful, petty enthusiasms. He complains that the Italians do not prepare good afternoon teas, which is pretty funny for somebody so desperate not to appear overly English. He fusses over coffee as well, and milk, and ferry prices. He swallows Italian wines and liqueurs under protest. In short, he comes across as precisely the kind of homesick traveller who makes life insufferable for everyone else. (In addition to the implied presence of the war, there is also the submerged fact of Lawrence's chronic tuberculosis. This probably made it harder for him to travel, but he refuses to mention it directly, and sneers whenever a local feels sorry for him.)

Lawrence even tries to get on board with nationalism:

The workman's International movement will finally break the flow towards cosmopolitanism and world-assimilation, and suddenly in a crash the world will fly back into intense separations.... For myself, I am glad. I am glad that the era of love and oneness is over: hateful homogeneous world-oneness. I am glad that Russia flies back into savage Russianism, Scythism, savagely self-pivoting. I am glad that America is doing the same. I shall be glad when men hate their common, world-alike clothes, when they tear them up and clothe themselves fiercely for distinction, savage distinction, savage distinction against the rest of the creeping world: when America kicks the billy-cock and the collar-and-tie into limbo, and takes to her own national costume: when men fiercely react against looking all alike and being all alike, and betake themselves into vivid clan or nation-distinctions. The era of love and oneness is over. The era of world-alike should be at an end. The other tide has set in. Men will set their bonnets at one another now, and fight themselves into separation and sharp distinction. The day of peace and oneness is over, the day of the great fight into multifariousness is at hand.

To read this now, in light of the fascist movements that led to the Second World War, is more than a little unsettling. Lawrence's absurd conflation of nationalism and individualism as a heroic rejection of global Communism is completely in line with Nazi propaganda.

But even this grandstanding is not enough for Lawrence. He eventually feels compelled to invent an entirely apolitical theme for his narrative, namely "the battle of the sexes." This is nothing but misdirection, and Lawrence knows it, and protests too much:

With smoke and sulphur leaps in Beelzebub. But he is merely the servant of the great old witch. He is black and grinning, and he flourishes his posterior and his tail. But he is curiously inefficacious: a sort of lackey of wicked powers.

The old witch with her grey hair and staring eyes succeeds in being ghastly. With just a touch, she would be a tall, benevolent old lady. But listen to her. Hear her horrible female voice with its scraping yells of evil lustfulness. Yes, she fills me with horror. *And I am staggered to find how I believe in her as the evil principle.* [italics mine] Beelzebub, poor devil, is only one of her instruments.

It is her old, horrible, grinning female soul which locks up the heroes, and which sends forth the awful and almost omnipotent malevolence. This old, ghastly woman-spirit is the very core of mischief. And I felt my heart getting as hot against her as the hearts of the lads in the audience were. Red, deep hate I felt of that symbolic old ghoul-female. Poor male Beelzebub is her loutish slave. And it takes all Merlin's bright-faced intelligence, and all the surging hot urgency of the Paladins, to conquer her.

Who is this "symbolic old ghoul-female"? Like the wrinkled old woman in *Ulysses*, who becomes James Joyce's symbol for Ireland, Lawrence's "ghoul-female" is really each and every European power, with their "black and grinning" colonial subjects, and their demonic war machines coughing "smoke and sulfur." But Lawrence is petulantly "literal" about his symbolism, as it were, and depicts a legion of masculine paladins struggling mightily against feminine Morgan Le Fay, the crone.

It's a tawdry and familiar magic, this enchantment of the world by nationalism, and then Lawrence's related daydream of men defending themselves against women. Lawrence proves, for the umpteenth time, that he is bisexual. He makes fun of his wife. He romanticizes Sardinian courtship, a subject about which he knows nothing. That's it -- that's about all he can do with "the battle of the sexes." Lawrence seems, by the end, a bit like those peasants in Sicily, tilling exhausted patches of soil in the shadow of a volcano.

Joann Iannacito says

It just did not engage me.

dead letter office says

wow. that was awful. i haven't even been able to bring myself to give him another chance.

Keith Miller says

D. H. Lawrence and Italy: *Twilight in Italy; Sea and Sardinia; Etruscan Places* (Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics) by D. H. Lawrence (1997)

Msellen88 says

Now I remember why I disliked reading Lawrence. Pure torture!

Ted says

Parts of the first two books (*Twilight in Italy, Sea and Sardinia*) were very interesting, and worth a reread at some time. Not so *Etruscan Place*, which I would still rate 3 stars.

Of course these books are around a century old now, so they describe things which for the most part would be changed perhaps beyond recognition by now. However, it might be very interesting, on a leisurely trip to parts of Italy that Lawrence writes about, to try to make an actual log of how those things have (or have not) changed. This might be particularly interesting if one is visiting Sardinia, which I would guess has changed

less than most other parts of Europe in the last century.

Lynn Cuervo says

I found this book at a used book store in North Carolina. It was published in the 1930's. It is a lovely read - part tour book, part musings on the lost Etruscan people and society.

Carmen says

I was a bit disappointed by this book. Although written very well, it missed things that I wanted to see. There were lots of descriptions of the people he met. Unfortunately, since this was right after World War 1, it has little to bear on today's population of Italians. I was really hoping to read more descriptions of places, so that I could compare them to nowadays. There were indepth descriptions of tombs, but not much else.

Jennell McHugh says

Really wanted to like this as I have enjoyed other Lawrence works... and any European travel-writing (especially historically rich and sentimental) is almost always a sure thing.

However, I don't really know how to describe why I couldn't get into this; mostly, the writing was extremely dense and there was way too much 'Christ' and 'Him' and religious capitalizations which were distracting.

Brian says

This book got me more interested in reading about the Etruscan civilization and then to read more about the Sardinian Nuraghe culture going on at the same time, in fact earlier. Lawrence's observations are personal and often enlightening.

M. Sarki says

I doubt I would ever read this again, in fact I know I won't, but I am certainly glad I visited here once. I explain why here:

<http://mewlhouse.hubpages.com/hub/DH-...>

Donna says

I wanted to read this book, but the beginning was very slow for me. Definitely a book that I read because I am in the field and wanted to see what it was about, but wouldn't recommend it to anyone who wants to read

for pleasure. It is VERY descriptive...old style of writing, but could appreciate many parts of it.

M. Sarki says

<https://msarki.tumblr.com/post/151461...>

It was exciting to get my hands on this book of three travelogues which basically has D.H. Lawrence recording his travels through Italy during three different periods in his life, first by land, another by sea, and one ultimately ending as his own life did, below ground. I made a few notes in my initial excitement over reading this book that are revealing, and some are worth repeating here:

Another book to savor this summer. I see resemblances here to the descriptive contemporary Cormac McCarthy.

Now this is some beautiful writing and personal observations and beliefs that I may or may not agree with, but it is interesting to witness somebody with the gristle to bring it on hastily. From the start, the fact he hates the bible makes him OK with me.

A densely-made smorgasbord of language and song.

There is a long introduction that is very helpful in preparing you for the reading of this book. Now that I am reading Lawrence himself, I am eager to learn what he has to say.

The last book being his death march. Interesting. Deep into the caves.

It took me as long to read this entire triptych travelogue as it did for Lawrence to walk his way around them all. First the book found its way to Michigan, surrounded by the Huron National Forest in late Spring of 2012, where I received the hefty book in the mail at my local post office box. I then lugged it back to Louisville with me in mid August for a week when I just had to take my wife to a Jackson Browne solo concert, and then I hauled it back up to the north woods of Michigan until mid-September before unpacking it again in Louisville for the beginning of my fall reading period. Throughout the book's travels I read pages of it every day. I was continually impressed with the way Lawrence found fault with so many things he saw and in almost every location he traveled to. If it was indeed a place he might have admired it waned in his abhorrence for what the stewards had done to destroy what was good in it. So many parallels to my own life experience even a century and a half later. But the book was much more than a public complaint. Lawrence informed and at times, most likely, rewrote a little history, at least as he saw it.

The travelogues are not something any of us should take along with us today to map out our strategy for seeing Italy. They are helpful in preparing yourself for the worst, but many things have most likely changed. I am sure that the food is better, the hotels cleaner, and the people of Italy more conformed to the importance of the tourist dollars being spent in their vicinities, providing for livelihoods and a higher standard of living than the peasants were accustomed to in the period of Lawrence's travels. Lawrence offers his opinion on many things and his opinions are the highlights for me in all three books. He makes what seems to be spontaneous remarks and his wit and clever responses are quite enjoyable.
