



PENGUIN  CLASSICS

D. H. LAWRENCE
D. H. Lawrence and Italy

With an introduction by TIM PARKS

SERIES ADVISOR: PAUL POPLAWSKI

D. H. LAWRENCE AND ITALY

DAVID HERBERT LAWRENCE was born into a miner's family in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, in 1885, the fourth of five children. His first novel, *The White Peacock*, was published in 1911. In 1912 Lawrence went to Germany and Italy with Frieda Weekley, the German wife of a professor at Nottingham University College, where Lawrence had studied; she divorced, and they were married on their return to England in 1914. Lawrence had published *Sons and Lovers* in 1913; but *The Rainbow*, completed in 1915, was suppressed, and for three years he could not find a publisher for *Women in Love*, which he first completed in 1917. After the First World War he travelled extensively in Europe, Australia, America and Mexico. He returned to Europe from America in 1925, and lived mainly in Italy and France. His last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was published in 1928 but was banned in England and America. In 1930 he died in Venice, in the south of France, at the age of forty-four.

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D. H. LAWRENCE

D. H. Lawrence and Italy

Twilight in Italy
Sea and Sardinia
Sketches of Etruscan Places

Edited by SIMONETTA DE FILIPPIS, PAUL EGGERT *and* MARA KALNINS
With an Introduction by TIM PARKS
and Notes by MICHAEL FREDERICK HERBERT

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Contents

Chronology	vii
Introduction	xi
Further Reading	xxv
A Note on the Texts	xxviii
<i>TWILIGHT IN ITALY</i>	i
<i>SEA AND SARDINIA</i>	137
<i>SKETCHES OF ETRUSCAN PLACES</i>	327
Appendix: Introduction by Anthony Burgess to the 1972 Viking Press edition	443
Maps	449
Explanatory Notes	457
Glossary of Selected Italian Expressions	485
Index	489

Chronology

- unexpurgated (August) editions of *Pansies* published; *The Escaped Cook* published. Returns to Bandoi.
- 1930 2 March: Dies of tuberculosis at Vence, Alpes Maritimes, France, and is buried there. *Netles* (poems), *Assorted Articles*, *The Virgin and the Gipsy* and *Love Among the Haystacks & Other Pieces* published.
- 1932 *Sketches of Etruscan Places* published (as *Etruscan Places*). *Last Poems* published.
- 1933-4 Story collections *The Lovely Lady* (1933) and *A Modern Lover* (1934) published.
- 1935 Frieda has Lawrence exhumed and cremated, and his ashes taken to Kiowa Ranch.
- 1936 *Phoenix* (compilation) published.
- 1956 Death of Frieda.
- 1960 Penguin Books publish the first unexpurgated English edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, following the famous obscenity trial.

Introduction

Wake up! This is the experience. At any moment Lawrence may say something startling. It could be brutal: 'If I were dictator, I should order [him] to be hung' (150:1-2). It could be hilarious: the Sicilians 'pour themselves one over the other like so much melted butter over parsnips' (147:6-7). Or it might be at once surreal and rivetingly exact: 'cypresses are candles to keep the darkness aflame in the full sunshine' (68:21-2). But whatever the nature of the surprise, Lawrence infallibly reproduces the sensation he himself seeks when he travels: sudden confrontation with strangeness, that special alertness produced by phenomena that demand explanation. 'I was startled into consciousness' (5:38), he tells us of one encounter. Or again, 'I went into the church. It was very dark, and impregnated with centuries of incense. It affected me like the hair of some enormous creature. My senses were roused, they sprang awake in the hot, spiced darkness. My skin was expectant, as if it expected some contact, some embrace' (19:8-12).

We mustn't ask Lawrence for information. It's not a kind of knowledge he's interested in. He won't give us hard facts about Italy: they can be found in a guidebook. Surprised and touched by what he sees, he wants to touch and surprise us. 'Rather gentle and lovely', he tells us of a painting in an Etruscan tomb 'is the way [the man] touches the woman under the chin, with a delicate caress. That again is one of the charms of the etruscan paintings: they really have the sense of touch, the people and the creatures are all really in touch. It is one of the rarest qualities, in life as well as in art' (372:1-5).

But one wouldn't want this kind of abrupt and intimate contact with just anybody. 'I should loathe to have to touch him' (149:31), Lawrence tells us of a particularly ugly-looking character at the train station in Messina. So if we're going to get involved with a writer whose embrace more often feels like that of the wrestler than the friend, we need to know where he's coming from. With Lawrence biography is vital.

Resigned from teaching, or indeed any form of strenuous employment, by an attack of pneumonia in 1911, the 26-year-old Lawrence at

once got involved in a most strenuous love affair. In 1912, after only a few weeks' acquaintance, he ran off with the German wife of his ex-professor at university. Six years his elder, a mother of three, Frieda Weekley, née von Richthofen, was not sure how serious the affair was, until, without her permission, Lawrence wrote to her husband and told him what was going on. She immediately and openly betrayed her presumptuous lover with a German friend.

Lawrence and Frieda were staying near her family in Germany. Having prised her away from husband and children, Lawrence now dragged her from her other man and her family to take a strenuous walk across the Alps from Bavaria to Italy. They set off together with two men and Frieda promptly betrayed Lawrence with one of them. But on arrival at the northern tip of Lake Garda on the Italian side of the Alps, their friends went off and at last Lawrence had Frieda to himself. With the excuse that their finances were tight, he managed to rent cheaply in a small village on the western shore of the lake, the least frequented side. This is steep and rugged country between the Alpine lake and the icy peaks. They had arrived in autumn with the empty, tourist-free winter ahead. It was hard to see where Frieda would find another lover now.

Given all this drama – fidelity-betrayal, marriage or freedom, public morality versus private conviction – it's not surprising that Lawrence tended to think of the world in terms of polarities. Ensnared in a house called Villa Igea, facing east across the lake, he now embarked on the most strenuous work programme. In the space of seven months he wrote the final version of *Sons and Lovers*, the story of the conflict between his father and mother, of his personal battle to become his mother's favourite, then his battle against his mother to be allowed to have girlfriends. He also wrote two plays and much of the poetry collection *Look! We Have Come Through!* about his love and conflict with Frieda. And he also began the great novel *The Rainbow*, and another *The Last Girl*. Where, then, did he find time to learn Italian and write a travel book as well? And why, living in an area renowned for the electric sharpness of its bright air, did he call that book *Twilight in Italy*?

Walking over the Alps, Lawrence notices the wayside crucifixes. Carved by untrained peasants they depict a Christ absolutely trapped in his earthly, sensual existence yet eternally exposed to the empty brightness of the Alpine snows and sky. Aside from the polarities set up here, the sensual life against the mental, dark and light, intensity and nullity, what at once has the reader alert is how Lawrence looks at

these artefacts without any reference to Christian orthodoxy. The real world is always ready to take on symbolic sense for him, but it is a sense that arises from his determined concentration on the object itself. So even when he is in danger of becoming didactic, his eye is simply too open to be trapped in any scheme. Intensely observed, the landscape trembles with a readiness to be seized and transformed by the creative mind: 'There was a blood-red sail', he tells us, looking from a parapet over Lake Garda, 'like a butterfly breathing down on the blue water, whilst the earth on the near side gave off a green-silver smoke of olive trees, coming up and around the earth-coloured roofs' (19:1–3). On the other hand, we are always reminded that the hills are steep to climb and the air is cold.

Opposites attract and repel each other, creating a force field of excitement and fear. So for many readers the essential Lawrence experience is that described in the poem 'The Snake', written a few years later in 1920. Going to get water from a drinking trough, the writer is startled by a snake. There is a powerful awareness of the otherness of the reptile; man and serpent share the same world and the same need for water, yet each inhabits a realm of consciousness unknowable to the other. It was the kind of encounter Lawrence had already described on a number of occasions, but perhaps most notably in *Twilight in Italy* in his meeting with the old woman spinning wool above Gargnano. It is from his reflections on this episode that we have the twilight of the book's provocative title.

On a terrace high above the lake, Lawrence finds an old woman, her back against a wall, head 'tried in a dark-red kerchief, but pieces of hair, like dirty snow, quite short, struck out over her ears. And she was spinning' (19:40–20:1). The more Lawrence concentrates on the woman, the more she becomes emblematic of a different order of consciousness, or rather unconsciousness. 'She was spinning, spontaneously, like a little wind . . . All the time, like motion without thought, her fingers teased out the fleece' (20:7–16).

Lawrence tries out his still rudimentary Italian on the spinner but she is not interested. 'She remained as she was, clear and sustained like an old stone upon the hill-side' (20:30–31). And the difference between the two of them is essentially this: that while Lawrence appreciates that her way of being lies outside his mental grasp, and hence is bound to accept that he lives in a multifarious world teeming with potentially disturbing encounters, for the old woman there is only her own knowledge, her own language, her own reality and environment, in which she

is totally integrated. She doesn't take on board his otherness. True, she hasn't seen him before, but only in the same way that there are parts of her body she has never seen. 'There was nothing which was not herself, ultimately' (22:2-3).

So in rural Italy Lawrence finds a form of pre-modern consciousness, something that always fascinated and attracted him. What happens when eternal opposites meet? At best, fireworks. Escaping from the woman because fearful that she will 'deny [him] existence' (22:41), evening falls, the sun turns red and, very briefly, day and night become one: 'on the length of mountain-ridge, the snow grew rosy-incandescent like heaven breaking into blossom' (26:12-13). This, for Lawrence, is the fleeing consummation of alien worlds, a brief and magical manifestation of the oneness behind opposites.

But exactly as that beautiful sunset flames across the peaks, in the valley below him Lawrence sees two monks pacing back and forth together between 'bony vines' in their 'wintry garden' (25:8). It's a place bereft of either sunlight or shadow, not a consummation of opposites but an annulling of all differences in a twilight world of sterile mental reflection. 'They did not touch each other . . . as they walked,' he notices. 'Their hands were . . . hidden in the long sleeves . . . of their robes' . . . 'Yet there was an eagerness in their conversation' (25:21-5). Then Lawrence produces one of those extraordinary, almost mad paragraphs in which, from a close observation of real phenomena, he leaps to the most fancifully abstract conclusions.

Neither the flare of day nor the completeness of night reached [the monks], they paced the narrow path of the twilight, treading in the neutrality of the law. Neither the blood nor the spirit spoke in them, only the law, the abstraction of the average. The infinite is positive and negative. But the average is only neutral. And the monks trod backward and forward down the line of neutrality. (26:6-11)

Any big idea in Lawrence is set up to be shot down. Never take anything as Bible. He hated the book. All the same, the concept here is central: there is a fruitful and natural way for polarities to encounter each other in conflict, consummation, intensity: a flaming sunset, a red hot argument with Frieda, and there was a negative, merely destructive way, the mind coldly and mechanically neutralising opposites in arid codes of thought and manipulation. This was the territory of Frieda's respectable husband, of contemporary intellectual individualism, of

industrial mechanization. Only Lawrence, it has to be said, could have seen the world's modern ills symbolized in the crepuscular back and forth of two monks in an Italian garden.

Twilight in Italy proceeds with a gallery of local characters, the fascinating, sometimes hilarious account of the performances of a local theatre company, the sensual excitement of an evening's dancing between local peasants and two visiting Englishwomen. On every page Lawrence's ability to capture physical presence is remarkable:

The bersaglieri sit close together in groups, so that there is a strange, corporal connection between them. They have close-cropped, dark, slightly bestial heads, and thick shoulders, and thick brown hands on each other's shoulders . . . And they are quite womanless. There is a curious inter-absorption among themselves, a sort of physical trance that holds them all, and puts their minds to sleep. . . . They are in love with one another . . . (64:32-5, 65:1-7)

At times his indiscretion takes the breath away. Is there any writer today who would follow a sympathetic description of his foreign landlord and landlady with a profound analysis of their imagined sex life and the way the meeting of their bodies is expressive of their different relationships with the land and the community? It is this that most astonishes about Lawrence: the naturalness, almost insouciance, with which he goes deeper than you would have thought possible.

Yet beyond, or rather through these character studies, what he is writing about is the twilight, as he sees it, of a certain Italian mentality: the shedding of the old oneness of man and land in a hierarchical community – the world of the spinner – and the movement towards an obsession with all that is countable and mental and egalitarian, the modern money-driven neurotic life. Hence his concentration on the local Gargano men who have been to America, or who dream of going there: the peasant who went and came back and remained completely untouched by the modern world, in a sense was never really away from his vines and olive trees, and the younger man whose encounter with New York has made life in rural Gargano impossible and who is about to abandon a newly-wedded wife to cross the ocean once more. Profound changes of the spirit are in the air, even in this tiny Italian community. Lawrence understands that. And the reader understands that below the surface Lawrence is seeking to see these things in relation to his own escape from England with Frieda.

So it's appropriate that the first of these Italian books should end with another walk across the Alps in which Lawrence encounters a number of Italian emigrants working in a textile factory in Switzerland. They are escaping the draft. They are looking for money. They are nostalgic for home, for the soil and the food and the sun, but that nostalgia isn't strong enough to take them back. It's moving, among all the chatter and comedy of these episodes, how profoundly and personally troubled Lawrence is by the phenomenon and, above all, by man's strange readiness to embrace everything mechanical. 'Give a man control of some machine,' as he says in *Sea and Sardinia*, 'and at once his air of importance and more-than-human dignity develops (171:27-8). This would be one of the great themes of *The Rainbow*. As he walks back from Switzerland into Italy, watching the spread of roads and railways and factories eating into the mountain landscape, he gives us reflections that might have been written, less eloquently, by some proponent of the no global movement of today.

It is the hideous rawness of the world of men, the horrible, desolating harshness of the advance of the industrial world upon the world of nature that is so painful. It looks as though the industrial spread of mankind were a sort of dry disintegration advancing and advancing, a process of dry disintegration. If only we could learn to take thought for the whole world instead of for merely tiny bits of it. (124:29-34)

Frieda is barely mentioned in *Twilight in Italy*. It's as if Lawrence were still too insecure to let us make her acquaintance. He keeps her to himself, writing poems about her, about how they have overcome their problems. In a way they are coercive poems, informing Frieda and the world that Lawrence's determination that the couple make a success of it has indeed won the day. In 1914 they returned to England to be married.

But by the time we get to *Sea and Sardinia*, everything has changed. True, Lawrence had seen lean times in the Great War. In 1915 *The Rainbow* had been banned for obscenity almost as soon as it was published. Too frail to be a soldier, he was nevertheless repeatedly called up and subjected to a humiliating medical examination. In 1917 he and Frieda were evicted from Cornwall on suspicion of spying for Germany, this as much in response to Lawrence's anti-militarism as Frieda's nationality. In the same year – an even more ridiculous error – his publishers rejected *Women in Love*.

Nevertheless with the end of the war came the chance to shake the dust of England from their feet and almost immediately the Lawrences were in Italy, then on the island of Capri and in Taormina on the eastern slopes of Etna, looking back across the sea to mainland Calabria. And despite all the setbacks, Lawrence now had a reputation! *Sons and Lovers* had won critical acclaim. Above all, he himself understood the importance of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. He was 35. Much had been achieved. Ideas that had still needed to be thrashed out and validated a decade ago were now thoroughly thought through and could be allowed to fall into the background. So there is a different kind of confidence about *Sea and Sardinia*; we can be allowed to meet Frieda.

Lawrence didn't travel to write travel books. 'Comes over one an absolute necessity to move' (141:1), he tells us in the first startling sentence of this book. Perhaps writing all day, living frugally in remote locations, he needed travel for the stimulus of confrontation. 'I love trying things,' he once famously remarked, 'and discovering how I hate them.'¹ Certainly he hated much of what he found in Sardinia.

Where *Twilight in Italy* is a collection of largely disconnected moments, character studies and descriptions held together by theme and style, *Sea and Sardinia* is a rapid, blow-by-blow account of a dozen nightmare days on the move – Sicily to Sardinia and back – a classic collision between exuberant high spirits and repeated disappointments. In this sense it is very much a comedy of the *Three Men in a Boat* variety. Except that where Jerome K. Jerome's charming threesome entertained ordinary middle-class yearnings for a quiet break in idyllic surroundings, Lawrence was once again looking to Sardinia to give him examples of a pre-modern community of dignified manhood. Indeed, he and Frieda had half a mind to set up home there. Needless to say, the greater the expectations, the greater the comedy of disappointment . . .

With masochistic energy the Lawrences depart from their remote villa before dawn. They have packed their 'kitchenino' (144:9), a little food hamper, with bacon sandwiches and a thermos flask (an object of mystery to the Italians). Lawrence carries their clothes in a knapsack, another imported novelty that brings such stares from the Sicilians 'as if I had arrived riding on a pig' (146:32). The description of the dawn-time commuters on the platform at Catania is sublime, likewise the experience of the packed train from Messina to Palermo, the interminable delays, the inexplicably numerous officials: 'You know them by their caps. Elegant tubby little officials in kid-and-patent boots and

gold-laced caps, tall long-nosed ones in more gold-laced caps, like angels in and out of the gates of heaven they thread in and out of the various doors' (150:19–22).

On the boat from Palermo, too, the multitudinous crew are only occasionally and seemingly casually involved in the business of navigation. Their real task is to make life miserable for the passengers. Again and again Lawrence launches into rhapsodies: how he loves the freedom of the sea, how he appreciates Sicilian bakery, only to be quickly and comically deflated by seasickness, rudeness and squalor. When he and Frieda get off the boat at Trapani in search of some nice little cakes they find that the city that 'looks so beautiful from the sea . . . is a cross between an outside place where you throw rubbish and a humpy unmade road in a raw suburb, with a few iron seats, and litter of old straw and rag' (174:13–18).

Never actually named, Frieda is referred to at first as 'the queen bee' (143:33) which is as much as to say: she who is ministered unto by all while rather grandly doing nothing herself. But what the queen bee does do is to offer a foil to Lawrence's ups and downs. When Lawrence is disgusted by the begging of a filthy little girl pushing a fat baby against him, Frieda kindly talks to the girl, asks the baby's name. In fact, Frieda talks to everybody who irritates Lawrence and seems to dislike everyone he likes. Perhaps it's because of this that 'queen bee' very quickly becomes just 'q-b' in the ironic shorthand of the now established marriage.

The climax of the trip comes when, after many vicissitudes, they reach the tiny village of Sorgono, deep in the Sardinian interior. Lawrence has been enthusing wildly about the 'lovely unapproachable-ness' (196:30–31) of the Sardinian peasants in their traditional dress and strange black stocking caps:

they wear [them] as a sort of crest, as a lizard wears his crest at mating time . . . A handsome fellow with a jaw of massive teeth pushes his cap back and lets it hang a long way down his back. Then he shifts it forward over his nose, and makes it have two sticking-out points, like fox-ears, above his temples. It is marvellous how much expression these caps can take on. They say that only those born to them can wear them. They seem to be just long bags, nearly a yard long, of black stockinette stuff. (221:32–222:3)

Lawrence loves this. He loves the fact that these men still refuse to accept 'the world's common clothes. Coarse, vigorous, determined,

they will stick to their own coarse dark stupidity and let the big world find its own way to its own enlightened hell' (222:31–4).

This is fantastic. And the way they treat their women, brusque, hostile almost, as befits people who accept the 'defiant, splendid split between the sexes' (201:20–21) makes our champion of polarities even more appreciative. No twilight here. Sex is about opposites, about kissing and strife, as Lawrence once wrote: 'Give me the old, salty way of love. How I am nauseated with sentiment and nobility, the macaroni slibery-slobbery mess of modern adorations' (201:26–9).

Then they arrive in Sorgono where the only hotel is filthy and cold, the proprietor is filthy and rude, and the streets are filthy and smelly, for the simple reason that they are used as toilets. Lawrence now falls into a sort of John Cleese rage, a wonderful send-up of himself:

I cursed the degenerate aborigines, the dirty-breasted host who *dared* to keep such an inn, the sordid villagers who had the baseness to squat their beastly human nastiness in this upland valley. All my praise of the long stocking-cap . . . vanished from my mouth. I cursed them all, and the q-b for an interfering female. (230:24–8)

Yet the more things go wrong, the more, deep down, Lawrence seems pleased, as if the scenario that would most have frightened him would have been to find what he was looking for, the ideal place for himself and Frieda to live. Indeed, *Sea and Sardinia* has a great deal to say about fear, and it is this that establishes its centrality in the writer's oeuvre. Everywhere he goes Lawrence is concerned he will be cheated, robbed, badly served, badly fed, bored by hangers on, harangued by ignorant people blaming him for the British government's foreign policy ('I am not the British Isles on two legs' (184:24)). He immediately picks up on such details as shoes left outside a hotel room, or doors left open on the streets, as indications of the level of local honesty. Towards the end of the book, afraid of not finding a cabin on the night steamer from Naples back to Palermo, he and Frieda try to gain time by making their own way to the docks while the train is still stopped in the station. Afraid now of being fleeced, they reject the idea of a taxi – 'I am wary of that boa-constrictor, a Naples cabman after dark' (311:16–17) – and walk alone through 'the vast black quicksands of that harbour road' where 'One feels peri all round' (311:29–30). Did Lawrence go to Italy, one sometimes wonders, precisely because it had a reputation for being dangerous.

When they reach the ticket office, he plunges 'into the fray. It literally is a fight. Some thirty men all at once want to get at a tiny wicket in a blank wall' (312:3-5). Lawrence constantly has to look to his wallet. Yet he is not upset:

Somehow or other, waking and sleeping one's spirit must be on its guard nowadays. Which is really what I prefer, now I have learnt it. Confidence in the goodness of mankind is a very thin protection indeed. . . . Therefore, tight on my guard, like a screw biting into a bit of wood, I bit my way through that knot of fellows, to the wicket, and shout for two first-class. The clerk inside ignores me for some time, serving soldiers. But if you stand like Doomsday you get your way. Two firsts, says the clerk. Husband and wife, say I. . . . (312:18-27)

To stand like Doomsday! Isn't this how Lawrence had won Frieda? Isn't this how he had convinced the publishers to accept his work? And how he survives in Italy. An act of sheer will, of fear turned into desperate forcefulness. 'Husband and wife' indeed. What a proud proclamation! With all its comic encounters, little disasters, raptures, and above all its exhausting search for decent food and shelter, *Sea and Sardinia* is the book that most candidly reveals Lawrence as he must have been in his many travelling adventures, friendly one moment, aloof the next, then belligerent, and always up or down according to whether Frieda was down or up. One thing in particular that emerges is the tension between his enormous appetite (for food and life) and an incredible parsimoniousness: he was simply determined to save every possible penny. Hence it's an added comic twist to discover that the original manuscript of *Sea and Sardinia*, written over a matter of weeks immediately after the trip, was thereafter consumed as toilet paper.

Turning to *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, the last of Lawrence's travel books, we find that Frieda has disappeared again. We are six years on, Lawrence is 41, and once again everything has changed. The two of them have travelled in Asia, Australia, America and Mexico. Vast amounts of writing have been done. Lawrence is recognised as one of the great novelists of his time, of any time. But his health is collapsing. In 1924 he suffered a serious bronchial haemorrhage. In 1925 tuberculosis was diagnosed. In 1926, back in Italy again, Frieda had taken a lover. Angelo Ravagli, a man twelve years younger than herself. Now, in March 1927, she left Lawrence in their rented accommodation near Florence to visit her family in Germany, but quite probably, as

her husband no doubt understood, stopping in Trieste on the way to see Ravagli.

Partly to console himself, Lawrence set off with an old friend, Earl Brewster, on a tour of the Etruscan tombs in various small towns fifty or so kilometres north-west of Rome on the Tyrrhenian coast. If *Twilight in Italy* was written from the excitement of his first home with Frieda and *Sea and Sardinia* in the heyday of their relationship as they searched for a new home and lifestyle, *Sketches of Etruscan Places* more sombriely but very beautifully describes a different kind of house-hunt: the exploration of a number of underground chambers and tunnels '[c]ut out of the living rock' yet 'they are just like houses' (338:37). The houses of the dead. Returning to the antique past, Lawrence was looking to his personal future. He was dying. Tuberculosis was not an enemy against whom one could stand like Doomsday. It was Doomsday. Before very long there would be no impediment to Frieda Lawrence becoming Frieda Ravagli.

Lawrence's interest in the Etruscans, whose many city states thrived in central Italy before the founding of Rome, was not new. For many years he had seen this forgotten people as emblematic of the sort of pagan consciousness he admired and emulated. Most emblematic of all was their total destruction at the hands of, as he saw it, a mechanistic, militaristic Rome. Having just finished a second draft of the polemical *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence opens *Sketches of Etruscan Places* in the same argumentative spirit. In particular, he is eager to underline the deep alliance throughout history between the brutal will to power and puritanical morals, an alliance, as he sees it, still alive in 1927 both in imperial Britain and Fascist Italy. The Etruscans loved the symbols of the phallus and the ark (the womb) and displayed them everywhere. Small stone phalluses are placed in the wall outside the tombs of all the men. This, Lawrence says, is why Etruria had to be wiped out.

Even in their palmy days, the Romans were not exactly saints. But they thought they ought to be. They hated the phallus and the ark, because they wanted empire and dominion and above all, riches: social gain. You cannot dance gaily to the double flute, and at the same time conquer nations or rake in large sums of money. (342:36-40)

But gradually the polemics fade and *Sketches of Etruscan Places* finds a rhythm all its own, becoming, before too long, the most serene and unstrained of all Lawrence's books. It is the spirit of the landscape

Introduction

and the spirit with which the Etruscans approached death that alter the tone.

There is a stillness and a softness in these great grassy mounds with their ancient stone girdles, and down the central walk [of the burial ground] there lingers still a kind of homeliness and happiness . . .

The same when we went down the few steps, and into the chambers of rock, within the tumulus. There is nothing left. It is like a house that has been swept bare . . . But whoever it is that has departed, they have left a pleasant feeling behind them . . . (338:23-34)

All his adult life, Lawrence had sought to live as a pagan in the modern world. Not an atheist, atheism being, as he saw it, just a negative dogmatism brought into being by monotheistic religion. He had looked for a way out of repressive Christian morality, while never seeking to be either immoral or amoral. And he had likewise looked for a way out of the general scramble for money and social status. But the supreme test of any life comes with the imminence of death. Reconstructing the mindset of these people who left us almost nothing but their tombs, yet whose tombs impart a deep sense of peace, Lawrence is seeking to prepare himself for the final journey.

It's a beautiful story. Crawling into one burial chamber after another with his friend, a guide and a couple of candles, Lawrence examines the many paintings on the ancient walls, conjuring up from their strange detail and symbolism the Etruscan way of life, their aesthetic sense, their religious practices, social hierarchy, how they lived in intimate contact with their bodies and nature. 'The things they did,' he remarks, 'in their easy centuries, are as natural and as easy as breathing. They leave the breast breathing freely and pleasantly, with a certain fulness of life' (341:9-11).

For a man who suffered such severe lung problems, this was an achievement to yearn for. Finally, Lawrence had found a pre-modern culture that did not disappoint him as, over recent years, Sardinia, Ceylon, New Mexico and Mexico had all in their different ways disappointed. The reason is obvious. The Etruscans were no longer around to bother Lawrence with poor food, indifferent table manners and dodgy sanitation.

Or are they? The key to a reading of *Sketches of Etruscan Places* is the idea of continuity:

Introduction

death, to the Etruscan, was a pleasant continuance of life, with jewels and wine and flutes playing for the dance. It was neither an ecstasy of bliss, a heaven, nor a purgatory of torment. It was just a natural continuance of the fulness of life. Everything was in terms of life, of living. (341:15-19)

If a sense of continuity is the right approach to death, then Lawrence will reproduce the principle in his book. Where another writer would have focused entirely on the Etruscans, on the tombs and their paintings, he moves freely between the artefacts of millennia ago and the modern Tuscan landscape outside, between reflections on migration in the fifth century BC and the boy who drives him and his friend across the low, windy hills in a pony cart, and then the hotel proprietors, the waiters, the part-time guide who works on the railways, the young German archaeologist at once so knowledgeable and so unimpressed. With a sureness of touch that isn't quite there in the earlier works, Lawrence leaves it to the reader to grasp the connection between the Fascist busybody determined to examine his passport in Civitavecchia and the Romans who destroyed the Etruscans. And he is entirely convincing when he finds in the face and manner of the local village women the same traits he has seen in the underground paintings. One way or another, he decides, the Etruscans will always be with us. And slowly but surely this ease of movement between ancient and modern, burial chamber and hotel room, begins to establish a curious mood of alert tranquillity, something as far from the Domsday defiance of the earlier Lawrence as one could possibly imagine.

An Etruscan prince, Lawrence tells us, would have a 'little bronze ship of death' (339:29) on the stone bed beside his sarcophagus. 'The prince, unlike his people, was an initiate in the mysteries of the cosmos, and above all in the 'mystery of the journey out of life, and into death' (378:5). He was at once a ruler and a priest. 'Try as you may,' Lawrence remarks, and certainly he had tried, 'you can never make the mass of men throb with full awakenedness' (376:40-377:1). 'Only a few are initiated into the mystery of the bath of life, and the bath of death' (376:34).

Now, visiting the tombs of the Etruscan princes, Lawrence feels a growing identity with these ruler priests. He too is an initiate in life's mysteries. He too would build his ship of death, a vessel that might take him across the stormy waters to the last horizon of being. *Sketches of Etruscan Places* marks the moment when Lawrence consciously began to build that boat. It would not be complete until, on his deathbed, he wrote

Introduction

the extraordinary poem, 'The Ship of Death'. As with *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, the tone was one of quiet, unblinking acceptance. One short stanza runs:

Oh build your ship of death, your little ark
and furnish it with food, with little cakes, and wine
for the dark flight down oblivion.³

Reading these lines, it's hard not to remember the kitchenino of *Sea and Sardinia*, so carefully packed for the voyage out, hard not to think of the little cakes that he and his queen bee sought so avidly in Trapani and Cagliari, and indeed of all the dark wine drunk, chapter after chapter, in these three remarkable books on Italy. As with the Etruscan paintings he so lovingly described, the sense of continuity between life and death is powerful. Perhaps, at the very end, Lawrence had managed to become truly pagan.

Tim Parks

NOTES

1. Letter to Earl Brewster, 15 May 1922, from Darlington, West Australia, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. 4, *June 1921–March 1924*, ed. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 239.
2. E.g. line 1 of 'Death is not Evil, Evil is Mechanical', *Last Poems* (1932), in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 713.
3. Section 5, lines 11–13, *Last Poems*, in *The Complete Poems*, ed. de Sola and Roberts, p. 718.

Further Reading

CRITICAL STUDIES OF LAWRENCE'S WORK

The following is a selection of some of the best Lawrence criticism published since 1985.

Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge University Press, 1992). Philosophically-based analysis of Lawrence's work.

Michael Black, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Fiction* (Macmillan, 1986).

Very close analytical approach to Lawrence's fiction up to and including *Sons and Lovers*.

James C. Cowan, *D. H. Lawrence: Self and Sexuality* (Ohio State University Press, 2002). Sensitive and intelligent psychoanalytical study.

Keith Cushman and Earl G. Ingersoll, eds., *D. H. Lawrence: New Worlds* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003). Gathers essays about Lawrence and America.

Paul Eggert and John Worthen, eds., *Lawrence and Comedy* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Collects essays concerning Lawrence's uses of satire and comedy.

David Ellis, ed., *Casebook on 'Women in Love'* (Oxford University Press, 2006). Essays of modern criticism.

David Ellis and Howard Mills, *D. H. Lawrence's Non-Fiction: Art, Thought and Genre* (Cambridge University Press, 1988). Collection which examines in particular Lawrence's writing of the 1920s.

Anne Fernihough, *D. H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology* (Oxford University Press, 1993). Wide-ranging enquiry into the intellectual context of Lawrence's writing.

Anne Fernihough, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). Usefully wide-ranging collection.

Louis K. Greiff, *D. H. Lawrence: Fifty Years on Film* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2001). Detailed account and analysis of screen adaptations.

Louis K. Greiff, *D. H. Lawrence: Fifty Years on Film* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2001). Detailed account and analysis of screen adaptations.

Further Reading

- G. M. Hyde, *D. H. Lawrence* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1990). Brief but provocative account of all Lawrence's writing.
- Earl G. Ingersoll, *D. H. Lawrence, Desire and Narrative* (University Press of Florida, 2001). Postmodern approach to the major fiction.
- Paul Poplawski, ed., *Writing the Body in D. H. Lawrence: Essays on Language, Representation, and Sexuality* (Greenwood Press, 2001). Gathers modern essays.
- N. H. Reeve, *Reading Late Lawrence* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Especially finely written account of Lawrence's late fiction.
- Neil Roberts, *D. H. Lawrence, Travel and Cultural Difference* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Valuable post-colonial study of Lawrence's travel-related writings 1921–5.
- Carol Siegel, *Lawrence Among the Women: Wavering Boundaries in Women's Literary Traditions* (University Press of Virginia, 1991). Important and wide-ranging feminist reassessment of Lawrence.
- Jack Stewart, *The Vital Art of D. H. Lawrence* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1999). Insightful study of Lawrence and the visual arts.
- Peter Widdowson, ed., *D. H. Lawrence* (Longman, 1992). Useful collection surveying contemporary theoretical approaches to Lawrence.
- Linda Ruth Williams, *Sex in the Head: Visions of Femininity and Film in D. H. Lawrence* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993). Feminist approach to selected works of Lawrence.
- John Worthen and Andrew Harrison, eds., *Casebook on 'Sons and Lovers'* (Oxford University Press, 2005). Essays of modern criticism.

REFERENCE, EDITIONS, LETTERS AND BIOGRAPHY

The standard bibliography of Lawrence's work is *A Bibliography of D. H. Lawrence*, 3rd edn., ed. Warren Roberts and Paul Poplawski (Cambridge University Press, 2001). A useful reference work is Paul Poplawski's *D. H. Lawrence: A Reference Companion* (Greenwood Press, 1996) which gathers material up to 1994 and includes comprehensive bibliographies for most of Lawrence's works; Poplawski's 'Guide to further reading' in the *Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence* goes up to 2000.

Further Reading

Lawrence's letters – arguably including some of his very best writing – have been published in an eight-volume complete edition, edited by James T. Boulton and published by Cambridge University Press.

Lawrence's work has now been almost completely published in the Cambridge Edition; thirty-three volumes have appeared and are variously available in paperback and hardback. The edited texts from a number of the volumes have also been published by Penguin.

A biographical work on Lawrence still worth consulting is the magnificent three-volume *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, ed. Edward Nehls (University of Wisconsin Press, 1957–9). Between 1991 and 1998, Cambridge University Press published a three-volume biography which remains the standard work: John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years 1885–1912* (1991), Mark Kinkad-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile 1912–1922* (1996) and David Ellis, *D. H. Lawrence: Dying Game 1922–1930* (1998). The most recent single-volume modern biography is that by John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider* (Penguin Books, 2005).