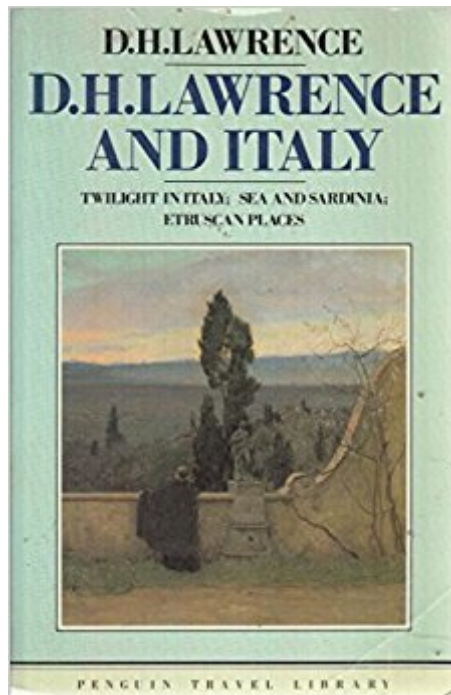


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D. H. Lawrence And Italy (Travel Library, Penguin)



Synopsis

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. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), English novelist, storywriter, critic, poet and painter, one of the greatest figures in 20th-century English literature. Among his works, *Sons and Lovers* appeared in 1913, *The Rainbow* in 1915, *Women In Love* in 1920, and many others. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

If you love Lawrence's fiction then don't miss the chance to get on board with him as he searches out the last of the soulful and wild places that may be found beyond the contagion of civilization. Even a century ago he knew that the chances were slim to come upon a place of primal vitality yet he pushes on sensitive to the faintest glow, reaffirming life. Weary of traveling, at times he is cynical, repetitive, even boring but that's just the set up for the great writer to deliver the goods.

These essays are classics. Etruscan Places almost single-handedly revived "modern" interest in the Etruscans and was essential to the preservation and study of their tombs and paintings.

Throughout, Lawrence is sensitive and insightful. An added patina to these works is the fact that

they were written in the 1930s during the build-up toward WWII. There is an immediacy mixed with nostalgia here that is compelling.

Three travel narratives chart the growth of Lawrence as well as introducing his takes on Italy. "Twilight in Italy," from 1916, looks at Italians trying to evade the wartime draft by working in Switzerland, as well as Lawrence's journeys around Lake Garda and the town of Gargnano. It's full of his denunciations of the industrial world, paeans to the Not-Me, the phallus, male energy, female life-forces, and affirmation of the darker forces within, under the complacent or cowed civilization. Therefore, depending on one's predilections for DHL, this may deter or reward you as a reader today. The highlights are in the quiet moments. He observes a shy, awkward, nearly silent woman caring for him in a gloomy inn. He listens to Italian anarchists imagine their better world, but he cannot join them. He watches the landscape, tries to fit in, and he laments the loss of the lemon groves to foreign competition. Paolo and Maria epitomize a young married couple whose future does not bode well, in DHL's prediction. As Tim Parks notes in his introduction (which compiles, skillfully, all of the best lines or most telling scenes from these three books), DHL makes out of a passing vista of two monks pacing outdoors a magisterial summation on the decline of modern man in the past century. He shows by a weary hiker from a London suburb, on too-quick a holiday, how vacations hurry us all today. After WWI, "Sea and Sardinia" was published after a week's visit in January 1921. DHL and Frieda ("the q-b") are the companions who find themselves fending off the locals. "I am not the British Isles on two legs." (184) So he splendidly sums up his predicament, as he resents being tagged for the loss by the Axis and the problems of Empire. But he also writes of his hope that the stocking-capped men on the island rise up and burst into exertion based on their fiery blood, rather than capitulate to the American order and its wholesome wishes for peace. So, like in book one, there's some contradiction. But the complaints about the voyages, the poor service, the bad meals, the dreary villages, entertain. One realizes DHL engages in this sour mood for fun, and he sets himself up as a bit of straw man. Tallying his costs, he jots how much he paid for every meal, accommodation, and ticket. He depicts the woeful inn where chickens parade outside, he complains of tiresome priests, and he wishes for pagans to return to the enchanted isle. However, it's obvious DHL preaches to himself, not us. He manages to eke two-hundred pages out of his journals, even if not much in Sardinia "really happens." "Whenever one is in Italy, either one is conscious of the present, or of the mediaeval influences, or of the far, mysterious gods of the early Mediterranean. Wherever one is, the place has its conscious genius." (250) Lawrence goes on a lot like this, if less so than in the first or last accounts here. He contrasts the post-war ennui with the

crackdowns of the new "regime" in Italy. He is sick of museums, artifacts taken out of context, "Carpaccio and Botticelli": he'd rather watch a peasant. "The horrors of barbarism are not so fearful, I verily believe, as the horrors of strangulation with old culture. Beauty as we know it is a millstone around our necks, and I am fairly choked." (276) "And as for the Italian good-nature, it forms a sound and unshakeable basis nowadays for their extortion and self-justification and spite." (310) He knows enough Italian to hear what is said when his back is turned from those who wait upon him. Those readers who come to this volume expecting light effusion and fulsome anecdotes will be thwarted. These episodes are full of contempt for our time, as they appeal to a romantic, unhinged, and more innocent era of fewer inhibitions. His last section, "Sketches of Etruscan Places and other Italian Essays," appeared in 1932, after his death. Written among those Tarquinian tombs with mortality in mind, these 1927 excursions naturally edge into seriousness. The Penguin Classic does not include all the "other essays" of co-editor Simonetta de Fillipis' 1992 Cambridge edition, so this is a concise hundred pages, mostly below ground in Tuscany. Lawrence reminds us how the ancients built out of wood, so all that survives is under the earth, the stone tombs. "So that the etruscan cities vanished completely as flowers. Only the tombs, like bulbs, were underground." (335) He continues in this vein: "Italy today is far more etruscan in its pulse, than Roman; and will always be so. The etruscan element is like the grass of the field and the sprouting of corn, in Italy: it will always be so. Why try to revert to the Latin-Roman mechanism and suppression?" So he asks, as the Fascist rule tries to refurbish the ancient, imperial, ruthless legacy that crushed the Etruscan spirit.

I haven't started reading it but the book is very lighth and soft. well printed

D.H. LAWRENCE AND ITALY is composed of three stories: 'Twilight in Italy', 'Sea and Sardinia' and 'Etruscan Places'. The first two "books" seem to be based on journals he wrote while traveling with his German born lover then wife Frieda, whom he refers to as q-b for queen bee, through various villages on the mainland of Italy and the island of Sardinia. Lawrence does not record his experience of "famous" sights in these two books, in fact he says he is not interested in historical places, museums etc. but rather he wishes to see the people and the places in the out-of-the way areas of Italy. He and Frieda travel by bus, train, and boat--close to the ground. Those who have read Lawrence's fiction will recognize his writing. He describes what he encounters with a visceral language--people, clothing, food, establishments. Some of the places are stunning and some so filthy you wonder how he could have stayed overnight. He visits lemon and olive groves and various

high places along the coast and in the interior valleys. His writing is graphic--the reader will be as appalled and enchanted. He reflects Italy just before and after WWI. In the third book, 'Etruscan Places', Lawrence describes his visits to various Etruscan sites, including the painted tombs of Tarquinia. His writing is less descriptive than that of the first two books. He is concerned with nothing less than the meaning of life, and the conflict between religion and truth (he died a few short years later at age 44 so his reflections seem almost prescient). He muses that societies are organized around death or life. He speaks of the use of fertility symbols such as fish and lambs for Christians and dolphins and eggs for Etruscans; the significance of the color vermilion -- male body painting by warrior classes where red paint connotes power contrasted with the the red skin coloring of the Etruscan tomb portraits which seems to have connoted the blood of life. He says the Etruscans loved life and the Romans who subdued them loved power. Lawrence's book provides good background for those who would know more about Italy. Many of the places he describes have changed since the 1920s--some for the better. The people have changed--their clothing, homes, etc. are less unique and colorful, but they are better fed, warmer in winter, and cleaner. Hopefully their lives are better, but I don't think Lawrence would agree.

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