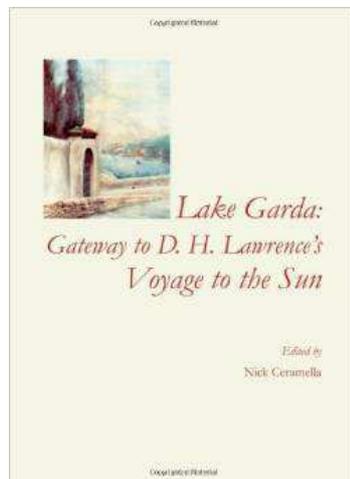




Lake Garda: Gateway to D. H. Lawrence's Voyage to the Sun

Edited by Nick Ceramella

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Recensione di Luigi D'Agnone¹

In dealing with the English literary context of the early twentieth century, one's attention is often drawn to cutting-edge modernist experiments, and less acclaimed narratives tend to be overlooked. The accounts of travels through different countries and the challenge to western stereotypes is a case in point, especially in D.H. Lawrence's output. This is the central argument of *Lake Garda: Gateway to D. H. Lawrence's Voyage to the Sun*, a collection of essays by scholars of Lawrence, edited by Nick Ceramella in 2013 and first presented in 2012 during a Symposium in Gargnano, where Lawrence lived from 3 September 1912 until 11 April 1913.

Back in the thirties, travel literature commonly aimed at mere reports of stays abroad or voyages to unfamiliar places, with an immediate effect of realism and authorial reliability. Lawrence approached this genre differently, being at the same time unconcerned with faithful narrations and concentrated on the emotional impact of the aesthetic resonances in everyday life. The impact of long travels on Lawrence's personal development and literary career is central to the eight sections of the volume, namely, "Twilight in Italy: Varying Approaches," "Sympathetic Moon and Hostile Sun," "Why a Northerner Travels South," "Going South on a Self-discovery Trip," "Lawrence, Religion and the Cult of the Sun," "Lawrence and Dance," "Lawrence and Music," "Lawrence and Painting." On the whole, this work mainly follows two paths: on the one hand, the need to move away from England in search of existential answers, such as how to reappropriate a primitive awareness of the body and, on the other hand, the symbolism of natural archetypes such the sun and the moon, in terms of turning points in the writer's thought. As a synthesis of these parallel lines of research, the common thread to the contributions is the great importance laid on Lawrence's relationships with the places he visited and the people he encountered during his restless travels throughout Italy and South America.

As the opening of *Sea and Sardinia* states: "Comes over one an absolute necessity to move." Starting from this supporting idea, a number of contributions analyses *Twilight in Italy* (1916), the record of the first time Lawrence came into contact with Italian people in 1912, after walking southwards from Germany across the Alps. Getting to know the local traditions and mindset, he created the dialectic between "blood-consciousness" and "mind-consciousness," which would feature his later prose and verse. The Italian

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countrymen's lifestyle became a symbol of primitivism, and a means to avoid the risk of culture prevailing over nature. Though recalling the romantic criticism of the industrial progress and alienation, the above-mentioned issue turns out to be more deeply rooted into the heart of human relationships. There is the overall attempt to recover an original state of things, wherein people entrust social connections to senses and not to cultural conventions.

Not only do the contributors underline the importance of Lawrence's stay in Gargnano, but they also focus on the sensible change in his perspective as he came across southern landscapes and cultures, as particularly shown by Paul Eggert's "Lawrence, Twilight in Italy and the Limits of the Foreign: A Print Culture Approach" and Mihaela Irimia's "In England you have wealth... Here, we have the sun." Actually, as a doorway to Mediterranean habits, northern Italy is a sort of borderline area between the realm of reason and the realm of senses, thus creating an unbridgeable gap. These hints clearly bring to mind the study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) by Max Weber, where the German sociologist investigated the link between ascetic protestantism and the spread of capitalism in northern Europe over the last few centuries. This phenomenon would seem to partially account for the "English attitude" towards commitment at work or self-denial but, by contrast, it seems to justify the disinterested behaviour of the Italian peasants towards work as a source of salvation, due to their dominant catholic influence.

Twilight in Italy, largely referred to in "D. H. Lawrence's 'Black Sun': Masculinity and Melancholia in *Twilight in Italy*" by Howard J. Booth, "Lawrence's Italy: An Adventure Down Old Religious Pathways" by Jane Costin and "Christs in the Tyrol – and in the Body of Lawrence's Writing" by Paul Poplawski, is the forerunner of later works such as *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), *Mornings in Mexico* (1927) and the posthumous *Sketches from Etruscan Places* (1932). These travel reports were discussed at the Gargnano Symposium for the way they show how travelling southwards stands for a growing closeness to the "religion of the blood" and the archaic world of rituals. As to the blood-mind opposition, particularly during his stay in Italy, Lawrence came up with an insight into the struggle between the Romans and the Etruscans, rendered through his impressions in *Sketches from Etruscan Places*. The author found a radical divergence of thought in life: the dionysian behaviour of the native Etruscans (still visible in their frescoed chambers and painted tombs), and the overwhelming presence of apollonian traits in the Roman invaders.

The image of the sun is of no less importance. The discussion is mostly based on the short story *The Sun* (1926), featuring both a Sicilian setting with its regenerating sunshine and the essential duality of this source of light. Izabel F. O. Brandão's essay "Lawrence and the Healing Italian 'Sun': Reweaving Links with the Body," specifically dealing with this plot, puts the stress on the topological and symbolic opposition between New York and the Italian island: the urban centre of the American "melting pot" comes to represent the pole of dullness, foggish atmospheres and emotional dysphoria, while the southern "paradise" is the homeland of the sun and the cause of physical rebirth. Beyond these differences, there emerges the doubleness of the story title: *sun* (described as a lover) and *son* are homophones, so that two main elements of the narration, such as the cure by sun exposure and the birth of a child, coincide phonetically and thematically. Hence, this suggests a latent Oedipus complex which identifies both the seducer and the son that Julie (the protagonist) bears with the sun.

The themes of travelling and the sun as a symbol of primeval force undeniably give voice to Lawrence's cosmogony and widely pervade his own vision of human relationships. In view of these leading topics, the closing sentence of his reflection on the Book of Revelations entitled *Apocalypse* (1930), that states "Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen," effectively sheds some light on his philosophy and becomes a key to reading the essays in the collection.

In addition, the miscellany includes a CD released by the American pianist William Neil and the Dutch soprano Charlotte Stoppelenburg. It contains the musical versions of twelve poems by Lawrence, which manage, through a well-reasoned intersemiotic translation, to reproduce a series of analogies between discursive strategies and sounds variations.