

# SICILY IN D.H. LAWRENCE'S IMAGERY

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## 1. Introduction

Similarly to several, other British artists, D.H. Lawrence has always been fascinated by the Mediterranean Myth and, consequently, by Italy and Sicily in particular, the places where most myths are strictly rooted, at least in his opinion [1]. In fact, D.H. Lawrence (fig. 1) uses only Sicily, although there are other places for the myth, as suggested by J. Campbell [2]. Thus, D.H. Lawrence's visits to Italy were not only rooted in the wish of perpetuating the eighteenth century "Grand tour", or the Byron-Shelley Italian experience which brilliantly he alludes to in *Twilight in Italy* [3], but also in his desire of penetrating – as he says – into Italy whose life is, just to quote his words from *Sea and Sardinia*:

*so primitive, so pagan [...] Whenever one is in Italy, either one is conscious of the present, or of the Medieval influences, or of the far, mysterious gods of the early Mediterranean [...] Proserpine, or Pan, or even the strange "[.] gods" of the Etruscans [4].*



Figure 1. Photo of D.H. Lawrence.

Thus, D.H. Lawrence's appeal for Italy and Sicily is connected to his visits to different Italian places in three different periods<sup>1</sup>. Among the places, which are transcribed not only in his travel books, but also in some of his novels, short-stories, essays and poems<sup>2</sup>, Sicily has an important role not only because of the myth, which seems to be inborn in the island, but also because of the beauty of the landscape and of the people, not to mention the influence of the Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga. Impressed by his literary production, D.H. Lawrence translated some novels and stories by G. Verga, such as: *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* (1923), *Little Novels of Sicily (Novelle Rusticane, 1925)*, and *Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories* (1928).

It is worth adding, that D.H. Lawrence's literary production, strongly imbued with autobiographical nuances, is deeply connected to his experience of self-discovery as to contribute to constituting his whole poetics which ends up in representing both a spiritual and a metaphysical quest. D.H. Lawrence himself declares in *Sea and Sardinia*, his travel book dealing with Sicily and Sardinia, that his discovery of Italy was also a discovery of himself, a "self-discovery":

*to go to Italy and to penetrate into Italy is like a most fascinating act of self-discovery - back, back down the old ways of time [...] Italy has given me back I know not what of myself, but a very, very great deal. She has found for me so much that was lost: like a restored Osiris [5]. (p. 123)*

## 2. D.H. Lawrence's vision

D.H. Lawrence's vision can be traced to mythological, biblical and esoteric sources leading back not only to the Etruscan gods, but also to the *Magna Mater*, the *Earth Mother*, that triple Mediterranean goddess which is reflected in the three phases, or trinity, of the Moon Goddess [6]. His fascination is certainly due to the visual image of the *Earth Mother* as the goddess of corn, represented in the sculpture of *The Seated Demeter* or *Core*, in the archaeological Museum in Syracuse which he visited. Thus, the triple Mediterranean goddess which has been constantly proposed and re-proposed, for the following centuries, in the Italian works of art such as, for instance, in *The Rape of Persephone* by Lorenzo Bernini in Rome, becomes one of the main themes in D.H. Lawrence's books as well as in his collection of poems, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923) (fig. 2).

In fact, Italy seems to preserve its past and to preserve the unknown, the mystery of the Mediterranean Mother Earth, or to use D.H. Lawrence's words in *Twilight in Italy*: "the

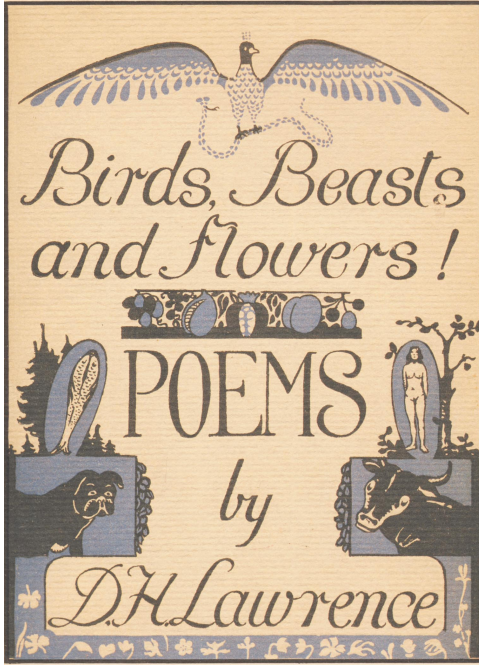


Figure 2. Cover of the 1992 edition of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*.

possession of the unknown, through the senses, which happens under a superb moon" [7]. As well, in *Twilight in Italy*, Italy, as the country of music and wine, seems to keep Pan alive<sup>3</sup>, together with all the underlying symbolic meanings referring to his myth which is strictly linked to the Moon symbolism. Pan, the expression of vitality, of the phallus consciousness and consequently of the senses over the mind, of the instinct over the rationality, seems to be the main reason of D.H. Lawrence's appeal for Italy and Sicily in particular. But the spontaneous and joyous approach to Italy, which is expressed in D.H. Lawrence's first Italian sketches as they were published in *The English Review*, is modified in the revised essays printed with the title *Twilight in Italy* in 1916, two

years after his first Italian experience: at the end of his first visit, his disillusionment was caused by the discovery that even the Italians – as the English before them – were very close to lose most of their ancient qualities, even the instinctual way of living life and, consequently, the capacity to express themselves physically with a touch which metaphorically leads to the idea of a possible contact with the cosmos.

### 3. D.H. Lawrence's imagery of the Italians and the Sicilians

D.H. Lawrence's great appeal for the Italians is declared in *Twilight in Italy*: "I liked them [the Italians] too much". In his first perception of the Italians, he had thought of having found the perfect expression of human life, the balance of spirit and senses, which constitutes the spring of the vitality of the Italians, described like this in *Twilight in Italy*:

*These young men are all free-thinkers, great dancers, singers, players of the guitar. [8]*

In *Sea and Sardinia*, the Italians, who 'become' Sicilians, are not less "lively", as D.H. Lawrence describes them:

*They are lively, they throw their arms round one another's necks, they all but kiss.[...] That is how they are. Each one thinks he is as handsome as Adonis and as "fetching" as Don Juan.[...] And that also is how they are. So terribly physically all over one another. [...] They catch each other under the chin, with a tender caress of the hand, and they smile with sunny melted tenderness. [9]*

With their physical approach, the Sicilians, described "as handsome as Adonis", or as some reborn "Don Juan", seem to manifest and share the carnal and sexual energy usually connected to Pan and Dionysus. Moreover, with their physical contact, they seem to simultaneously express the individual and collective touch in a metaphorical reference to the universal, cosmic touch. The Sicilian attitude of "fetching", which was shared by all the Italian men at the time of D.H. Lawrence's visits, recalls "Man is a Hunter", an essay by D.H. Lawrence. In this essay, the natural, vital, or lively characteristics of the Italians are seen as an expression of the pervasive permanence of the Mediterranean Myth. The double-meaning of "man is a hunter! *L' uomo è cacciatore*" simultaneously suggests the ancient rituals of hunting and the idea of virility and sexual energy, symbolized by Pan. As D.H. Lawrence himself explains, in Italy the sentence "man is a hunter! *l'uomo è cacciatore*" "sounds so *virile*": it alludes both to the "game" of hunting and to the "game" of sexes because, as D.H. Lawrence reports, "if it is a question of a man who has got a girl into trouble: *l' uomo è cacciatore!* man is a hunter! What can you expect?" [10].

In *Etruscan Places*, D.H. Lawrence expresses the same fascination, felt during his first visit to Italy, for that spontaneity and vitality of the Italians that he himself had sought in vain throughout his whole life. In his opinion, the Etruscans embody the expression of an ideal society, a mystical past to be brought back to light again [11], because, as he says, "the Etruscan civilization seems a shoot, perhaps the last, from the prehistoric Mediterranean world" [12].

#### 4. The Mediterranean Myth

After his long pilgrimage throughout Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Australia and Mexico, D.H. Lawrence came back to those Mediterranean Gods whose echo resounds even in his travel book, *Mornings in Mexico*. Even from Mexico, D.H. Lawrence was forced to recognize the strength of Italy and of the Mediterranean civilization in his process of self-discovery. In fact, in the last chapter of *Mornings in Mexico*, he perceived the similarities

between Mexico and Sicily, created by the hot climate, the sea, and the pristine Gods. Thus, as if he were feeling nostalgia for Italy and the Mediterranean places of his quest, D.H. Lawrence writes:

*There is a bright moon, so that even the vines make a shadow, and the Mediterranean has a broad white shimmer [...] Sono io! say the Italians. I am I [...] They say: in vino veritas [...] The Mediterranean, so eternally young, the very symbol of youth! [13].*

If the title of the last chapter of *Mornings in Mexico*, “A Little Moonshine with Lemon” – which is also the name of a cocktail – suggests both the Moon and the Pagan Gods, Dionysus or Pan, the Latin sentence in *vino veritas* easily evokes the ancient Mediterranean rituals connected to the magic of drinking, and symbolizing, at the same time, the first step in the process of self-discovery. It is not by chance, then, that *Mornings in Mexico* ends with Italian words which are the translation of the title: “Un poco di chiar di luna, con cannella e limone...” [14]. With the allusion to the Moon together with the use of Italian words, D.H. Lawrence seems to express his nostalgia for the Mediterranean, for the old and hot, hot Sicily, as he defines the island both in the novella *Sun* and in the poem “Snake”.

As already said, in his visits, D.H. Lawrence perceived that Italy was permeated by a lively atmosphere made up of music, dancing and wine; an atmosphere which seemed to be reminiscent of Pagan times, of the old vegetative myths and, consequently, of the pristine Mother Goddess as well as of the God Pan/Bacchus/ Dionysus, traditionally considered the Gods of wine, of fertility and sexual energy. As is revealed even by the title of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, D.H. Lawrence’s idea of life is rooted in a complete communion with nature as in archaic times when Gods were strictly linked to the vegetative process of renewal: in pristine times, both the Moon and the Mother Goddess represented the one, or the whole, in which the multiple aspects of reality co-existed in perfect harmony and balance. At the time of his visits in Sicily, some legacies of Pagan and pristine gods were in part still traceable and visible, as “Purple Anemones”, a poem written in Taormina and collected in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, clearly manifests.

## 5. The imagery of Sicily

Undoubtedly, D.H. Lawrence’s sojourn in Sicily, an island so imbued with mythical hints, confirmed his belief that the only way for revitalizing humanity was a journey back to “the world before the floods”, where Bacchus was still the God, whereas nowadays “Bacchus is a dream’s dream”, as he is defined in the poem “Grapes” [15].

The image of Sicily recurs in D.H. Lawrence's entire literary production, although it is often indirectly suggested, such as in the images of the volcanoes, echoes of that Mount Aetna where the God Vulcan was supposed to live, or in the recurring mythical monsters of Sicily, "Scylla and Charybdis" – as in the novel *Kangaroo* –, or in the pervasive references to the Myth of Pluto and Persephone, which seems to have taken place in Sicily<sup>4</sup>, and precisely in Enna, as told in D.H. Lawrence's poem "Purple Anemones" in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. Moreover, in several poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, Sicily is described in the richness of its nature, with figs, grapes, pomegranates, peaches, almond trees, purple anemones, hibiscus and salvia flourishing everywhere. In other poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, such as "Pomegranate", "Medlars and Sorb-Apples" and "Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers", Sicily is recurrently cited: it is "Syracuse", with "the pomegranate-trees in flower" [16], to offer the background in the poem "Pomegranate", while Syracuse is indirectly mentioned through the image of the "Syracusan wine" in "Medlars and Sorb-Apples" [17]; in the same poem, it is through the double-meaning reference that "Marsala" evokes both the Sicilian town, and the homonymous liquor. Moreover, Sicily is indirectly cited with the reference to "the Sicilian townlets skirting Etna" in "Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers", another poem written in Taormina [18].

It is in "Sicily, [in a] December's Sicily in a mass of rain [...] round Etna" that one can perceive and re-experience the interaction between humanity and nature, that feeling of wonder and mystery which was inborn in primitive peoples and, consequently, in their religions and rituals, as D.H. Lawrence masterly recreates in the poem "Bare Almond-Trees", written in Taormina:

*Wet almond-trees, in the rain,*

[...]

*Out of the deep, soft fledge of Sicilian winter-green,*

[...]

*What are you doing in the December rain?*

*Have you a strange electric sensitiveness in your steel tips?*

*Do you feel the air for electric influences*

*Like some strange magnetic apparatus?*

*Do you take in messages, in some strange code,*

*From heaven's wolfish, wandering electricity, that prowls so  
constantly round Etna?*

[...]

*Sicily, December's Sicily in a mass of rain [...] [19].*

It is worth adding – just to underline how much, for D.H. Lawrence, the Mediterranean Myth is visible in Sicily – that the almond-trees were strictly related to “the white Goddess Artemis [who was] identified with the nymph Phyllis who was metamorphosed into an almond tree” [20].

Moreover, it is in Sicily and precisely in Fontana Vecchia, near Taormina (where D.H. Lawrence spent almost two years) that the Volcano Aetna is a pervasive presence, because, according to the myth, it is there that the God Vulcan used to live. In “Peace”, another poem written in Taormina, he uses the eruptive lava of Aetna as an expression of change and transformation, thus elusively suggesting the process of self-renewal leading to fulfilment. In the poem, he brilliantly shows that everything in life is in constant, although long, transformation, thanks to the image of lava whose meaning is reinforced and multiplied by a subtle comparison with a snake:

[...]

*Brilliant, intolerable lava,*

*Brilliant as a powerful burning-glass,*

*Walking like a royal snake down the mountain towards the sea. [...]*

As D.H. Lawrence reveals in the poem “Peace”, lava can only symbolize an endless process of change, a process which is remarked upon not only thanks to the allusive comparison of lava with the snake – one of the best emblems of transformation – but also thanks to the changes of lava which transforms itself from a “brilliant, burning” and “white-hot” lava into a “Grey-black rock” [21].

### **5.1. Sicily and Myth**

Lava is part of the earth just like any snake, or to use D.H. Lawrence’s words: “the snake was part of the place” in Sicily [22]. One could add that in the volcanic area of Taormina, where D.H. Lawrence had lived, also lava is part of the place like any other flower, or tree, or like the “Sicilian Cyclamens” of the homonymous poem [23], written in Taormina. He describes the Sicilian cyclamens as strictly connected to earth, “Drawn out of earth [...] stone-engendered”, as “ecstatic fore-runner[s]”, and as an expression of a primeval world, a world so old as only the “far-off Mediterranean mornings, when our world began” can re-voke [24]. Similarly, a fig-tree flourishes from a nude rock, as specified in “Bare Fig-Trees”, another poem written in Taormina: the fig-tree<sup>5</sup>, which is “like a rock living [...] Flourishing from the rock in a mysterious arrogance”, seems to be carrying the knowledge of the past, the burden of mystery and to preserve it, and, by “laugh[ing] at Time”, to transmit it endlessly:

*[...] And laugh at Time, and laugh at dull Eternity,  
 And make a joke of stale Infinity,  
 Within the flesh-scent of this wicked tree,  
 That has kept so many secrets up its sleeve,  
 And has been laughing through so many ages  
 At man and his uncomfortablenesses,  
 And his attempt to assure himself that what is so is not so,  
 Up its sleeve. [...] [25].*

This idea of continuity expressed by the elements of nature, such as cyclamens and fig-trees, is reinforced by "Almond Blossom", a poem written in Fontana Vecchia; this inextricable link is manifested by the strength of the almond-trees: not weaker than that of the eruptive lava of the poem "Peace", the strength of the almond-trees emerges as a "supreme annunciation to the world", with "insuperable, subtly-smiling assurance" [26]. This subtle smile, which can be perceived as an untouchable, but pervasive presence in "Almond Blossom", seems to be reminiscent of the smile connected to the fig-trees of the previously cited poem. It is a smile which alludes to the endless cycle of life through a constant renewal, where the new is simply a transformation of the old, a process visible in Sicily thanks to the volcano and its lava. This renewing of life, or the mystery of creation is in line with the primitive religions and with the archaic vegetative myths where the Triple Goddess was an emblem of the whole, or "the mother of all things" who "ruled all living creatures" [27], or the "divine multiplicity in unity" [28]. Thus, as in the archaic, vegetative myths, in D.H. Lawrence's "Almond Blossom", "The tree [,] being life-divine/ Fearing nothing" represents the mystery of creation, or of the perennial renewal of life: it is the mystery which is inborn in nature itself and which is particularly visible in Sicily, as is suggested by the poem: "Something" as a mysterious entity, "Something [which] must be reassuring to the almond, in the evening star [...] / So that the faith in his heart smiles again". Then, it is not by chance that D.H. Lawrence refers to mythical elements such as "the evening star", connected to the Goddess, and "Sirius"<sup>6</sup>, in "Almond Blossom" where "Sirius" is alluded to as "the dog-star" and Aetna is evoked as "the snow-wind", while D.H. Lawrence significantly invokes: "give me the tree of life in blossom".

This "perennial" cycle of life is particularly visible in Sicily, where the transformation of everything is manifested by the previously cited lava which, at the end of a long process, becomes one of the best fertilizers of the land. The same long process is retraceable in those old objects which were first transformed into iron and which, later, after centuries,



became assimilated as part of the almond-trees, or inborn in them, as is revealed in “Almond Blossom”, where the almond-trees are described as “enveloped in iron [...] against the ages”. In the poem, the process of change, which simply means an endless transformation of elements, is explained with these words:

[...]  
*This [Sicily] is the ancient southern earth whence the vases  
were baked, amphoras, craters [...]  
Bristling now with the iron of almond-trees  
Iron, but unforgotten,  
Iron, dawn-hearted,  
Ever-beating dawn-heart, enveloped in iron against the exile,  
against the ages. [...] [29].*

Sicily is described again by D.H. Lawrence as a land imbued with mythological references in “Purple Anemones”. In this poem, written in Taormina, he rewrites, or “revises” the Myth of Pluto and Persephone, as if it had taken place in Sicily and precisely in Enna. Alluding to Pluto, who was “Proserpine’s master” as “the dark one”, as well as to Persephone, Proserpine and Ceres, D.H. Lawrence writes:

[...]  
*And in Sicily, on the meadows of Enna,  
She thought she had left him;  
But opened around her purple anemones,  
Caverns,  
Little hells of colour, caves of darkness,  
Hell, risen in pursuit of her; royal, sumptuous  
Pit-falls. [...] [30].*

## **5.2. Sicily and the snake in poetry and in Sun**

The strictly correlated myths of the Moon Goddess and of the Mother Goddess (or *Magna Mater*), emerge clearly in the references to Proserpine, Persephone and Ceres, three deities representing the Goddess in her multiform manifestations. Mythically both the Moon and the *Magna Mater* are emblems of transformation, since the Moon changes shape weekly in a cycle of twenty-eight days and the *Magna Mater* renews herself yearly in a four-seasons cycle. Consequently, all the elements and creatures sharing these

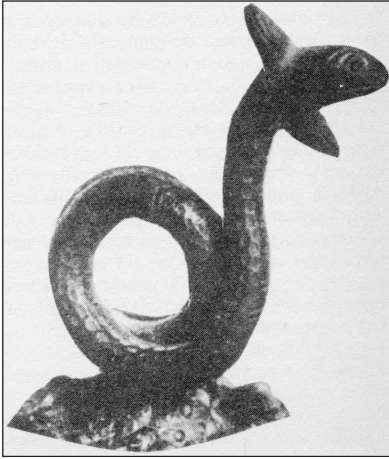


Figure 3. Snake (bronze sculpture).

characteristics are under their dominion: among these, the snake, able to renew “itself by sloughing its skin, suggests the annual renewal of the earth itself [; it] was sacred to Dionysus, and to Asclepius, god of healing and renewal” [31]. Thus, it is not surprising that just in Taormina, “On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking”, D.H. Lawrence ended up not only by comparing lava with a snake, as reported in the poem, “Peace”, but also by writing a poem, entitled “Snake”, when he had the chance to meet a reptilian creature<sup>7</sup>; “the same snake as in the poem, is given in *Sun*”; the snake, which is “both phallic symbol and sacred messenger from the burning darkness” [32], is described by D.H. Lawrence, in the poem “Snake”, in connection with its divine mythical characteristics<sup>8</sup>, connected to the legend of Zeus, who, in the form of a snake, fertilized the virgin Persephone in Sicily (fig. 3):

[...]

*Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the  
earth*

*On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking [...]*

*He drank enough*

*And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken, [...]*

*And looked around like a god [...]* [33].

The snake, which is “like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld/ now due to be crowned again”, and “one of the lords/ Of life” [34], is associated to Pan, a God who, as a fertility symbol, suggests the eternal struggle for life<sup>9</sup>. Once more, D.H. Lawrence elusively suggests that only by restoring old religions – or one could say – by crowning the snake again and consequently the pristine goddess, can humanity rediscover the real meaning of life. Thus, the only way to revitalize our ghostly society seems to go back to the way of life of archaic peoples whose echo is resounding in Sicily. And the snake, with all its metaphorical references, “was part” of Sicily, as D.H. Lawrence declares in the novella *Sun*.

### 5.3. Sun

It is Sicily, and precisely a place facing the sea in Fontana Vecchia, near Taormina, to offer the set for the novella *Sun*. This Sicilian place is described as warm and hot and not only in its landscape with “the bluest seas”, with a richness of wine and olive trees, “groves of lemon” and with the view of the volcano in the distance, but also in its historical roots even older than the Greeks’ arrival in Sicily.

*Even she had a house above the bluest seas, with a vast garden, or vineyard, all wines and olives, dropping steeply in terrace after terrace [...] and the garden full of secret places, deep groves of lemon [...], and hidden, pure green reservoirs of water; then a spring issuing out of a little cavern, where the old Sicules had drunk before the Greeks came [...] There was the scent of mimosa, and beyond the snow of the volcano. [35]*

From this description, it is easy to recognize not only the flourishing Mediterranean landscape, but also the Sicilian area, as the hints both to the volcano Aetna, and to the pristine people, the Sicules who had inhabited this part of the island, clarify. And the beauty of the fertile Sicily is remarked by other descriptions in *Sun*, which underline the hot weather and the landscape, so deeply imbued with colours (*pink, mauve, blue*) and rich in corn:

*The end of February was suddenly very hot. Almond blossom was falling like pink snow, in the touch of the smallest breeze. The mauve, silky little anemones were out, the asphodel tall in bud, and the sea was corn-flower blue. [36]*

In the novella, the relationship of the heroine – the woman who had landed in Sicily – with the Sun is stronger than any other links that the woman has: it is stronger than her ties with her husband and her son. This relationship between the woman and the Sun in the hot Sicily ends up by representing a sacral marriage, as is written in *Sun*:

*She could feel the sun penetrating into her bones; nay, further, even into her emotions and thoughts. [37].*

At the very end – as D.H. Lawrence lets us perceive – it “was not taking sun-baths” only, but [...]it was more than that”: in fact, the woman seems to be ambiguously attracted both by the Sun and by a Sicilian peasant, who seems to recall the supposed, clan-

destine lover of Frieda, D.H. Lawrence's wife, in the days spent in Fontana Vecchia. Confused by these new feelings, elusively, the woman of the novella ends up not only worshipping, but also becoming part of the Sun and, thus, creating a direct and complete connection with the universal, the Sun:

*Something deep inside her unfolded and relaxed, and she was given to a cosmic influence. By some mysterious will inside her, deeper than her known consciousness and her known will, she was put into connection with the sun, and the stream of the sun flowed through her, round her womb. [38].*

Moreover – just to stress once more D.H. Lawrence's idea that the Mediterranean Myth is rooted in Sicily, and still visible there – in the last lines of *Sun*, the mythical image offered by the “Almond blossom falling like pink snow” and the “mauve, silky little anemones”, which are both emblems of the Goddess, is reinforced by another mythical reference to Perseus, the son of Zeus who freed Andromeda; this mythical reference offers an underlying comparison between Andromeda and the American woman who had landed in Sicily.

## 6. Conclusions

D.H. Lawrence's travels in Sicily and Italy can be defined as a significant contribution to his whole literary production, not only because of the artistic and archaeological importance of Italy<sup>10</sup>, or of the descriptions of the landscape and of the inhabitants, not only because Italy represents a form of spiritual quest, and not only because of the Mediterranean myth that ends up in constituting the metaphorical structure by which most of his works are sustained. I would suggest that Italy permeates D.H. Lawrence's production and life in a sort of mutual relationship. For instance, it is curious that the Italian Angelo Ravagli, who embodies Mellors in D.H. Lawrence's Lady *Chatterley's Lover*, by

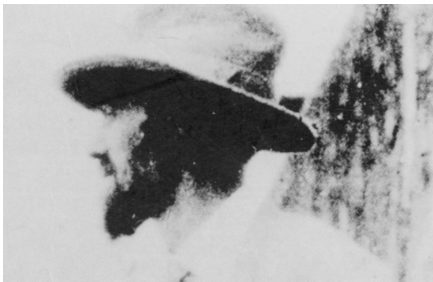


Figure 4. Photo of D.H. Lawrence.

marrying Frieda after D.H. Lawrence's death, paradoxically became in part inheritor of Lawrence's legacy. Although much differently from the intriguing A. Ravagli, even Pino Orioli, from Florence, constituted a very stimulating presence in D.H. Lawrence's life and work, being the publisher of his last works (fig. 4)<sup>11</sup>.

But, there are even more significant

Italian influences because, as he reveals, his interior wish was to penetrate into Italian culture. Then, it is worth noting that D.H. Lawrence knew the Futurists during his stay in Lerici in 1914 –<sup>12</sup>, as he himself wrote in a letter – and that he was used to read Gabriele D’Annunzio and Giovanni Verga since 1916. Moreover, he is also the translator of the Sicilian Verga, thus revealing his interior need to penetrate not only into Italian culture, but also into the Sicilian one and testifying his capacity of mastering the Italian language as well. As a matter of fact, G. Verga influenced D.H. Lawrence strongly, as can be seen in D.H. Lawrence’s story “The Fox”, revised after his immersion in the translation of G. Verga’s *Novelle* and particularly of “La Lupa”. To testify his strong connection with G. Verga, D.H. Lawrence named his house in Fontana Vecchia “La Casa del nespolo”, or “The Medlar Tree House” in the English translation<sup>13</sup>.

But perhaps the most intriguing influence of the Italian culture can be found in D.H. Lawrence’s indirect message to humanity: the only possible future can be rooted on that natural vitality and spirituality which, to his belief, the old Sicilians, the Etruscans and all the archaic Mediterranean people possessed. Thus, by restoring the old Mediterranean civilization, so strictly preserved in Sicily at the time of his visit (1919-1922), humanity can survive.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> His first visit in the north of Italy, from 1912 to June 1914, is reported in *Twilight in Italy* (1916); the second one, from November 1919 to February 1922, in Sicily (in Fontana Vecchia, near Taormina with visits to Messina, Syracuse, Catania and Palermo) and with a tour of Sardinia described in *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), is completed by his visits to Florence, Picinisco and Capri; the third one, from November 1925 to July 1929, is mostly in Florence with a tour to the Etruscan area (April 1927) which is depicted in *Etruscan Places*, published posthumously in 1932. Although these works can be defined as Italian travel books because of the descriptions of the landscape and the environment, of the Italian people and of their artistic expressions, they are more than just travel books, or a series of essays both on his personal impact with Italy and on his process of self-discovery: they express the interaction of D.H. Lawrence’s sensibility with the realities of Italy, with the places and modes of life he encountered, and especially with Sicily, Sardinia and with the ancient Etruscan civilization.

<sup>2</sup> His works with Italian setting are: the novels *The Lost Girl* (1920) and *Aaron’s Rod* (1922); some essays and most poems of the collection, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923). *The Lost Girl*, which deals with Picinisco, was written in Fontana Vecchia, while the novella, *Sun* (1926), set in Sicily, was composed later, on the memory of the old days in Fontana Vecchia, as is subtly suggested by the Sicilian peasant of the story, who seems to recall the Sicilian mule-driver who – as leg-

endary reported – caused the betrayal of D.H. Lawrence's wife, Frieda; see: S. Di Giacomo 2001, *The Long Standing 'British' Tradition on Monte Tauro*, Taorminafilmfest, 121.

<sup>3</sup> See: D.H. Lawrence 1981 (1916), *Twilight in Italy*, in A. Burgess (ed.) *D.H. Lawrence And Italy*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 45, 59, 60, 61.

<sup>4</sup> See: K. Sagar 1999, *The Genesis of "Snake"*, *Etudes Lawrenciennes*, From Primitivism to Post-Modernism, 20, 32.

<sup>5</sup> On Fig symbolism and vegetative symbols, which are strictly linked to the Goddess, see: R. Graves 1997 (1948), *The White Goddess*, The Noonday Press, New York, 253, 257.

<sup>6</sup> "The evening star" and "Sirius" as the dog-star, are connected to the Goddess: see: R. Graves 1997 (1948), *The White Goddess*, The Noonday Press, New York, 53, 58.

<sup>7</sup> The opening lines of "Snake" seem to testify that D.H. Lawrence's experience was real: "A snake came to my water-trough/On a hot, hot day,/ and I in pyjamas for the heat,/ To drink there." Although it is not proved if the event was true or fictional, certainly "Snake" can be compared with "a little myth which draws on ancient myths, psychological archetypes, years of intensive reading, and at least two earlier but quite different encounters with snakes. Lawrence did not need [...] a snake in order to write "Snake" any more than Coleridge needed [...] an albatross to write "The Ancient Mariner" (K. Sagar 1999, *The Genesis of "Snake"*, *Etudes Lawrenciennes*, From Primitivism to Post-Modernism, 20, 37).

<sup>8</sup> On Myth and Sicily, K. Sagar writes: "Lawrence would have known the version of the birth of Dionysus in which Zeus in the form of a snake fertilized the virgin Persephone. She gave birth to Zagreus, the horned god. But Zagreus is Zeus in his underworld aspect, continually giving birth to himself, as snakes were believed to do. This primal rape, from which came all birds, beasts and flowers, took place in Sicily" (*The Genesis of "Snake"*, *Etudes Lawrenciennes*, From Primitivism to Post-Modernism, 20, 32).

<sup>9</sup> On the topic, see: K. Sagar 1992, *Lawrence and the Resurrection of Pan*, in P. Preston (ed.), *D.H. Lawrence: The Centre and the Circles*, University of Nottingham Press, Nottingham, 36.

<sup>10</sup> See: G. Katz-Roi 1997, *Lawrence and Italian Art*, *Etudes Lawrenciennes* 14-15, 1997, 149-160.

<sup>11</sup> D.H. Lawrence's works, published by P. Orioli in Florence, are: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928); *The Story of Doctor Manente, Being the Tenth and the Last Story from the Suppers of A.F. Grazzini Called "il Lasca"* (1929); *The Vergin and the Gipsy* (1930); *Apocalypse* (1931); *Last Poems* (1932).

<sup>12</sup> G.J. Zytaruk. and J.T. Bolton (eds) 1981, *The Letters of D.H.Lawrence*, 2, June 1913-October 1916, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 180-182.

<sup>13</sup> S. Di Giacomo 2001, *The Long Standing 'British' Tradition on Monte Tauro*, Taorminafilmfest, 119-122.

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## Summary

D.H. Lawrence, who spent two years in Sicily, precisely in Fontana Vecchia, near Taormina and Aetna (where the God Vulcan used to live), has always been fascinated by Italy and Sicily in particular, the places where, in his opinion, most myths are rooted. His fascination for Sicily is due both to the sculpture of *The Seated Demeter or Core*, that he saw in the archaeological Museum in Syracuse, and to the Sicilians, described "as handsome as Adonis", and who seem to manifest and share the sexual energy usually connected to Pan and Dionysus. The image of Sicily recurs in D.H. Lawrence's entire production, often indirectly suggested by images such as: the volcanoes, the mythical Sicilian monsters "Scylla and Charybdis", and the references to the Myth of Pluto and Persephone, which took place in Enna, as told in his poem "Purple Anemones" (in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*). Moreover, his novella *Sun* deals with the flourishing Mediterranean landscape of Sicily, with Aetna in the distance, and the memory of the Sicules, the archaic inhabitants of the island. It is also worth mentioning that D.H. Lawrence translated several works by the Sicilian Giovanni Verga: from *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* (1923) to *Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories* (1928).

## Riassunto

D.H. Lawrence, che ha trascorso due anni in Sicilia, precisamente a Fontana Vecchia, vicino a Taormina e all'Etna (dove si narra che visse il Dio Vulcano), è stato sempre affascinato dall'Italia e dalla Sicilia in particolare, ovvero i luoghi che sono, a suo dire, più impregnati del mito. La sua attrazione per la Sicilia è dovuta alla scultura di *Demetra seduta o Core* che aveva visto nel Museo Archeologico di Siracusa e agli stessi Siciliani, descritti "belli e possenti come Adone", e che sembrano possedere e sprigionare quella carnalità, o energia sessuale di solito connessa a Pan e a Dioniso. L'immagine della Sicilia, che pervade l'intera produzione lawrenciana, è spesso indirettamente evocata da allusioni simboliche tanto ai vulcani e ai mitici mostri siciliani "Scilla and Cariddi", quanto al mito di Plutone e Persefone, che ebbe luogo a Enna, come è narrato nella lirica "Purple Anemones" (in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*). In più, la sua novella *Sun* si sofferma sul paesaggio rigoglioso della Sicilia Mediterranea, con l'Etna all'orizzonte e le tracce degli antichi abitanti dell'isola, i Siculi. Va, infine, ricordato che D.H. Lawrence ha tradotto parecchie opere dello scrittore siciliano Giovanni Verga: da *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* (1923) a *Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories* (1928).

## Résumé

D.H. Lawrence, qui a passé deux ans en Sicile, précisément à Fontana Vecchia, près de Taormina et de l'Etna (où l'on raconte que vivait le Dieu Vulcain), a toujours été fasciné par l'Italie et par la Sicile en particulier, autrement dit, les lieux qui sont, selon lui, plus imprégnés du mythe. Son attraction pour la Sicile est due à la sculpture de *Déméter assise ou Coré* qu'il avait vue dans le Musée Archéologique de Syracuse et aux Siciliens mêmes, décrits "beaux et puissants comme Adonis", et qui semblent posséder et dégager cette luxure, ou énergie sexuelle, normalement reliée à Pan et à Dyonisos. L'image de la Sicile, qui se répand dans toute la production lawrencienne, est souvent indirectement évoquée par des allusions symboliques tant aux volcans et aux mythiques monstres

siciliens "Scilla and Cariddi", qu'au mythe de Pluton et Perséphone, qui eut lieu à Enna, comme c'est narré dans la lyrique "Purple Anemones" (in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*). En plus, sa nouvelle *Sun* s'arrête sur le paysage luxuriant de la Sicile Méditerranéenne, avec l'Etna à l'horizon et les traces des antiques habitants de l'île, les Sicules. Il faut, finalement, rappeler que D.H. Lawrence a traduit de nombreuses oeuvres de l'écrivain sicilien Giovanni Verga: de *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* (1923) à *Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories* (1928).

### Zusammenfassung

D.H. Lawrence verbrachte zwei Jahre in Sizilien, und zwar in Fontana Vecchia, in der Nähe von Taormina und des Ätnas (wo der Gott Vulkan nach den Legenden wohnte), und er war von Italien und insbesondere von Sizilien bezaubert, die Orte, die nach seinen Worten, am meisten mit dem Mythos erfüllt waren. Die Anziehung, die Sizilien auf ihn ausübt, kommt aus der Skulptur der sitzenden *Demetra oder von Kore*, die er im Archäologischen Museum in Syrakus gesehen hatte, sie hat aber auch mit dem Aussehen der Sizilianer zu tun, die er "schön und mächtig wie Adonis" beschreibt und die seiner Meinung nach die Sinnlichkeit und die sexuelle Energie ausstrahlen, die man normalerweise mit Pan und Dionysos verbindet. In der ganzen Produktion von Lawrence wird oft auf Sizilien durch Symbole angedeutet, durch Hinweise auf die Vulkane, auf die mythischen sizilianischen Ungeheuer Szylla und Charybdis und auf den Mythos von Pluto und Persephone, der sich nach der Legende in Enna abspielte, wie die Lyrik "Purple Anemones" erzählt (in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*). Außerdem verweilt seine Novelle *Sun* bei der üppigen Landschaft der mediterranen Sizilien, mit dem Ätna am Horizont und mit den Spuren der antiken Bewohner der Insel, die Sikuler. Schließlich darf man nicht vergessen, dass D.H. Lawrence viele Werke vom sizilianischen Schriftsteller Giovanni Verga übersetzte: von *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* (1923) bis hin zu *Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories* (1928).

### Resumen

D.H. Lawrence vivió dos años en Sicilia, concretamente en Fontana Vecchia, cerca de Taormina y del Etna (donde se cuenta que vivía el Dios Vulcano). Siempre demostró una gran atracción por Italia y, en particular, por Sicilia, los lugares que, en sus propias palabras, están más impregnados del mito. Su atracción por Sicilia se debe a la escultura de *Demetra sentada o Core* que había visto en el Museo Arqueológico de Siracusa y a los mismos sicilianos, a quienes describe "hermosos y potentes como Adonis", y que parecen poseer y emanar la carnalidad, la energía sexual, que generalmente se relaciona con Pan y Dionis. La imagen de Sicilia, que recorre toda la producción de Lawrence, a menudo se evoca indirectamente con alusiones simbólicas tanto a los volcanes y los míticos monstruos sicilianos "Escila y Caribdis", como al mito de Plutón y Perséfone, que tuvo lugar en Enna, como se narra en la lírica "Purple Anemones" (en *Bird, Beast and Flowers*). Además, su novela *Sun* se recrea en el paisaje exuberante de la Sicilia Mediterránea, con el Etna en el horizonte y el rastro de los antiguos habitantes de la isla, los Sículos. Por último, hay que recordar que D.H. Lawrence tradujo muchas obras del escritor siciliano Giovanni Verga: de *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* (1923) a *Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories* (1928).

### Резюме

Д. Лоуренс провел два года на Сицилии, в Фонтане Веккья (Fontana Vecchia), расположенной рядом с Таорминой и Этной, где по преданию якобы жил Бог Вулкан. Этот писатель всегда был очарован Италией и, особенно, Сицилией, где места, по его словам, пропитаны мифами. Его увлечение Сицилией началось после того, как он увидел статую сидящей Деметры или Кору в археологическом

музее Сиракузы, и из-за самих сицилийцев, описанных им как «красивые и сильные, подобно Адонису», и обладающие той чувственностью, или сексуальностью, обычно связанной с Паном или Дионисием. Образ Сицилии, пронизывающей все произведения Лоуренса, часто вызван непосредственно как символическими ссылками на вулканы и мифологические сицилийские монстры «Сциллу и Хорибду», так и на миф о Плутоне и Персефоне, действие которого разворачивается в Энне, как это рассказано в лирической «Purple Anemones» (в *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*). Более того, в рассказе Лоуренса «Sun» подробно описывается роскошный вид средиземноморской Сицилии, с Этной на горизонте и следами древних жителей острова, сикулов. Напомним, наконец, что Лоуренс перевел много произведений сицилийского писателя Джованни Верга (Giovanni Verga): от «Мастера Дон Джезуальдо» (1923) до «Крестьянской кавалерии и других историй» (1928).

