

An Ancient, Yet Young Civilization: D.H. Lawrence's Etruria and the Power of a Brush Stroke on a White Canvas

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ABSTRACT: After a brief introduction of D.H. Lawrence, this essay analyses his response to the Etruscan culture and discusses his paintings as part of his last message for a regeneration of Europe and the whole Western World after the tragedy of World War I.

KEYWORDS: D.H. Lawrence, paintings, Cézanne, Nietzsche, Futurism, vitalism, Etruscans, Romans, Christianity, mind, body, resurrection, Europe, Italy.

Introduction

D.H. Lawrence (1885–1930) is an extremely prolific artist whose production includes, besides a group of paintings, many literary works belonging to all genres, including fiction and non-fiction writings. He was also a writer in transit who, at the beginning of the 20th century, travelled all over the world. In Europe he stayed for varying lengths of time in many countries, but it was only in Italy that he chose to live, settling in different places, from Gargnano on Lake Garda, to Spotorno in Liguria, to Sicily, to the Villa Mirenda near Florence to mention just a few. Many of his journeys also provided the inspiration

for his work, including travel writings, as well as short stories, novels and poems, and other non-fictional writings.¹

Lawrence's first journey to Italy took place in 1912, when he left England, with its philistine, repressive culture, and his job as a teacher, and went first to Germany and then to Italy with a married woman, Frieda Weekley (born von Richthofen). They spent eight months in Gargnano on Lake Garda, an experience which is recalled in *Twilight in Italy* (1916). He was primarily attracted by the place and the people, but he also got involved in the literary and artistic turmoil which was taking place in Italian culture at the beginning of the 20th century.² Suffice it to think of Marinetti and Futurism, with which he developed a sort of love-hate relationship, and which was destined to have an enormous influence on his life and work. Futurism also plays an important role in his enthusiastic response to the Etruscans. The extremely modern movement, Italian Futurism, and a

1. See John Worthen, *D.H. Lawrence. The Early Years* (1885–1912), Mark Kinkad-Weekes, *D.H. Lawrence. Triumph to Exile* (1912–1922), and David Ellis, *D.H. Lawrence: Dying Game* (1922–1930), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, 1996, 1998. Among his travel writings *Twilight in Italy* (1916) has been chosen and selected by John Carey for his *Pure Pleasure: Guide to the 20th Century's Most Enjoyable Books*, London, Faber, 2000.

2. Lawrence tried (successfully) to learn Italian: he had a teacher in Gargnano and could write letters in Italian when he was staying at the Villa Mirenda in 1927–1928. See his letters to Giulia Pini in James T. Boulton, Margaret H. Boulton and Gerald M. Lacy (eds), *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. VI, March 1927 – November 1928, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 122, 133, 164–165, 185–186, 273, 306, 445–446, 464–465, 534, 563, 570–571, 582–583, and Keith Sagar and James T. Boulton (eds), *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. VII, November 1928 – February 1930, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 32–34, 81–82, 280–282, 428, 454. He also translated from Italian into English the novel *Mastro Don Gesualdo* and some short stories by the famous Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga, as well as A.F. Grazzini's *Story of Doctor Manente*. See Stefania Michelucci, "Translation", in Catherine Brown and Sue Reid (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to D.H. Lawrence and the Arts*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, pp. 76–89.

primaeval, ancient culture, the Etruscans, are closely and creatively connected within Lawrence's *Weltanschauung*.

It is in the last years of his life, in the bucolic peace of the Tuscan countryside, that Lawrence experienced a period of intense artistic creativity despite the illness which was slowly devouring his body. He started painting, finding this medium more agreeable than the verbal one at a time in his life when he was weakened with sickness. Painting was more directly sensuous and physical and maybe responded to his need to re-discover a language of the body. He also completed his last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), a challenge to the prudery of his countrymen, but also an attempt to outline the way to regeneration to the Western World, as in *Last Poems* and in his paintings.

Etruria: an ancient, yet old civilization

In 1926 and 1927 Lawrence visited some Etruscan sites with his American friend, the painter Earl Brewster and started thinking of this lost civilization as a possible subject for a book. Before his journey Lawrence had read *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (1901) by George Dennis, *Etruskische Malerei* by Fritz Weege (1921), *Etruria and Rome* (1924) by Roland Arthur Lonsdale Fell, and *Etruria antica* by Pericle Ducati (1925). He had also shown interest in anthropological texts such as Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890–1905), Jane Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913) and Émile Durkheim's, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912).³

3. "Half travel-book, scientific too" was the book he had in mind. See James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey (eds), *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. V, March 1924–1927, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 412. Lawrence was very much taken by Frazer's account of tree spirits in chapter IX of *The Golden Bough*, "The Worship of Trees", where central Etruria and its rich fields are mentioned. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Robert Frazer (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

The contact with the past was for Lawrence an important stage in the development of his dream of achieving “wholeness”, that is, a total harmony between body, mind, and soul. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence attributes to ancient civilizations some kind of deep life knowledge, which is completely lost and unknown to modern humanity. “We are really far, far more life-stupid than the dead Greeks or the lost Etruscans.”⁴

Owing to ill health, Lawrence was unable to visit all the sites he had hoped to see, and he made only six of the twelve sketches he had originally planned. The book he had envisaged thus remained unfinished and was published posthumously as *Etruscan Places*.⁵

The fact that so little was known about the Etruscans and their civilization at that time helped to stimulate Lawrence’s imagination and gave him the opportunity to interpret freely the Etruscan remains in terms of those symbols which best expressed his own ideas. The relatively blank sheet gave him scope for his own intuition which still stands up almost a century later. *Sketches of Etruscan Places* is still nowadays one of the mostly read books about this ancient civilization and it has been translated into many different languages. The Etruscan culture represented the old order, the pagan world retaining all the virtues he associated with the pre-Christian world, which he had experienced in Cornwall during World War I:

It seems as if the truth were still living here, growing like the sea holly. [...] I do like Cornwall [...] One can feel free here [...] feel the world as it was in that flicker of pre-Christian Celtic civilization, when humanity was really young.⁶

4. D.H. Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1921–1922), Bruce Steele (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 118.

5. Four of the essays were published separately in the periodicals *Travel in America* and *World Today in Britain*.

6. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (eds), *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. II, June 1913–October 1916, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 492, 495.

For Lawrence the Etruscans were “young” in their vitality, yet they were also the keepers of the ancient, great secret of life; they were to embody naturalness, spontaneity, and simplicity – aspects of a civilization which was antithetical to the modern, mechanical, and corrupted one.

Lawrence firmly rejects the view of prestigious nineteenth-century historians such as Theodor Mommsen, who celebrated Rome’s grandeur and almost ignored the Etruscans: “A great: scientific historian like Mommsen hardly allows that the Etruscans existed at all. Their existence was antipathetic to him.”⁷ Such historians had transmitted the image of the Etruscans as an immoral, weak people who deserved to be wiped out by Roman expansion. Lawrence’s mention of Mommsen implies a reflection on the hold of the Romans on the European imagination. The great theme is the decline of the Roman Empire to which Lawrence’s critique can be taken as a contribution. In his mind sensory decadence is a natural outcome of the Romans’ willed control of physical being.

Lawrence’s artistic sensitivity enabled him to treat his subject with a special, lively, intuitive insight never shown before by any Etruscologist, as one of the most important scholars in the field of Etruscan Studies, Massimo Pallottino, has pointed out.

7. D.H. Lawrence, *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays*, Simonetta de Filippis (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 9. Hereafter referred to as *SEP* followed by page number. Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* (8 vols), *The History of Rome*, translated by William Purdie Dickson, 1894–1895, reprinted in 1996, London, R. Bentley & Son, vol. I, Ch. IX, “The Etruscans”, p. 150: The Etruscans’ “religion presenting a gloomy fantastic character and delighting in the mystical handling of numbers and in wild and horrible speculations and practices, is equally remote from the clear rationalism of the Romans and the genial image-worship of the Hellenes.” *Sketches of Etruscan Places* is striking for the sharp irony against Mommsen: “The Prussian in him was enthralled by the Prussian in all conquering Romans. So being a scientific historian, he almost denies the very existence of the Etruscan people.” (*SEP*, 9).

The scholar who will one day write that history of Etruscan art which has not yet been written, will have to take into account Lawrence's observations which [...] contain a better and deeper critical quality [...] than the many huge volumes published by well-known archeologists [...] science may once more acknowledge his debt to poetry.⁸

In his interpretation of the Etruscans, Lawrence offers surprisingly modern reflections on the relationship between dominant and subordinate cultures, which sound as a pioneering anticipation of post-colonial critical theories in the academy. He combines a perceptive observation of their remains with an inquiry into the nature of their civilisation, adopting a self-critical attitude. His unconventional, unromantic attitude towards Italy emerges clearly in the first few pages of "Cerveteri", in which he presents a country destroyed by the war, where food is tasteless and "the faun-faced men with their pure outlines and their strange non-moral calm" (*SEP*, 12), have become rarer and rarer. Italy is not an idealised country (*Das Land wo die Zitronen blühen*, in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 1795-96) but one whose old civilisation is being contaminated both by progress and the new Fascist regime which, at the end of the 1920s, is spreading all over Italy.

Under a surface of a country imbued with fascist rhetoric, boasting its Roman inheritance, Lawrence tries to throw light on the

8. Massimo Pallottino, "Scienza e poesia alla scoperta dell'Etruria", a lecture written in 1957 and published as an "Introduction" to the Italian edition of D.H. Lawrence's *Etruscan Places*. Cf. D.H. Lawrence, *Luoghi Etruschi*, G. Kezich (ed.), Siena, Nuova Immagine Editrice, 1985, pp. 24-25 (my translation). Lawrence's unusual, unscholarly approach to the Etruscans was also praised by James Wellard in *The Search for the Etruscans*, Indianapolis, Cardinal, 1973, pp. 89-90: "Lawrence's own life view [...] was very different from that of the conventional scholar. And it is this which makes his book so valuable, for he was the first writer after Dennis to treat the Etruscans as a living and not an extinct people."

mystery of the Etruscans, the people wiped out by the Romans, “in order to make room for Rome with a very big R” (*SEP*, 9), whose remains are hidden in the city of the dead, neglected and almost forgotten by contemporary Italians, like seeds still ready to germinate in their season.⁹ “It is wonderful, the strength and mystery of old life that comes out of these faded figures. The Etruscans are still here, upon the wall.” (*SEP*, 52). As Massimo Pallottino points out, Lawrence’s work must not be confused with that of the archaeologists, nor with the contemporary “Etruscan Romance”, the fascination with the mystery of a lost world and civilisation. It is the intense and vivid account of the emotions aroused in the writer by the Etruscan remains, an account imbued with “a love for things”, a desired effort to “feel” the Etruscans more than study them through a magnifying glass, which helps the reader achieve a deeper understanding of the nature of the people. “The Etruscan are not a theory or a thesis. If they are anything, they are an *experience*” (*SEP*, 171). What makes Lawrence’s travel book exemplary, however, is his refusal of *any* dogmatic approach to *any* culture. What he argues here is that just as there is a “plurality in nature”, there is also a multiplicity of ethnic identities, all of which have not only the right to develop and live independently, but also to interact peacefully with one another.

Although he is aware that he has no evidence to offer for his insights – which necessarily reflect the point of view of a modern observer – he insists that the fragments of paintings surviving in the tombs are the expression of a joyful acceptance of life in all its manifestations, whether it be a battle, a feast, or a hunting ceremony, *involving* a harmonious and respectful relationship between sexes and classes: “There is a certain dance and glamour in all the movements, even in those of the naked slave-men. They are by no means

9. See Stefania Michelucci, “D.H. Lawrence’s Etruscan Seduction”, *Etruscan Studies*, 22, 1, 2019, pp. 1–15.

downtrodden menials; let later Romans say what they will. The slaves in the tombs are surging with full life." (*SEP*, 46).



Figure 1. *Tomb of the Lionesses*, Tarquinia.



Figure 2. *Tomb of the Triclinium (of the Feast in Lawrence)*, Tarquinia.

Thus, for Lawrence, the paintings in the tombs convey a moral message: a kind of total acceptance of the present which involves the absence of any abstract ideal in their approach to life. The Etruscans achieved a kind of happiness – unknown, utterly forgotten by Western civilization – which was the outcome of a harmonious relationship among human beings, man vs woman, human beings vs nature and vs the surrounding cosmos with all forms of life, based on the idea of a divine flame connecting the entire cosmos and on a social cultural order rooted in the natural world. And this approach to life accounts for the absence of mournful scenes, the serene acceptance of death, which was seen by them as the mere continuation of earthly existence. That is why their paintings overflow with energy and life, with artistic creativity, with powerful sexual images, as if death would be just the premise of another rebirth.

The underworld of the Etruscans was a gay place [...]. For the life on earth was so good, the life below could but be a continuance of it (*SEP*, 46). Death [...] was neither an ecstasy of bliss, a heaven, nor a purgatory of torment. It was just a natural continuance of the fullness of life. (*SEP*, 19).



Figure 3. *Tomb of the Leopards*, Tarquinia.

Sketches of Etruscan Places becomes therefore a sort of celebration of life, paradoxically linked to the world of the dead, a hymn of *carpe diem*, which acquires in a time of great crisis (for Lawrence himself, totally consumed by his illness, and for Europe, on the verge of the totalitarian regimes which would lead to World War II) the meaning of a real prophecy, the promise of a redemption.¹⁰

Lawrence's discovery of the Etruscans develops through a parallel, converging path. On the one hand it leads him to a poetic and passionate, seductive response to this ancient Italian civilization, in contrast to some academic authorities on the subject (such as Mommsen). On the other, it stimulates him to interpret the spare remains in the light of Nietzsche's *Umwertung* and, above all, of the Futurist manifestoes. Although rejecting Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's celebration of the machine, Lawrence welcomed the Futurist search of a pulsing, never-ending vitalism and dynamism, their belief in the inhuman in humanity, which for him was the vital core of the Etruscan culture before it became completely absorbed by the homogenizing civilization of Imperial Rome.¹¹

The Power of a Brush Stroke on a White Canvas

The unity between mind and body, the wholeness of being achieved by the Etruscans, is what Lawrence celebrates in the provocative essay "Introduction to These Paintings" (1929), which was meant to be an introductory essay for the catalogue of the exhibition of his paintings at the Warren Gallery in 1929. It is actually more an

10. See Michelucci, "D.H. Lawrence's Etruscan Seduction", p. 10.

11. On Lawrence and Futurism see Andrew Harrison, *D.H. Lawrence and Italian Futurism: A Study of Influence*, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2003.

idiosyncratic rewriting of the history of Western art with particular attention to Cézanne.¹²

For Lawrence, a devastating separation between mind and body, and a related mortification of the latter, lies at the core of Western culture. The roots of such a separation dwell in Plato's idealism and in the celebration of the spirit in Christianity, which sees the soul as the only link with God, and the body as the dwelling-place of vice and evil.¹³

Using a religious, prophetic language which contrasts with Roger Fry's abstract analysis and appreciation of Cézanne, Lawrence reacts indignantly to what had been described as the imperfect, almost immoral quality of Cézanne's art.¹⁴ He claims that Cézanne's unstable apples seem to slip down onto the table, hurt the onlooker, and make people "shout with pain."¹⁵ These apples hurt because they overturn an established order, manifesting a new system of relations (dynamic and

12. See the catalogue of the exhibition at the Warren Gallery, *The Paintings of D.H. Lawrence*, London, The Mandrake Press, 1929. Other editions of D.H. Lawrence's paintings are the following: M. Levy (ed.), *Paintings of D.H. Lawrence*, with essays by H.T. Moore, J. Lindsay and H. Read, London, Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1964, and Keith Sagar (ed.), *D.H. Lawrence's Paintings*, Hanover Township, Chaucer Press, 2004.

13. See Stefania Michelucci, "D.H. Lawrence's Representation of the Body and the Visual Arts", in Paul Poplawski (ed.), *Writing the Body in D.H. Lawrence: Essays on Language, Representation, and Sexuality*, Westport (Conn.), Greenwood Press, 2001, pp. 19–30, and Giovanni Cianci, "D.H. Lawrence e la 'melit ' delle mele. O del recupero della corporeit ", in Giovanni Cianci, Elio Franzini and Antonello Negri (eds), *Il C zanne degli scrittori, dei poeti e dei filosofi*, Milano, Bocca Editori, 2001, pp. 213–229.

14. Roger Fry, *C zanne: A Study of his Development*, London, L. & V. Woolf, 1927. On Lawrence and Roger Fry, see Jack Stewart, "Lawrence, Van Gogh and C zanne", in *The Vital Art of D.H. Lawrence: Vision and Expression*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1999, pp. 154–172, and Cianci, "D.H. Lawrence e la 'melit ' delle mele."

15. D.H. Lawrence, *Selected Critical Writings*, Michael Herbert (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 268. Hereafter referred to as *SCW*, followed by page number.

vital) between human beings and the surrounding cosmos.¹⁶ It is actually their “shiftiness” that reveals their ontological existence, their “happening” (to paraphrase Heidegger), in the free vastness, their existence in the fullness of their bodily being.¹⁷ Lawrence proclaims that the order which has been accepted as natural, the mental image of the outside world, or, in other words, the cliché, the two dimensional, bodiless representation of reality, in fact represents chaos and disorder, a loss of the vital, organic link between human beings and the cosmos – “our world is a wide tomb full of ghosts, replicas. We are all specters; we have not been able to touch even so much as an apple” (*SCW*, 268).



Figure 4. Paul Cézanne, *La corbeille de pommes* (1893).

16. “The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe at the living moment [...]. And this perfected relationship between man and his circumambient universe is life itself, for mankind.” (*SCW*, 173)

17. See Martin Heidegger, “Die Kunst und der Raum”, St. Gallen, Erker-Verlag, 1969.



Figure 5. Paul Cézanne, *Nature morte avec le panier de fruits* (1888-1890).

The re-discovery of a natural, religious acceptance of the body, in all its functions, in fact becomes a central issue in all of Lawrence's later works, as is clear from the three versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Escaped Cock* and his paintings.

As Christian asceticism appears responsible for the sense of shame of human beings with their own bodies, it becomes necessary to re-write Christian mythology starting from the Fall, as in his painting *Throwing Back the Apple*, and to celebrate especially those functions of the body that have been hidden or denied by hypocritical appeals to notions of "decency."

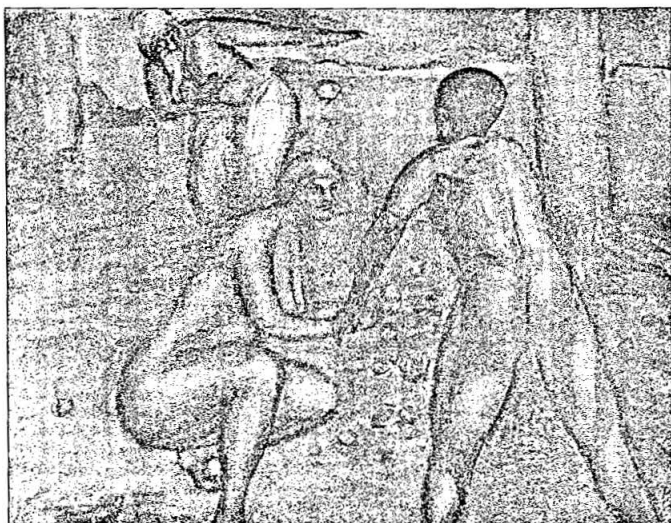


Figure 6. D.H. Lawrence, *Throwing Back the Apple* (1927).

Throwing Back the Apple is an ironic painting with Eve challenging God with her forbidden fruit. She hands the apples to Adam, who like a javelin thrower, throws the forbidden fruit against God, to regain his place in Paradise, thus rejecting the myth of the original sin.



Figure 7. D.H. Lawrence, *Dandelions* (1928).

In *Dandelions*, a religious aura surrounds the image of the peasant urinating on a field scattered with yellow flowers. His natural relationship with the body and with all physiological functions (suggested by the way he holds his penis), becomes the expression of a primordial innocence: "I just did a water-colour of a naked man pissing against a wall, as the Bible says. It's most tender and touching, and I shall exhibit it in London."¹⁸ Of course, what Lawrence considered to be an image of regained innocence could not escape the indignant attacks of contemporary philistine morality. The fact that *Dandelions* was rejected by Dorothy Warren for the exhibition, and by the editor Stephensen for publication in the volume *The Paintings of D.H. Lawrence* (1929), supplied Lawrence with further evidence that modern man is very far indeed from a natural acceptance of the body and all its functions. It is worth mentioning here Nietzsche's idea of "the culture-Philistine." Both Dorothy Warren and the editor Stephensen do not simply despise the arts out of ignorance because it is their cultured education that actually trained them to be incapable of responding openly to them.

Human bodies are never missing in the settings of Lawrence's visual work, in contrast with the English tradition of landscape painting, where their absence is to be interpreted, as he makes clear in *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914) and in "Introduction to These Paintings" (1929), as a way of escaping from the tormenting *Angst* of the body. Nor is the landscape for him a mere setting, a background against which to set human bodies, but rather an environment which partakes of their vital impulse, and becomes itself a living body, pulsating matter. This effect derives from his insistence on the curved, circular line, which suggests the idea of flux, of dynamic movement, embracing both bodies and natural forms (for example in *Red Willow Trees*, *Dance Sketch*, *Yawning*, *Flight Back into Paradise*).

18. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. VI, p. 344.



Figure 8. D. H. Lawrence, *Red Willow Trees* (1927).

In *Red Willow Trees* the bodies are parts of the surrounding environment, an extension of it, intensified by the chromatic power of the colour red.



Figure 9. D.H. Lawrence, *Dance Sketch* (1928).

In *Dance Sketch*, a setting inspired by Cézanne's bathers is used for the rite of dancing, involving, in its whirling rhythm, man, woman, animal and the surrounding nature, as in the Etruscan frescoes, which are evoked through the chromatic, clear-cut distinction between male and female.¹⁹



Figure 10. Paul Cézanne, *Les grandes baigneuses* (1906).

19. See Stefania Michelucci, "Il corpo dipinto: D.H. Lawrence e Cézanne", in Ciani, Franzini and Negri (eds), *Il Cézanne degli scrittori, dei poeti e dei filosofi*, pp. 231–250.



Figure 11. *Tomb of the Lionesses*, Tarquinia.



Figure 12. D.H. Lawrence, *Yawning* (1927–1928).

As suggested by the title, in *Yawning* Lawrence tries to represent the body abandoning itself to a physical impulse; it is possible to notice the insistence on volumes and forms, the almost grotesque, expressionist dimension of the male chest. The face of the man in the foreground suggests a self-portrait.



Figure 13. D.H. Lawrence, *Flight Back into Paradise* (1927).

In a letter to Dorothy Brett dated February 9th, 1927, Lawrence wrote:

I'm just finishing a nice big canvas. Eve dodging back into Paradise, between Adam and the Angel at the Gate, who are having a fight about it – and leaving the world in flames in the far corner behind her. Great fun, and of course a *capolavoro*.²⁰

Flight Back into Paradise expresses the need to run away from a mechanized, imprisoning culture. The painting can also be read as a visual version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, with Lady Chatterley finding a refuge in the gamekeeper who is fighting with the sterile, diaphanous Clifford in the back. The face of the gamekeeper is a self-portrait.

20. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. V, p. 639. The painting was meant to be the first of a trilogy, aiming at a rewriting of the myth of the Fall.



Figure 14. D.H. Lawrence, *Spring* (1929).

In *Spring* a moment of playful intimacy (the soccer game) turns into a vital and joyful homoerotic relationship which manifests itself in all its naturalness, thus unfolding that tormented, hidden but transparent, homoerotic aspect of Lawrence's personality.

With the human bodies themselves, Lawrence tends to emphasize the lower limbs, especially the "loins", which are for him the site of the "wisdom of the blood."²¹ The loins are usually disproportionately large in relation to the rest of the body, very often round and full and suggestive of a powerful physical force straining almost to break out of the canvas.

Although Lawrence's paintings are clumsy and "imperfect" when judged from a technical point of view (as he himself admitted

21. See D.H. Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. On Lawrence's use of body symbolism, see Poplawski, *Writing the Body in D.H. Lawrence* and James C. Cowan, "Lawrence and Touch", *The D.H. Lawrence Review*, 18, 2/3, 1985-1986, pp. 121-137.

in a letter to Mark Gertler),²² in the dancing movements of their bodies, and the huge, round, often grotesque bodily forms, they seem to celebrate Nietzsche's Dionysiac resurrection of the instinctual body, the revolutionary, subversive dance of living matter unleashing the primeval forces of the cosmos, of "an old, lost, lost subtle world, where men had the wonder of demons about them."²³

It is worth pointing out another way in which Cézanne's apples attracted Lawrence. Besides their "appleyness" (their existing in the fullness of their matter), what strikes his imagination is their erotic fullness, their vibrating sensuality. The loins and the buttocks which impose their presence both in Lawrence's writings and paintings are often rendered with a round fullness which reminds the observer of Cézanne's apples. Thus, Lawrence's enthusiasm for Cézanne is closely linked with his religion of the body, which, in turn, is influenced by Nietzsche's indictment of Christianity and his exaltation of the body as "the surest of our belongings", "the richest and most significant of all phenomena", the source of what was once a Dionysiac/Apollonian *Kultur*, in opposition to our deadening, mechanized *Zivilization*. In Nietzsche's thundering, subversive words, "it is not possible to conceive a more dangerous aberration than contempt for the body."²⁴

Conclusion

The Etruscan frescoes in the painted tombs of Tarquinia appeared to Lawrence as the expression of an art which goes beyond aesthetic beauty and conveys the real essence of life, a sense of vigorous,

22. "I know that they're rolling with faults [...] but there's something *there*." *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, vol. VI, p. 406.

23. D.H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod*, Mara Kalnins (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 265.

24. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 1967, VII, 2: 17; VIII, 1: 209-210; VIII, 3: 28 (my translation).

strong-bodied liveliness. The harmonious relationship with the flux of the cosmos achieved by the Etruscans is the quest of the story *The Escaped Cock* (1929). Here the resurrection of the body involves a painful revitalization of all those parts which had been mortified by the celebration of the spirit ("the corpse of love") and culminates in the full recovery of the man's sexual energies – "I am risen!"²⁵ – through the healing touch of the priestess. This resurrection, as well as the one experienced by Lady Chatterley and the gamekeeper in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* does not involve a blind annihilation of the spirit and an absolute submission to the urge of the instinct, but rather, a gradual education of the body to pursue the fulfillment of its potentialities. Resurrection in *The Escaped Cock* is made possible through a ritual preparation of the body for the sacrality of the sexual encounter. In the picture painted by Lawrence to illustrate this story, the strange position of the man's left hand, while suggesting (along with the inclination of his body), a circular, dynamic movement, seems to pull the face of the woman, and consequently her whole body, toward the sexual center of the man.

25. D.H. Lawrence, *The Escaped Cock*, in *The Virgin and the Gipsy and Other Stories*, Michael Herbert (ed.), Bethan Jones and Lindeth Vasey, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 159.



Figure 15. D.H. Lawrence, Cover for *The Escaped Cock* (1929)

While in the painting erotic fullness extends to the surrounding environment, as shown by the roundness of the ground and by the luminous form in the background, in the story the man's sexual initiation leads to a perception of the bodily essence of the surrounding world: "How *plastic* it is, how full of curves and folds like an invisible rose of dark-petalled openness, that shows where dew touches its darkness!"²⁶ Here, as well as in most of his paintings, Lawrence tried, at a moment of his career when he was gradually losing control over his own body, to express, with an iconic medium which he felt to be more powerful and immediate than writing itself, the need to learn how to listen with religious respect to the inner demands of the body, how to live in harmony with it.

26. Lawrence, *The Escaped Cock*, p. 160 (my emphasis).

But as the departure of the man at the end of *The Escaped Cock* suggests, a resurrection in the flesh and through the flesh, through a healing of the dissociation between body and spirit, seems to be possible only in utopian isolation from the rest of the world, in the temple of Isis or in the isolated gamekeeper's hut at the centre of the wood in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

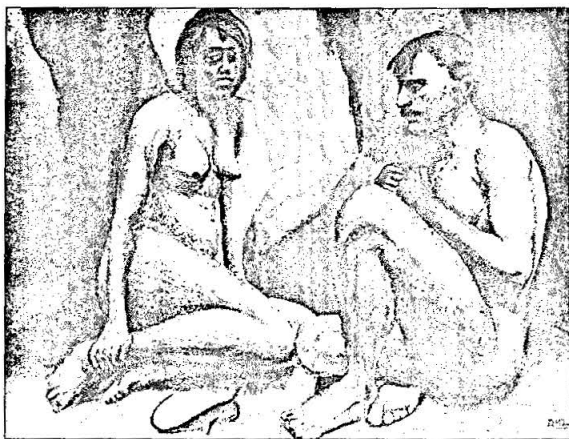


Figure. 16. D.H. Lawrence, *The Lizard* (1927–1928).

This is powerfully expressed in the painting *The Lizard*, which reveals the paralyzing inhibitions of human beings, who are unable to live in harmony with their own bodies, to experience Eros in a natural way, in contrast with the natural vitality of the lizard. As Lawrence wrote in the poem “The Lizard”: “If men were as much men as lizards are lizards, / they’d be worth looking at.”²⁷

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²⁷ D.H. Lawrence, “The Lizard”, in *The Poems*, vol. I, Christopher Pollnitz (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 455.