

D. H. LAWRENCE



***TWILIGHT
IN ITALY***

D. H. Lawrence

Twilight in Italy

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Lily Wharton

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Introduction

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Twilight in Italy presents D. H. Lawrence's sequence of Italian travel essays, first published together in 1916 and drawn from journeys in the years immediately preceding that date. This collection gathers the complete set of pieces that constitute that book: The Crucifix Across the Mountains; On the Lago di Garda; The Spinner and the Monks; The Lemon Gardens; The Theatre; San Gaudenzio; The Dance; Il Duro; John; Italians in Exile; and The Return Journey. Read as a whole, they trace a movement from approach and arrival to departure, offering a sustained meditation on place, people, and the author's own sensibility as it responds to northern Italy and the Alpine threshold.

The scope of this volume is deliberately focused: not an omnibus of Lawrence's fiction or poetry, but the integrated travel cycle he fashioned from his Italian sojourns. The pieces are essays and sketches rather than stories or verse, yet they often adopt narrative structures and dramatic episodes. Their arrangement preserves the internal arc Lawrence created, so that landscapes, encounters, and reflections accumulate meaning across the sequence. By gathering these works together, the collection presents a coherent record of observation and response, emphasizing how each essay illuminates the others and how the whole exemplifies a distinct phase in Lawrence's non-fictional practice.

The genres represented are principally travel writing and personal essay, with elements of memoir, ethnographic vignette, and portraiture. Lawrence's method combines on-the-spot description with reflective analysis, moving from the seen to the intuited, from outward scene to inward response. Though these texts are not fiction, they exhibit techniques familiar from his novels: carefully staged scenes, sharply drawn characters, and symbolic motifs. They also share with his poems a compressed attention to sensuous detail. Letters and diaries underpin the experience that informs these essays, but the present collection consists of the finished, published prose pieces Lawrence shaped for readers.

Throughout this sequence, the unifying themes are encounter and threshold. Lawrence crosses physical frontiers—mountain passes, lake shores, village streets—and in doing so tests cultural, religious, and emotional boundaries. Work and ritual, festival and faith, the cycle of cultivation and the rhythm of repose, all become occasions for measuring how life is felt in the body as well as understood by the mind. The essays probe the relation between individual and community, and between human intention and the larger presence of landscape, water, stone, and light that seems to exceed human designs.

Stylistically, Lawrence is notable for sensuous precision and a cadence that moves from stillness to sudden intensity. His prose lingers on textures of weather and terrain, then sharpens into judgments that are frank and sometimes unsettling. Figurative patterns—especially those drawn from elemental forces and from gesture—guide perception and

give the essays their coherence. The writing is subjective in the best sense, acknowledging the author's position while inviting the reader to test each impression against the pressure of observed detail. The result is a prose that is at once intimate, argumentative, and vividly pictorial.

The opening essays establish the premises of journey and settlement. *The Crucifix Across the Mountains* follows an approach into Italy, where religious images and the starkness of high passes mark a shift in atmosphere. On the *Lago di Garda* turns to the life of a lakeside community, its water and stone, its traffic of boats and paths. In these scenes, Lawrence situates himself as a participant-observer: present enough to register daily rhythms, detached enough to notice how climate and custom shape speech, movement, and the unspoken agreements that organize place.

The middle of the collection deepens attention to work and devotion. *The Spinner and the Monks* centers on an encounter that juxtaposes solitary labor with communal religious life, exploring how craft and contemplation coexist. *The Lemon Gardens* attends to terraced cultivation and the patient ingenuity by which people enlist landscape to sustain a livelihood. Here, the essays' descriptive power serves an ethical inquiry: what forms of care bind people to their environment, and how do habitual acts—pruning, carrying, repairing—become expressions of belonging?

Public art and public worship enter the sequence through *The Theatre* and *San Gaudenzio*. In the former, Lawrence watches a local performance, observing audience and actors as a small society rehearsing itself. In the latter, he visits a

site of devotion associated with a patron saint, considering how architecture, ritual, and expectation gather individuals into a collective mood. These pieces trace how spectacle and sacrament alike shape civic feeling, and how the staged and the sacred both rely on gesture, repetition, and shared attention to make meaning palpable.

The Dance and Il Duro turn to bodily expressiveness and character. The Dance presents a communal festivity in which steps, music, and proximity communicate energies that words cannot carry. Il Duro sketches a figure whose very name suggests hardness or resilience, prompting reflections on strength, reserve, and the negotiations by which personality meets social regard. Together, these essays consider how identity is performed and recognized, and how a community's forms—its tunes, turns, and nicknames—hold a mirror to the forces that bind and unsettle it.

John and Italians in Exile offer portraits that widen the horizon beyond a single village or valley. John gathers the lineaments of an individual life, attentive to the moments in which reserve breaks or deepens. Italians in Exile addresses displacement, considering workers who have left their homeland and who live with divided attachments. Here, Lawrence's interest in movement acquires a social dimension: migration as a fact of modern life, and the ways in which language, labor, and memory sustain identity across borders.

The Return Journey closes the arc by turning back toward departure and retrospection. Having moved through mountains, gardens, churches, theatres, and dances,

Lawrence now confronts the act of leaving and the recollection that travel compels. The essay does not undo what came before; it gathers the sequence's motifs under the sign of passage, acknowledging that to cross a frontier is to change what one remembers and how one tells it. The cycle thus frames experience as a rhythm of approach and withdrawal, a pattern that travel both reveals and enacts.

As a whole, *Twilight in Italy* occupies a distinctive place in Lawrence's body of work, complementing the psychological intensity of his contemporaneous novels with a concentrated practice of seeing and judging in situ. These essays prefigure and converse with his later travel writing, and they continue to reward readers for their synthesis of sensuous description, probing thought, and narrative poise. Their lasting significance lies in the way they articulate a philosophy of attention: to landscape, to custom, to the quick of human encounter. Collected here, they offer a complete, resonant portrait of an author discovering a world and testing his voice within it.

Author Biography

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David Herbert Lawrence (1885–1930) was an English novelist, poet, essayist, and travel writer central to modernist debates about the self and society. He examined the strain that industrial life, social convention, and repression place on feeling and desire, seeking forms that could join sensuous experience with thought. His Italian essays—On the Lago di Garda, The Crucifix Across the Mountains, The Spinner and the Monks, and The Lemon Gardens—show him as a searching observer of place and ritual. Across genres he pursued a frank, rhythmic prose and an exploratory criticism of modernity that made him both controversial and indispensable to twentieth-century literature.

Lawrence grew up in Nottinghamshire and won scholarships that enabled further schooling before training as a teacher at University College Nottingham. He taught in classrooms in the English Midlands and in Croydon while writing poems and stories, experiences that sharpened his attention to class, work, and the limits of respectability. Early novels such as *The White Peacock* and the breakthrough *Sons and Lovers* announced a writer who could turn industrial landscapes into charged moral and emotional fields. He read widely in philosophy and psychology and aspired to a criticism of modern life that moved beyond literary study into anthropology, travel, and performance.

His first sustained encounter with Italy, in the years just before the First World War, yielded a sequence of essays later gathered in *Twilight in Italy*. In pieces like *San Gaudenzio*, *The Theatre*, *The Dance*, and *Italians in Exile*, he blends observation, ethnography, and spiritual reflection, reading architecture, festivals, and everyday gestures as signs of a civilization at once ancient and vividly present. *On the Lago di Garda* and *The Lemon Gardens* capture a sensuous topography; *The Crucifix Across the Mountains* and *The Spinner and the Monks* pursue meditations on suffering, craft, and communal memory. *The Return Journey* closes that itinerary.

The war years were difficult. Back in Britain with his German-born partner, later wife, he lived under suspicion, and *The Rainbow* was suppressed as obscene in 1915, shaping his reputation for decades. *Twilight in Italy* appeared in 1916 and, without polemic, offered an alternative moral landscape to wartime nationalism and industrial rationality. Readers found in those essays a voice that could hold sympathy and critique in balance, attentive to ceremony, work, devotion, and landscape. Lawrence continued to write poetry, essays, and fiction, testing how travel and comparative experience might enlarge the moral vocabulary available to a Europe convulsed by conflict.

After the war he resumed a restless international life, writing across forms and settings. His Italian materials continued to feed short fiction, as in *Il Duro* and *John*, which compress encounters of class, sexuality, and ritual into tense, resonant narratives. The essays *Italians in Exile* and *The Return Journey* extend his portrait of displacement and

belonging, attentive to political pressures and private yearning without reducing either to thesis. Throughout, he prized the short form's capacity for sudden pattern and revelation, an intensity that paralleled the lyric movement of his poems and the sharper, more experimental chapters of his later novels.

Lawrence's aesthetics valued embodied knowledge: the intelligence of the senses, of gesture, of rhythm. *The Theatre and The Dance* articulate this preference explicitly, praising performance as a communal language that exceeds argument. *San Gaudenzio* shows the counterpoint—buildings as condensed time, faith, and power—while *On the Lago di Garda* and *The Lemon Gardens* demonstrate how landscape and labor shape feeling. Such writing clarifies his wider themes: the damage of mechanized life, the vitality of instinct, and the need to heal divisions between mind and body. It also shows the critic-novelist at work, turning travel into a method of understanding.

In later years he published *Women in Love* and, privately in Italy, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, works whose frankness ensured both notoriety and, posthumously, a landmark legal defense of literary freedom. Ill with tuberculosis, he continued to work until his death in 1930 in France. His legacy remains unsettled yet enduring: a body of fiction, poetry, essays, and travel writing that widened the moral and stylistic possibilities of English prose. The Italian pieces collected here—*The Crucifix Across the Mountains* through *The Return Journey*—retain their freshness, showing a writer who used place not as backdrop but as a collaborator in thought.

Historical Context

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Twilight in Italy appeared in 1916, when D. H. Lawrence was emerging as a distinctive voice within early twentieth-century literary modernism. The essays draw on travels he undertook in roughly 1912–1914, before and on the eve of the First World War, and register a Europe in transition. Lawrence, raised in industrial Nottinghamshire, looked south to the Alps and northern Italy for forms of social and sensuous life that industrial Britain seemed to deny. The collection sits between late Victorian travel writing and modernist experiment, blending observation with reflection, and staging encounters with religion, labor, festivity, and national borders at a moment when those borders were hardening.

Modern Europe's accelerating change frames the book. The prewar years saw rapid mobility, mass tourism, and intensified cross-border labor, while nationalist rivalries crested into conflict in 1914. In Italy, the liberal "Giolittian" era (c. 1901–1914) fostered industrial growth in the north and social reform, but also labor strife and stark regional inequalities. The Alps connected and divided states and cultures, with well-traveled passes, new tunnels, and iconic roadside shrines. Lawrence's essays repeatedly mirror these forces: traditions under pressure from modern economies; local loyalties shadowed by imperial competition; and travelers—like Lawrence himself—caught between the lure of movement and the constraints of the state.

The Crucifix Across the Mountains engages a historical landscape shaped by Catholic devotion and by Habsburg and Italian sovereignties. Tyrol—then largely under Austria-Hungary—inherited a dense network of crucifixes, chapels, and pilgrimage routes, emblems of communal identity and protection. By the early 1900s, transalpine travel had been transformed by railways and tunnels such as the Brenner line (opened 1867) and the Gotthard (1882), encouraging tourism and seasonal work. Yet along these modern arteries persisted older signs and rhythms. Lawrence reads the Alpine crossing as an encounter with the legacies of empire, faith, and folk piety that organized movement long before passports and timetables systematized it.

On the Lago di Garda situates itself in a borderland. Before 1918, the lake straddled a frontier: the northern shore, including Riva, belonged to Austria-Hungary, while much of the southern and western littoral lay in the Kingdom of Italy. Steam navigation, lakeside promenades, and health resorts—growing since the nineteenth century—brought visitors to a landscape of olive groves, lemon terraces, and waterside towns. Yet Garda also bore memories of earlier wars, from the Napoleonic era to the Risorgimento. Lawrence's attention to the lake's daily life registers how tourism coexisted with fishing, small commerce, and cross-border livelihoods, all soon to be disrupted by the demands and suspicions of wartime.

The Lemon Gardens reflects a distinctive northern Italian industry. On the western Garda shore, terraced "limonaie," framed with masonry pillars and winter shutters, had supported citrus cultivation since the early modern period.

Nineteenth-century demand in Central Europe, coupled with lake shipping and rail links, sustained an intensive, labor-heavy agricultural system. By the early twentieth century, however, Garda growers faced competition from southern Italian and overseas citrus, plant diseases, and volatile prices. The limonaie's specialized labor and seasonal rhythms thus embodied a wider story: the integration of local economies into global markets, and the precariousness that modernization could bring to even celebrated regional products.

The Spinner and the Monks touches on older crafts and religious institutions within a modernizing Lombardy and Veneto. Northern Italy's silk economy—reliant on mulberry cultivation and women's work in filande (silk-reeling mills)—had shaped village life since the nineteenth century, despite mechanization and changing markets. Monastic communities, once powerful landholders, had been curtailed by post-unification laws suppressing religious corporations (from 1866), though many sites remained culturally central or were repurposed. Lawrence's juxtaposition of individual artisan labor and cloistered discipline reflects a historical tension between secular industry and ecclesiastical authority, each trying to persist—and to define moral order—amid shifting legal regimes and economic needs.

The Theatre registers Italy's deep performance culture at a time of technological and social transition. Provincial towns prided themselves on civic theatres that hosted opera, drama, and touring companies. By the 1900s, electric lighting, new stage machinery, and the spread of early cinema altered audience habits and aesthetics. Seating

plans preserved social hierarchies—boxes for elites, galleries for workers—making the theatre a public mirror of class and civic identity. Traveling troupes carried repertory across regions, even as film began to compete for spectators. Lawrence's observations situate the provincial stage within national conversations about modern spectacle, popular taste, and the place of art in everyday life.

San Gaudenzio invokes a monumental symbol of post-unification civic pride and enduring Catholic devotion. The Basilica of San Gaudenzio in Novara, crowned in the nineteenth century with Alessandro Antonelli's remarkable cupola and spire (completed in the 1880s), dominated the skyline of the Piedmontese plains. Such architecture, blending baroque foundations with modern engineering, spoke to a newly unified Italy asserting urban identity while negotiating the unresolved "Roman Question" between state and Church (settled only in 1929). Lawrence treats the site not as antiquarian curiosity but as a living focus of processions, memory, and urban rhythm, where national history and local piety intersect.

The Dance engages rural festivity as social structure and renewal. Across northern Italian villages, patronal feasts and calendrical festivals brought together peasants, artisans, and townspeople for processions and communal dancing—waltzes, polkas, and regional forms—often under the watch of clergy and carabinieri. Such occasions mediated courtship, asserted respectability, and occasionally sparked quarrels over propriety or politics. Brass bands, fireworks, and traveling vendors signaled the penetration of modern

entertainment into traditional cycles. Lawrence treats the dance ground as a revealing microcosm: a regulated freedom where generational aspirations, gender norms, and communal solidarity negotiated the pressures of work, reform, and the expanding money economy.

Il Duro and John present character studies shaped by broader social forces. In early twentieth-century Italy, universal conscription, seasonal migration, and precarious wage labor forged particular models of masculinity—proud, resilient, sometimes wary of outsiders. Foreign visitors, meanwhile, formed communities around the Italian lakes: invalids seeking milder climates, artists and teachers, middle-class tourists guided by Murray and Baedeker handbooks. These encounters exposed asymmetries of language, money, and expectation. Lawrence's portraits ask how national character is made and mistaken in such contact zones, where hard experience and courtesy, reserve and performance, become strategies for navigating volatile economies and the tourist gaze.

Italians in Exile addresses one of the era's defining movements: mass emigration. Between roughly 1876 and 1915, around fourteen million people left Italy, many from the rural north and south, heading to the Americas or moving seasonally to Switzerland, France, Austria, and Germany. Remittances sustained villages, yet migrants met suspicion, harsh conditions, and episodes of xenophobic violence abroad. Political exiles also circulated: socialists, anarchists, and nationalists, including Italian-speakers from Habsburg-ruled Trentino and Trieste. Swiss neutrality and demand for labor made the Alpine confederation a corridor

and refuge. Lawrence traces how exile reshapes identity, turning the familiar into a remembered or imagined homeland.

The collection repeatedly returns to borders as lived experience. The multiethnic Habsburg lands met the young Italian state along linguistically mixed valleys where Lombard, Venetian, and German dialects overlapped. Schooling and conscription regimes tied people to different capitals; customs posts and currency regulations threaded through daily life. Cross-border marriages, labor contracts, and smuggling were common. For Italian-speakers under Vienna, loyalty could be pragmatic, sentimental, or strategic. Lawrence's essays capture this layered belonging, where a roadside shrine, a market day, or a police inspection could summon centuries of political shifts, reminding travelers that even the most picturesque vistas were historically contingent.

The outbreak of war in 1914 transformed these settings. Italy initially remained neutral, while Austria-Hungary and Germany fought the Entente; secret diplomacy produced the Treaty of London (April 1915), and Italy entered the war in May 1915 against its former allies. Mountain warfare on the Isonzo and in the Trentino turned familiar passes into front lines. Evacuations, internments, and requisitions altered village economies; young men disappeared into armies. Travel became bureaucratically fraught—permits, censors, interrogations. The Return Journey is steeped in this atmosphere of suspicion and dislocation, as peacetime circuits of lake steamers and alpine trains gave way to military priorities and closed borders.

Lawrence's personal position during these years sharpened his sensibilities to surveillance and nationality. Living with Frieda, a German-born partner, marked him for scrutiny once Britain entered the war. The Defence of the Realm regulations tightened movement and publication; his novel *The Rainbow* was prosecuted for obscenity in 1915, heightening his notoriety. Although the essays in *Twilight in Italy* draw on prewar experience, their 1916 publication meant they were read under wartime conditions that colored responses to his views on nation, sex, and religion. The collection thus intersects with debates about loyalty, censorship, and the limits placed on cosmopolitan observation.

Technologies of mobility underpin the book's itinerary. By the early twentieth century, rail networks linked Central Europe to Lombardy and the Veneto; lake steamers synchronized with trains; postal and telegraph services bound remote towns into national and international systems. Guidebooks standardized sightseeing, while inexpensive cameras and postcards shaped visual expectations. Lawrence consciously resists this codified gaze, lingering in back streets, fields, and workshops rather than canonical monuments. His travel practice reflects a broader modernist impulse to test the authority of expert knowledge and tourist scripts, seeking unprogrammed encounters while inevitably moving along infrastructures built for mass circulation.

Intellectual currents further inform the essays' tone. European modernism questioned industrial civilization's values, with currents of vitalism and primitivism valuing

immediacy and bodily knowledge. Debates roiled Catholic and secular circles alike: the condemnation of “Modernist” theology in 1907 signaled tightening ecclesiastical control, even as popular religion remained resilient. In Italy, reformers pressed for schools, hygiene, and labor protections, while conservatives defended hierarchy and custom. Lawrence’s sensitivity to ritual, work, and eros reflects these contexts. His own background in a coal-mining district supplied a comparative lens: Italian peasant and artisan worlds offered a counterpoint to mechanized, class-stratified Britain.

Across the collection, performance and sociability become measures of a society’s health. *The Theatre* and *The Dance* locate community in shared time and space, yet they also register commercialization and regulation. Likewise, *The Lemon Gardens* and *On the Lago di Garda* illuminate economies dependent on precarious niches within national markets. *San Gaudenzio* and *The Crucifix Across the Mountains* consider how sacred architecture and imagery anchor memory amid flux. *Italians in Exile* and the portraits of *Il Duro* and *John* show how migration and encounter refashion identity. Together these pieces map a north Italian world negotiating modern capitalism without fully relinquishing local solidarities and devotions.

Synopsis (Selection)

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Mountain Crossings (The Crucifix Across the Mountains; The Return Journey)

Following a passage over the alpine frontier in *The Crucifix Across the Mountains* and the farewell arc of *The Return Journey*, Lawrence frames Italy as a threshold between spiritual iconography and lived modernity. Waymarks like roadside crucifixes, tunnels, and passes become meditations on suffering, endurance, and the traveler's shifting identity. The tone is reflective and dusk-lit, blending sensuous observation with a skeptical, symbolic critique of Europe on the cusp of change.

Lake Garda and Cultivation (On the Lago di Garda; The Lemon Gardens)

In *On the Lago di Garda* and *The Lemon Gardens*, the lake's mutable light and the terraces of citrus cultivation anchor a study of how landscape shapes feeling and labor. Lawrence tracks seasons, smells, and stonework to show a dialogue between human design and elemental forces, attentive to beauty but alert to economic precarity and decline. The prose is tactile and rhythmic, using sensory detail to test ideas about vitality, utility, and the cost of cultivation.

Village Rituals and Devotions (The Spinner and the Monks; The Theatre; San Gaudenzio; The

Dance)

Gathering The Spinner and the Monks, The Theatre, San Gaudenzio, and The Dance, these sketches move from cloister to piazza to trace a society where sacred ritual and popular festivity interpenetrate. Craft, devotion, performance, and courtship reveal local hierarchies and freedoms, as bodies and voices enact communal identity under the watch of church and custom. The mood alternates between celebratory immediacy and analytic distance, exemplifying Lawrence's habit of reading ritual as a register of instinct and authority.

Portraits of Strangers and Displacement (Il Duro; John; Italians in Exile)

Il Duro, John, and Italians in Exile present portraits of hardness, estrangement, and displacement across borders. A tough local figure, an English outsider, and uprooted Italians become tests of character under pressure—how pride, tenderness, and survival play out against social codes and national lines. The style is incisive yet empathetic, joining sharp physiognomic detail to recurring themes of exile, masculinity, and the friction between individual will and communal belonging.

Twilight in Italy

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THE CRUCIFIX ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

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The imperial road to Italy goes from Munich across the Tyrol, through Innsbruck and Bozen to Verona, over the mountains. Here the great processions passed as the emperors went South, or came home again from rosy Italy to their own Germany.

And how much has that old imperial vanity clung to the German soul? Did not the German kings inherit the empire of bygone Rome? It was not a very real empire, perhaps, but the sound was high and splendid.

Maybe a certain Grössenwahn is inherent in the German nature. If only nations would realize that they have certain natural characteristics, if only they could understand and agree to each other's particular nature, how much simpler it would all be.

The imperial procession no longer crosses the mountains, going South. That is almost forgotten, the road has almost passed out of mind. But still it is there, and its signs are standing.

The crucifixes are there, not mere attributes of the road, yet still having something to do with it[1q]. The imperial processions, blessed by the Pope and accompanied by the great bishops, must have planted the holy idol like a new plant among the mountains, there where it multiplied and grew according to the soil, and the race that received it.

As one goes among the Bavarian uplands and foothills, soon one realizes here is another land, a strange religion. It