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REVIEWS

**Nick Ceramella, ed. *Lake Garda: Gateway to D. H. Lawrence's Voyage to the Sun*.
Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.
Pp. 377 + CD, illus. £54.99 (hardcover). ISBN 978 1 4438 4825 1**

Reviewed by Fiona Becket

Lake Garda: Gateway to D. H. Lawrence's Voyage to the Sun, edited by Nick Ceramella, is the result of a conference held in Gargnano in September 2012 in order to commemorate Lawrence's sojourn there between 1912 and 1913. Lawrence expected to winter in Gargnano when he and Frieda Weekley arrived, and wrote to his editor and mentor Edward Garnett that it was "a rather tumble-downish place on the lake. You can only get there by steamer, because of the steep rocky mountainy hills at the back – no railway ... There are vineyards and olive woods and lemon gardens on the hill at the back ... not a bit touristy" (*IL* 453).

Previously he had written to Garnett about the beauty of the lake; by early October he was settled in the Villa Igéa and able to write to Garnett about rustic cooking, "weird fruit" (*IL* 458) and cheap red wine. His observations on cultural difference ran in a positive direction towards the men who sing, and the soldiers – "good looking and animal" (*IL* 458). On a day when the negatives outweighed the spectacle of the manly men, the scenery, wine, fresh fruit and vegetables, he fell into a rage about taxes and surcharges ("These damned dirty poverty stricken Italians diddle you whenever they get the chance; it's something fearful the way they try to do me", *IL* 464) and a weak currency. He finished 'Paul Morel' as *Sons and Lovers*, and started two new novels, one of which, 'The Insurrection of Miss Houghton', that became *The Lost Girl*, binarises England and Italy even at the level of its structure.

The letters “home” give a sense of a reputation being formed (as a playwright, a poet, as well as a writer of fiction), and of the personal resignation necessary as Frieda Weekley’s marriage resolved itself towards divorce, and the attendant bitterness. Lawrence’s anti-Cartesian personal philosophy takes shape, articulated famously to Ernest Collings in that letter (“My great religion is a belief in the blood”, *IL* 503) so clearly inflected by his experience of Gargnano: “That is why I like to live in Italy. The people are so unconscious” (*IL* 504).

Ceramella’s task has been to compile and edit a volume that responds sensitively to “Lorenzo’s” experience of self-imposed exile, crossing into Italy from Austria, in flight from the repressive conditions that had begun to define his time in England (turbulent relationships and ill-health, combined with a sense that his life as a writer had begun). Ceramella’s introduction to this weighty, and genuinely international, volume rightly asks us to consider the importance of *Twilight in Italy* as an outcome of living and writing in Gargnano, and the essays that inaugurate the collection, by Paul Eggert, Howard J. Booth and Naveed Rehan, highlight the creative dynamism of the “Italy” essays as Lawrence shaped his responses both to Italy and to England, permitting those creative intersections of the personal and the cultural.

Space will not allow a detailed assessment of every essay in this collection – there are twenty-two essays organised within eight book parts – and so a snap-shot of the content becomes necessary. The book includes two interviews: the first with mezzo-soprano Charlotte Stoppelenburg who performed, in Gargnano in September 2012, the European premiere of William Neil’s *The Waters are Shaking the Moon*, based on poems by Lawrence (reprinted in the Appendix). Ceramella’s volume laudably combines the critical and the creative, and it is valuable to have, also, Neil’s account of the “transformational process” of setting the poems to music (325). His is a thoughtful and responsive description of the relationships between tone, structure, image and sound. The second interview with Sabine Franks offers a painter’s perspective on Lawrence’s

experiences of living and working in Italy and, in particular, on the ways in which *Twilight in Italy* has influenced her creativity in a series of paintings called *Via D. H. Lawrence*, exhibited in Gargnano in 2013, a selection of which – landscapes, street scenes and views – are reproduced (in black and white) in this volume. By these means the reader is reminded of Lawrence as a poet and painter, and given an insight into how, after a century, his writing proves inspirational to other artists whose work also offers new interpretative insights into the work and ideas of the man.

As the title of the collection suggests, the sun permeates this volume – as symbolic, as metonymic, even (in Booth's essay) as oxymoronic. The sun, ever connected with ideas of the south, provides a guiding principle across and within these essays as they embark on analyses of such diverse topics as Lawrence's symbolism, the body (as healthy, as sick), the mind, desire, despair and the spirit. There is much in the volume that touches on Lawrence's highly personal assessment of non-European pre-modern cultures. Sergio Crapiz takes as his theme the "ethnopoetics" of Lawrence's writing on Amerindian societies and belief-systems and outlines how "Lawrence shattered the positivist myth of progress, which dominated the ethnocentric ideas of early twentieth-century anthropologists" in an essay which revisits critical debates on Lawrence's "primitivism" (215). Sheila Lahiri Choudhury considers the power of myths of the sun in Lawrence's writing and challenges the reader to look beyond the Amerindian and the Hellenic (the pre-Socratic) in Lawrence and consider the power of Indian myth. As Lahiri Choudhury makes reference to mythic icons, Paul Poplawski revisits the iconic manifestations of the Christs in the Tyrol that inspired Lawrence's reflections on cultural and personal rebirth and renewal: the risen son/sun. In these essays we find a productive intersection, if not dialogue, between the discursive "travel" writing and the fiction (short and long).

Certainly, this volume is wide-ranging in its engagement with genre. The poetry, short stories, novellas and novels are invoked

and examined in the context of this investigation of the imaginative power exerted on Lawrence by the idea and experience of Italy. While there are essays that concentrate on abstractions, on the “cosmic”, in Lawrence, there are also essays that remind the reader – especially in this year of a different, more sombre, centenary – of the imperialist politics that Lawrence so despised, and which he theorised in terms of the death of the self, and the uncertainties to which those politics gave rise. Carl Krockel approaches this theme by aligning Lawrence with the Italian film director Pier Paolo Pasolini, seeing both as developing visions “borne out of tradition, sexuality, the sacred and myth”, and arguing that both “had a high regard for the economically marginalised” while acknowledging the different aesthetic consequences of such a regard (194).

These examples demonstrate the intention in Ceramella’s collection to underline the contribution to Lawrence studies of an international body of scholars and artists in a context that acknowledges the power of place in the development of even part of an *oeuvre*; and the extraordinary reach and influence of a body of work and ideas. Some might argue that the editor could have been less democratic in his choice of contributors; that he could, perhaps, have given more space to fewer contributors. However, a rejoinder might be that this is a highly accomplished volume of differences – illustrated, multi-media, self-consciously alert to the power of the interview alongside the critical essay and to the attractions of self-reflexive pieces alongside more orthodox works of critique. It is an interesting book.