

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-24275-2 - Sea and Sardinia
D. H. Lawrence Edited by Mara Kalnins
Excerpt
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SEA AND SARDINIA

Note on the text

The base-text for this edition is the corrected ribbon typescript (TS) of *Sea and Sardinia* which DHL sent to his agent Robert Mountsier on 28 March 1921 and from which Thomas Seltzer's American edition (A1) was set.

The apparatus records all textual variants including editorial interventions on the few occasions when it has been necessary to emend the text with the following exceptions. Inconsistent usage in TS – for example initial capital or lower case letters as in Liras/liras, spelling variants as in honour/honor, hyphenation as in half-past/half past – has been regularised in accordance with DHL's most consistent practice. DHL also sometimes signalled the first appearance of a familiar foreign word or phrase by using italics or quotations marks – for example, '*Signora*' and "sang-froid" – but subsequently omitted them; this habit has been preserved here. TS usually placed punctuation outside inverted commas for a word or phrase but A1 sometimes placed it inside; the most consistent practice in TS has been adopted.

For a list of the *Dial* (Per) extracts see Introduction, p. xxvii n. 24.

The following emendations have been made silently:

- 1 Clearly accidental spelling errors by DHL or the typist and obvious typesetters' mistakes have been corrected.
- 2 Accidental omissions have been supplied in the case of incomplete quotation marks, full stops and apostrophes in colloquial contractions such as 'o'clock'.
- 3 In TS the first typist clearly indented paragraphs following direct speech whereas the second typist sometimes typed from the left-hand margin. Such inconsistencies in paragraphing have been regularised in accordance with the first typist's practice.
- 4 The convention for indicating ellipsis varies in the base-text and is four full stops in A1 and Martin Secker's English edition (E1). The convention adopted here is three full stops.
- 5 Chapter titles in the TS are sometimes in upper and lower case letters and sometimes in capitals – as in Per, A1 and E1 – as well as sometimes underlined. The convention adopted here is upper and lower case letters. Full stops, generally present after both chapter numbers and titles in TS and A1, but not in Per and E1, have been retained throughout.
- 6 Italic punctuation in A1 and E1 is recorded only when it is part of another variant.
- 7 Throughout A1 printed 'color' (and its compounds) for 'colour' and E1 'to-day'

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- and 'to-morrow' for 'today' and 'tomorrow'. The spelling has been standardised in accordance with DHL's normal usage here.
- 8 Unlike TS and A_I, E_I habitually inserted a comma after 'Oh' and 'oh'; DHL's usage is preserved here.
- 9 In TS the typists and DHL included lines indicating internal divisions in the text, but although A_I and E_I sometimes added extra space neither printed the lines, which are restored here.

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I.

As far as Palermo.

Comes over one an absolute necessity to move. And what is more, to move in some particular direction. A double necessity then: to get on the move, and to know whither.

Why can't one sit still? Here in Sicily it is so pleasant: the sunny Ionian sea, the changing jewel of Calabria,^{*} like a fire-opal moved in the light; Italy and the panorama of Christmas clouds, night with the dog-star laying a long, luminous gleam across the sea, as if baying at us, Orion marching above; how the dog-star Sirius^{*} looks at one, looks at one! he is the hound of heaven, green, glamorous and fierce!—and then oh regal evening-star, hung westward flaring over the jagged dark precipices of tall Sicily: then Etna, that wicked witch, resting her thick white snow under heaven, and slowly, slowly rolling her orange-coloured smoke. They called her the Pillar of Heaven,^{*} the Greeks. It seems wrong at first, for she trails up in a long, magical, flexible line from the sea's edge to her blunt cone, and does not seem tall. She seems rather low, under heaven. But as one knows her better, oh awe and wizardry! Remote under heaven, aloof, so near, yet never with us. The painters try to paint her, and the photographers to photograph her, in vain. Because why? Because the near ridges, with their olives and white houses, these are with us. Because the river-bed, and Naxos under the lemon groves, Greek Naxos^{*} deep under dark-leaved, many-fruited lemon groves, Etna's skirts and skirt-bottoms, these still are our world, our own world. Even the high villages among the oaks, on Etna. But Etna herself, Etna of the snow and secret changing winds, she is beyond a crystal wall. When I look at her, low, white, witch-like under heaven, slowly rolling her orange smoke and giving sometimes a breath of rose-red flame, then I must look away from earth, into the ether, into the low empyrean. And there, in that remote region, Etna is alone. If you would see her, you must slowly take off your eyes from the world, and go a naked seer to the strange chamber of the empyrean. Pedestal of heaven! The Greeks had a sense of the magic truth of things. Thank goodness one still knows enough about them to find one's

kinship at last. There are so many photographs, there are so infinitely many water-colour drawings and oil paintings which purport to render Etna. But pedestal of heaven! You must cross the invisible border. Between the foreground, which is our own, and Etna, pivot
 5 of winds in lower heaven, there is a dividing line. You must change your state of mind. A metempsychosis. It is no use thinking you can see and behold Etna and the foreground both at once. Never. One or the other. Foreground and a transcribed Etna. Or Etna, pedestal of heaven.

10 Why then must one go? Why not stay? Ah what a mistress, this Etna! with her strange winds prowling round her like Circe's panthers,* some black, some white. With her strange, remote communications, and her terrible dynamic exhalations. She makes men mad.* Such terrible vibrations of wicked and beautiful electricity she
 15 throws about her, like a deadly net! Nay sometimes, verily, one can feel a new current of her demon magnetism seize one's living tissue, and change the peaceful lie of one's active cells. She makes a storm in the living plasm, and a new adjustment. And sometimes it is like a madness.

20 This timeless Grecian Etna, in her lower-heaven loveliness, so lovely, so lovely, what a torturer! Not many men can really stand her, without losing their souls. She is like Circe. Unless a man is very strong, she takes his soul away from him, and leaves him, not a beast, but an elemental creature, intelligent and soulless. Intelligent, almost
 25 inspired, and soulless, like the Etna Sicilians. Intelligent daimons, and humanly, according to us, the most stupid people on earth.* Ach horror! How many men, how many races, has Etna put to flight? It was she who broke the quick of the Greek soul. And after the Greeks, she gave the Romans, the Normans, the Arabs, the Spaniards, the French, the Italians, even the English, she gave them all
 30 their inspired hour, and broke their souls.*

Perhaps it is she one must flee from. At any rate, one must go: and at once. After having come back only at the end of October,* already one must dash away. And it is only the third of January. And one
 35 cannot afford to move. Yet there you are: at the Etna bidding one goes.

Where does one go? There is Girgenti by the south. There is Tunis at hand. Girgenti, and the sulphur spirit and the Greek

As far as Palermo

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guarding temples, to make one madder? Never. Neither Syracuse and the madness of its great quarries.* Tunis? Africa? Not yet. Not yet. Not the Arabs, not yet. Naples, Rome, Florence? No good at all. Where then?

Where then? Spain or Sardinia. Spain or Sardinia. Sardinia, which is like nowhere. Sardinia, which has no history, no date, no race, no offering. Let it be Sardinia. They say neither Romans nor Phoenicians, Greeks nor Arabs ever subdued Sardinia. It lies outside; outside the circuit of civilisation. Like the Basque lands. Sure enough, it is Italian now, with its railways and its motor-omnibuses. But there is an uncaptured Sardinia still. It lies within the net of this European civilisation, but it isn't landed yet. And the net is getting old and tattered. A good many fish are slipping through the net of the old European civilisation. Like that great whale of Russia. And probably even Sardinia. Sardinia then. Let it be Sardinia.

There is a fortnightly boat sailing from Palermo—next Wednesday, three days ahead. Let us go, then. Away from abhorred Etna, and the Ionian sea, and these great stars in the water, and the almond trees in bud, and the orange trees heavy with red fruit, and these maddening, exasperating, impossible Sicilians, who never knew what truth was and have long lost all notion of what a human being is. A sort of sulphureous demons. *Andiamo!*

But let me confess, in parenthesis, that I am not at all sure whether I don't really prefer these demons to our self-sanctified humanity.

Why does one create such discomfort for oneself! To have to get up in the middle of the night—half-past one—to go and look at the clock. Of course this fraud of an American watch has stopped, with its impudent phosphorescent face. Half-past one! Half-past one, and a dark January night. Ah well! Half-past one! And an uneasy sleep till at last it is five o'clock. Then light a candle and get up.

The dreary black morning, the candle-light, the house looking night-dismal. Ah well, one does all these things for one's pleasure. So light the charcoal fire and put the kettle on. The queen bee* shivering round half dressed, fluttering her unhappy candle.

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“It’s fun,” she says, shuddering.

“Great,” say I, grim as death.

First fill the thermos with hot tea. Then fry bacon—good English
 bacon from Malta, a god-send indeed—and make bacon sandwiches.
 5 Make also sandwiches of scrambled eggs. Make also bread and
 butter. Also a little toast for breakfast—and more tea. But ugh, who
 wants to eat at this unearthly hour, especially when one is escaping
 from bewitched Sicily.

Fill the little bag we call the kitchenino. Methylated spirit, a small
 10 aluminium saucepan, a spirit-lamp, two spoons, two forks, a knife,
 two aluminium plates, salt, sugar, tea—what else? The thermos flask,
 the various sandwiches, four apples, and a little tin of butter. So
 much for the kitchenino, for myself and the queen bee. Then my
 knapsack, and the q-b’s handbag.

15

Under the lid of the half-cloudy night sky, far away at the rim of
 the Ionian sea, the first light, like metal fusing. So swallow the cup of
 tea and the bit of toast. Hastily wash up, so that we can find the
 house decent when we come back. Shut the door-windows of the
 20 upper terrace, and go down. Lock the door: the upper half of the
 house made fast.

The sky and sea are parting like an oyster shell, with a low red
 gape. Looking across from the verandah at it, one shivers. Not that
 it is cold. The morning is not at all cold. But the ominousness of
 25 it: that long red slit between a dark sky and a dark Ionian sea,
 terrible old bivalve which has held life between its lips so long.
 And here, at this house, we are ledged so awfully above the dawn,
 naked to it.

Fasten the door-windows of the lower verandah. One won’t fasten
 30 at all. The summer heat warped it one way, the masses of autumn
 rain warped it another. Put a chair against it. Lock the last door, and
 hide the key. Sling the knapsack on one’s back, take the kitchenino in
 one’s hand, and look round. The dawn-red widening, between the
 purpling sea and the troubled sky. A light in the capucin convent*
 35 across there. Cocks crowing, and the long, howling, hiccuping,
 melancholy bray of an ass. “All females are dead, all females-och!
 och! och!—hoooo! Ahaa!—there’s one left.” So he ends on a moaning
 grunt of consolation.—This is what the Arabs tell us an ass is
 howling when he brays.