

Lawrence and the Etruscans

In January 1920 Lawrence's friend Rosalind Baynes had rented the ancient Villa Canovaia at San Gervasio, near Fiesole. In August a nearby explosion blew out all the windows; Lawrence asked if he could stay in the abandoned villa, and spent most of September there.

Sometimes he came to Fiesole where I was now living, climbing by a steep track up through the olives and along under the remains of Fiesole's Etruscan walls, and arriving rather jauntily, carrying something peculiar and humorous - a salamander or a little baby duck as a pet for the children. Or he came and cooked the Sunday dinner - an English Sunday dinner with roast beef and batter pudding. And there were tea parties with friends up from Florence, and evenings when we sat on the terrace high above the lights of the city, having our supper of mortadella and marsala. It was here several other poems were suggested - 'Cypresses', for example.¹

Is it coincidence that the first contact we know of between Lawrence and the Etruscans should be in a context of jauntiness and humour? 'There seems to have been in the Etruscan instinct a real desire to preserve the natural humour of life' he was to write.² Perhaps it was at this time also that Lawrence first visited the Archaeological Museum in Florence, where he would have seen many of the finest Etruscan artefacts, and read Dennis's *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*. 'Cypresses' implies some knowledge of the Etruscans, and years later Lawrence was to say that he had read only Dennis.

Lawrence could have chosen no better guide to the Etruscans than George Dennis. Dennis was not an academic but an explorer, motivated not by the ambition to become a Professor by amassing dead facts, like the young German archaeologist Lawrence met in Tarquinia, but by a spirit of adventure, by natural curiosity and enthusiasm. He was as interested in the people and places he met on the way as in the remains themselves, and always approached the remains as evidence of a living people. His classic study of the Etruscans is also, like *Etruscan Places*, a very personal and lively travel book, full of vitality and humour.

¹ Edward Nehls, *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1958, vol.2, pp.49-50.

² *Sketches of Etruscan Places and other Italian essays*, ed. Simonetta de Filippis, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.32.

Lawrence saw the Tuscan cypresses as hieroglyphs of a language, like Etruscan, to which we have lost the key. The 'supple, brooding, softly-swaying pillars of dark flame', the cypresses, are said to be monumental to the 'long-nosed, sensitive-footed, subtly-smiling Etruscans', silently speaking the lost language, darkly exuding the lost life, sinuous and flame-tall, a home still for the spirits of the lost whom Lawrence invokes

To bring their meaning back into life again,
Which they have taken away

And wrapt inviolable in soft cypress-trees,
Etruscan cypresses.

We have buried, with the Etruscans, 'so much of the delicate magic of life'.

Lawrence does not offer to interpret the cypresses. They are silent tongues to him too. The poem is a series of unanswered questions, a dialogue of one. From other trees, from fruits, flowers and beasts, Lawrence was able to draw 'little living myths', and penetrate their symbolic secrets, most triumphantly in 'Tortoises', also written at the Villa Canovaia, and in 'Almond Blossom' four months later. But the cypresses resist him. The primary sexual symbols, the phallus and the ark, dominated Etruscan consciousness, and stood at the entrance to the tombs. They are also dominant symbols in *Birds*, *Beasts and Flowers*. Yet the phallic nature of Tuscan cypresses, though hinted at in the poem, is not developed.

In September 1921 Lawrence arranged to meet Catherine and Donald Carswell in Siena in order to visit Perugia with them. He arrived in Siena before them, and hated it so much that he could not bear to stay, and returned to Florence. The Carswells went to Perugia without him. Apparently Catherine wrote to him that she had discovered the secret of the Etruscans there, for on 25 October Lawrence wrote to her:

Also, will you tell me what then was the secret of the Etruscans, which you saw written so plainly in the place you went to? Please don't forget to tell me, as they really do rather puzzle me, the Etruscans.¹

¹ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol.IV, eds. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.105.

We do not know what reply he received. But if Lawrence had not disliked Siena, or if they had met in Perugia instead, *Etruscan Places* might have been advanced by several years, for it was Lawrence's visit to the University Museum in Perugia with Millicent Beveridge and Mabel Harrison in March 1926 which set him planning his tour of the major Etruscan sites.

In April 1926 Lawrence wrote to Martin Secker from Spotorno:

We might go to Perugia, and I might do a book on Umbria and the Etruscan remains. What do you think? It would be half a travel book - of the region round Perugia, Assisi, Spoleto, Cortona, and the Maremma - and half a book about the Etruscan things, which interest me very much. If you happen to know any good book, modern, on Etruscan things, I wish you'd order it for me. I've only read that old work, Dennis' - *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*. There will be some lectures in Perugia.¹

Later that month Lawrence told Secker that he was 'reading Italian books on the Etruscans - very interesting indeed. I'll join Vieusseux's library here - they will have more things' [444]. One of these Italian books was certainly Ducati's *Etruria Antica*, which, according to Richard Aldington, Lawrence carried about with him during the summer of 1926.

A week later, and three days before moving into the Villa Mirinda five miles south of Florence in the Tuscan hills, Lawrence wrote to his niece Margaret that he had taken the Mirinda specifically to use it as a centre for travelling round to 'quite a number of places in Tuscany and Umbria, where the best remains are. At present I'm supposed to be reading up about my precious Etruschi!' [447]. One of the books he read was by Theodor Mommsen, probably *The Earliest Inhabitants of Italy*, for at the end of the month he wrote to his sister-in-law Else Jaffe:

Mommsen hated everything Etruscan, said the germ of all degeneracy was in the race. But the bronzes and terracottas are fascinating, so alive with physical life, with a powerful physicality which surely is as great, or sacred, ultimately, as the ideal of the Greeks and Germans. [465]

On 21 May Lawrence wrote:

¹ *Letters V.* eds. James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey, CUP 1989, p.413.

.. I have been reading up the ancient Etruscans. I thought perhaps in July, if the weather will clear up, I might go to Cortona and Chiusi and Volterra and Tarquinia and Orvieto, the old Etruscan places, and look at all the remains, and perhaps write a light Etruscan travel book, with many photographic reproductions. I think I might like it - if only the weather would be fine and hot. [461]

But in the summer heat Lawrence did not feel like travelling, or embarking on any large-scale work. It was idyllic at the Mirenda:

In the real summer I always lose interest in literature and publications. The cicadas rattle away all day in the trees, the girls sing, cutting the corn with sickles, the sheaves of wheat lie all the afternoon like people dead asleep in the heat. E pui non si frega. I don't work, except at an occasional scrap of an article. I don't much feel like doing a book, of any sort. [490]

In August and September of 1926 Lawrence made his last visit to England. He spent a long weekend with Richard Aldington in Berkshire:

As I knew he was contemplating a book on the Etruscans, I had a dozen standard works on the subject sent down from the London Library; and we spent a good deal of time turning them over and discussing Etruria, which was very important at that time in Lawrence's private mythology.¹

Unfortunately, the only book Aldington specifies is *Villanovans and Early Etruscans* by D. Randall-Maciviers. It is clear, however, that Lawrence prepared himself very assiduously before making his Etruscan tour.

In March 1927 Frieda was planning to go to Germany, so Lawrence invited himself to stay with his American Buddhist friends Earl and Achsah Brewster, who had just moved to Ravello. His plan was to stay in Ravello for a week or ten days, then set out from there with Earl Brewster on the long-planned Etruscan pilgrimage:

What *I* should most like to do, for the trip, would be to do the western half of the Etruscans - the Rome museums - then Veii and Civita Castellana and Cerveteri - which one does from Rome - then Corneto, just beyond Civita Vecchia in Maremma - then the Maremma coast-line - and Volterra.

¹ Nehls, vol.3, 84-5.

Do you know any of these places? I should like to do them very much. If there were time, we might get to Chiusi and Orvieto - we could see. I have a real feeling for the Etruscans. [649]

The trip went much as Lawrence had planned. He and Earl Brewster arrived in Rome on 4 April. They began with the museum of the Villa di Papa Giulia - 'with what lively interest Lawrence studied its treasures!' Brewster recalled. On 6 April Lawrence saw his first Etruscan necropolis, at Cerveteri. This time there was no disillusion. The spirit of this place was more congenial to him than anywhere else he had been. At Cerveteri he found 'a queer stillness and a curious peaceful repose. . . quite different from the weirdness of Celtic places, the slightly repellent feeling of Rome and the old Campagna, and the rather horrible feeling of the great pyramid places in Mexico, Teotihuacan and Cholula, and Mitla in the south; or the amiably idolatrous Buddha places in Ceylon':

There is a stillness and a softness in these great grassy mounds with their ancient stone girdles, and down the central walk there lingers still a kind of homeliness and happiness. True, it was a still and sunny afternoon in April, and larks rose from the soft grass of the tombs. But there was a stillness and a soothingness in all the air, in that sunken place, and a feeling that it was good for one's soul to be there. [Sketches 16]

The next day they reached Tarquinia, and this was the high spot of the tour. In the afternoon they walked with a guide out to the necropolis. The first of the painted tombs Lawrence entered was the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing. To enter that tomb today is to recapture Lawrence's joy:

It is all small and gay and quick with life, spontaneous as only young life can be. If only it were not so much damaged, one would be happy, because here is the real Etruscan liveliness and naturalness. It is not impressive or grand. But if you are content with just a sense of the quick ripple of life, then here it is. [ibid 345]

And the scene at one end, of the dead man banqueting in the underworld, confirmed Lawrence's belief that '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' [46]. Next, they

were taken to the Tomb of the Leopards:

The walls of this little tomb are a dance of real delight. The room seems inhabited still by Etruscans of the sixth century before Christ, a vivid, life-accepting people, who must have lived with real fullness . . . All is colour, and we do not seem to be underground at all, but in some gay chamber of the past. [48]

In these dark underground chambers, Lawrence found colour and daylight and fresh air. In these Etruscan tombs he felt he had come face to face with unfallen man:

You cannot think of art, but only of life itself, as if this were the very life of the Etruscans, dancing in their coloured wraps with massive yet exuberant naked limbs, ruddy from the air and the sea-light, dancing and fluting along through the little olive-trees, out in the fresh day. [48]

Earl Brewster recalled:

How happy were our days at Tarquinia! The tombs are on a high plateau back a few miles from the sea. They number about a hundred and cover the area of a small city. we were thrilled by the freshness and beauty of their mural paintings. I felt Lawrence truly maintained Etruscan art has a certain sensitive quality not found in the Greek. The symbolism, as he explained it, seemed so convincing that I could but wonder at the variety of explanations archaeologists give to it. From the jewelled splendour of those dark tombs we came forth into the brightness of an April day and a blue sky, broken by hurrying white clouds: the fields through which we walked were gay with red poppies: our guide unlocked the door leading to another tomb and we would descend again to behold the joyous scenes with which the Etruscans, of such a distant world, chose to decorate the homes of their dead.¹

After visiting more Etruscan museums and tombs at Vulci and Volterra, Lawrence returned to the Villa Mirinda on 11 April. The next day he wrote:

But I was really happy looking at Etruscan tombs by the coast north of

¹ Earl and Achsah Brewster, *D. H. Lawrence: Reminiscences and Correspondence*, Secker 1934, p.123.

Rome - Cerveteri, Tarquinia etc. No rush there! Even the ass brays slowly and leisurely, and the tombs are far more twinkling and alive than the houses of men.¹

Two days later he wrote to his mother-in-law:

The Etruscan tombs are very interesting and so nice and charming. They were a living, fresh, jolly people, lived their own life, without wanting to dominate the life of others. I am fond of my Etruscans. They had life in themselves, so they didn't have so much need to dominate. I should like to write a couple of sketches of these Etruscan places - nothing scientific, but just as it is now, and the impression one has. [33-4]

One might have expected Lawrence to throw himself into this work at once, but a fortnight later we find him writing to Kot that he has yet to begin these sketches [42]. He had not, however, been idle, for in the interim he had written 'a story of the Resurrection - what sort of a man "rose up", after all that other pretty little experience' [40].

If Lawrence at this time was thinking of Etruscan places as no more than a collection of impressionistic sketches, it is, perhaps, not surprising that he should be willing to set it aside in favour of imaginative work. His decision to do so is still less surprising when we realize the extent to which *The Escaped Cock* grew from the whole Etruscan experience.

The worst thing about Catherine Carswell's excellent 1932 biography of Lawrence is its title: *The Savage Pilgrimage*. It gave unintended support to T.S. Eliot's accusation of fanatical primitivism in *After Strange Gods* two years later. Lawrence's pilgrimage was not a 'savage' one. What could be more truly civilized than a search for a people somewhere on earth who had found a way of living together which fostered living life to the full, and fully in tune with nature? Lawrence, travelling south-east, to Italy, Sicily (the very toe of Europe), Ceylon, Australia, had all along believed that he was most likely to find what he was searching for in the West, the New World. He was afraid that he might be disillusioned, but at last crossed the Pacific to America. The Indians of the American South-West seemed to him to have found a mode of life which was right

¹ *Letters*, VI, eds. James T. Boulton and Margaret H. Boulton, p.28.

for them, and in accord with the spirit of place, but was not apt or available to an Englishman. For from advocating a reversion to savagery, Lawrence wrote:

The voice out of the far-off time was not for my ears. Its language was unknown to me. ... I don't want to go back to them, ah, never. I never want to deny them or break with them. But there is no going back. Always onward, still further. The great devious onward-flowing stream of conscious human blood.¹

Lawrence's pilgrimage could be read as a search for Pan. He met an awe-inspiring Pan in the American South-West, but a Pan of the lightning and cactus spine rather than a Dionysos of the tendrilled vine. Writing subsequently of the American pioneers, he recorded his own rejection of that embodiment of Pan:

Something in the soul perished: the softness, the floweriness, the natural tenderness. How could it survive the sheer brutality of the fight with that American wilderness, which is so big, vast, and obdurate.²

He abandoned his leadership principle, and his pilgrimage. He yearned for the greenness of England (but his health ruled that out), and the floweriness of Tuscany.

So the Lawrences settled at the Villa Mirenda, in the Tuscan hills above Florence. The word 'Tuscan' derives from Etruscan. Etruria, at its height, occupied the whole of Western and central Italy between the Arno and the Tiber, from the sixth until the third century B.C. After that the Etruscans were gradually assimilated by the expanding Roman empire.

In Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Parzival has spent many fruitless years searching for the Holy Grail. At last, exhausted and disillusioned, he is advised to stop searching, and simply to let the reins lie loose on his horse's neck. The horse takes him directly to the Grail Castle. So Lawrence had no sooner given up his globe-trotting than he found by chance that what he had been seeking was beneath his feet, in the tombs of the Etruscans. He had spoken of England as a floating sarcophagus, the English as 'a nation of poltroons in the face of life, bossed by the witless canaille and off-sweepings of a dead 19th century'. In Etruria he found exactly the opposite – the tombs of a long-dead people brimming with life.

¹ *Mornings in Mexico and Other Essays*, ed. Virginia Crosswhite Hyde, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 122.

² *Phoenix*, ed. Edward McDonald, Penguin, 1978, p.267.

After finishing the first version of *The Escaped Cock*, Lawrence still did not begin *Etruscan Places*. He wrote next the essay 'Making Love to Music'. After expounding the theory that 'we are such stuff as our grandmother's dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded by a band' [ibid 162], he asks what the modern young woman, condemned by her grandmother's dream to make love to music, dreams of. She dreams, he answers ('the thought occurred to me suddenly when I was looking at the remains of paintings on the walls of Etruscan tombs at Tarquinia'), of rediscovering the Etruscan secret, though she may never have heard of the Etruscans, of becoming herself one of those gaily dancing Etruscan women:

The Etruscan young woman is going gaily at it, after two thousand five hundred years. She is not making love to music, nor is the dark-limbed youth, her partner. She is just dancing her very soul into existence, having made an offering on one hand to the lively phallus of man, on the other hand, to the shut womb-symbol of woman, and put herself on real good terms with both of them. so she is quite serene, and dancing herself as a very fountain of motion and of life, the young man opposite her dancing himself the same, in contrast and balance, with just the double flute to whistle round their naked heels. [166]

On 27 April Lawrence wrote to Kot: 'I liked my trip to Cerveteri and Tarquinia and Vulci so much, I'd like to jot them down while they are fresh'.¹ Within the next day or two he began to do so, but almost immediately broke off to write more essays, including 'Flowery Tuscany'. In all of these it is evident that what Lawrence is thinking about is the ways in which the Etruscan spirit has lived on in Italy:

Italy today is far more Etruscan in its pulse than Roman; and will always be so. The Etruscan element is like the grass of the field and the sprouting of corn, in Italy: it will always be so. [*Sketches* p.36]

He identifies the 'Etruscan element' as essentially non-tragic, for tragedy is a resistance, typically Northern, to the passing of things. Hardy's *Little Father Time* is typical of the Northern consciousness: flowers upset him because he cannot look at them without thinking that they will all be withered in a few days. But in a permanently

¹ *Letters* VI, p.42.

sunny climate, such thoughts become morbid:

Where are the little yellow aconites of eight weeks ago? I neither know nor care. They were sunny and the sun shines, and sunniness means change, and petals passing and coming. The winter aconites sunnily came and sunnily went. What more? The sun always shines. It is our fault if we don't think so. [238]

The Etruscans themselves lived like flowers, and apparently died like them - totally without morbidity. Their little wooden temples were 'small, dainty, fragile, and evanescent as flowers' [32].

In May Lawrence was not well. He pottered about with stories and other 'trifles'. By the end of the month he had done only the first three Etruscan essays. It took him until the last week in June to finish them, so that the essay on Volterra was written some ten weeks after the actual visit - and without notes.

On 25 June Lawrence wrote to Earl Brewster:

One day we will really go after more Etruscans together. Meanwhile I think I shall go to Arezzo and Cortona, Chiusi, Orvieto, Perugia with Frieda, towards the end of next week. I'd like to do those places before we leave. With Cerveteri and Tarquinia, Vulci and Volterra, that makes nine of the great cities - the twelve. - But it leaves a whole bookful of little places - Veii, Civita Castellana, Norchia, Vetulonia, Cosa, Populonia, Bieda - we might do those, and make a second vol. - after.¹

A few days before the planned excursion with Frieda, Lawrence bathed in the sea at Forte dei Marmi and brought on a bronchial haemorrhage. The trip had to be abandoned. For Lawrence the completion of the book was contingent upon seeing those other sites. He continued to plan the trip for another two years, but it was never made, and so the book was never published in his lifetime, though four of the essays appeared in *Travel and World Today* .

It was a great temptation to Lawrence to interpret the Etruscan remains to fit his dream. He ignored some of the facts he perfectly

¹ *Letters VI*, p.89.

well. knew, for example, that the Etruscans were a colonizing and trading people who used slave labour in the mines of Populonia and did not spend their whole lives dancing and fluting. But on the whole his scholarship is sound, and many of his new insights have been verified by subsequent scholarship. The books he had read had no answers to the questions which really interest us about the Etruscans - the meaning of their language, their art, their religious symbols and rituals, the quality of their daily lives. Lawrence felt free to interpret the surviving artefacts imaginatively, resurrecting a race of which he felt himself to be a lost survivor. His long pilgrimage brought him at last to these tombs, and in them he found the vivid human life he had been seeking, a life of perfect awareness and relatedness, without the crippling dualism of body versus spirit, human versus non-human, life versus death. The whole Etruscan ambience was balm to his soul:

There is a simplicity, combined with a most peculiar' free-breasted naturalness and spontaneity, in the shapes and movements of the underworld walls and spaces, that at once reassures the spirit ... They leave the breast breathing freely and pleasantly, with a certain fullness of life. Even the tombs. And that is the true Etruscan quality: ease, naturalness, and an abundance of life, no need to force the mind or the soul in any direction. [*Sketches* 19]

The imagery of the breast 'breathing freely and pleasantly' suggests a Lawrence cured of his consumption, as if that were a symptom of the disease of modern life, the body's protest against its deprivation and desacralization.

During the war Lawrence had begun to formulate a theory that the real is an inner not an outer reality; that truth resides in the human spirit rather than in facts. But the gap between life as it is and life as it should be was painfully wide. His assertion that his dreams were truer than facts would not prevent those dreams being dismissed by others as merely escapist or wishful. He strove to bridge that gap between what is and what should be by writing always of what could be, or what had been and therefore might be again. Before he went to America, he had been obliged to express his dream in the symbolism of myth, including the myth of Eden or the Golden Age. Half-way between such myths and our world is the ancient world at the point where it emerges into history and

bequeaths us the evidence of its artefacts. It was an important breakthrough for Lawrence when he found himself able to claim that life, in Europe, was once the incarnation of his dream.

We can test Lawrence's recreation of the life of the Etruscans against our own response to their remains. He articulates our own spontaneous response to them. After reading Lawrence's interpretation, of them, no other seems tenable. It really does seem, as we descend into the Etruscan underworld, that it is 'more real than the above day of the afternoon' [49].

The most striking characteristic of the Etruscans for Lawrence was their 'profound belief in life, acceptance of life'. And this involved also an acceptance of death, with no heaven or hell. This belief in life was so profound as to constitute a religion, a religion the very opposite of the life-denying puritanism of Lawrence's childhood:

As the pagan old writer says: 'For no part of us nor of our bodies shall be, which doth not feel religion: and let there be no lack of singing for the soul, no lack of leaping and of dancing for the knees and heart; for all these know the gods.' [55]

It is the culmination of what Rupert Birkin called 'the old effort at serious living', where seriousness has nothing to do with moral intensity, but is an essential element in gaiety - a total commitment to life in the body and in this world:

Behind all the Etruscan liveliness was a religion of life, which the chief men were seriously responsible for. Behind all the dancing was a vision, and even a science of life, a conception of the universe and man's place in the universe which made men live to the depth of their capacity. To the Etruscan all was alive; the whole universe lived; and the business of man was himself to live amid it all. He had to draw life into himself, out of the wandering huge vitalities of the world. The cosmos was alive, like a vast creature. The whole thing breathed and stirred. [56-7]

Modern science is at last catching up with the simple fact, self-evident to pagan man, that the universe can only be understood and lived in when it is seen to be 'a single aliveness with a single soul'.

Biochemistry tells us that each cell contains all the information necessary to reconstitute the entire organism. Pagan thinkers knew that the whole could always be inferred from any of its parts, that

there was no distinction between macrocosm and microcosm, inner and outer, above and below, physical and metaphysical. Thus there was nothing of childish, primitive superstition in the discipline of the augur, who looked for signs in the flights of birds, or the haruspex, who examined entrails for portents:

In their flight the suddenly roused birds, or the steady, far-coming birds, moved wrapped in a deeper consciousness, in the complex destiny of all things. And since all things corresponded in the ancient world, and man's bosom mirrored itself in the bosom of the sky, or *vice versa*, the birds were flying to a portentous goal, in the man's breast who watched, as well as flying their own way in the bosom of the sky. If the augur could see the birds flying in his heart, then he would know which way destiny too was flying for him . . .

Prayer, or thought, or studying the stars, or watching the flight of birds, or studying the entrails of the sacrifice, it is all the same process, ultimately: of divination. All it depends on is the amount of true, sincere, religious concentration you can bring to bear on your object. An act of pure attention, if you are capable of it, will bring its own answer. And you choose that object to concentrate upon which will best focus your consciousness. Every real discovery made, every serious and significant decision ever reached, was reached and made by divination. The soul stirs, and makes an act of pure attention, and that is a discovery.

The science of the augur and the haruspex was not so foolish as our modern science of political economy. If the hot liver of the victim cleared the soul of the haruspex, and made him capable of that ultimate inward attention, which alone tells us the last thing we need to know, then why quarrel with the haruspex? To him, the universe was alive, and in quivering rapport To him, the blood was conscious: he thought with his heart. [61-2]

This is also, clearly, an account of the operation of the creative imagination, and of the unified sensibility which alone is capable of real thinking, for thought, as Lawrence was later to define it, is 'a man in his wholeness, wholly attending'.

The old knowledge has survived as poetic symbolism: 'We can know the living world only symbolically' [125] This 'old Etruscan symbolic thought' is what Blake called 'fourfold vision'. It differs from our ordinary, exclusively rational, thinking ('single vision and Newton's sleep') by releasing the Energies, opening up the circuits

of vitality ('twofold vision'), by recapturing innocence on the far side of experience ('threefold vision'), and by the resacralization of the world, the recognition that every thing is miraculous, 'everything that lives is holy' ('fourfold vision').

Lawrence's terminology for these things is very like that of the Existentialists. In the essay on Galsworthy, almost the last thing Lawrence wrote before making his Etruscan trip, he had written:

While a man remains a man, a true human individual, there is at the core of him a certain innocence or naiveté which defies all analysis, and which you cannot bargain with, you can only deal with it, in good faith, from your own corresponding innocence or naiveté ...

It is the essential innocence and naiveté of the human being, the sense of being at one with the great universe-continuum of space-time-life, which is vivid in a great man, and a pure nuclear spark in every man who is still free.¹

It is the openness of the child to the world:

The ancients saw, consciously, as children now see unconsciously, the everlasting *wonder* in things . . . They were like children: but they had the force, the power and the sensual knowledge of true adults. They had a world of valuable knowledge, which is utterly lost to us. Where they were true adults, we are children; and vice versa. [*Sketches* 125]

Blake used Newton and Locke as representatives of single vision. Lawrence uses Socrates:

Later, when scepticism came over all the civilized world, as it did after Socrates, the Etruscan religion began to die, Greeks and Greek rationalism flooded in, and Greek stories more or less took the place of the old Etruscan symbolic thought. [59]

To allow one's being to be reduced to single vision is to live in bad faith, or, in Lawrence's phrase, with impure heart:

But all attempt at divination, even prayer and reason and research itself, lapses into jugglery when the heart loses its purity. In the impurity of his

¹ *Study of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Bruce Steele, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p.210-11.

heart, Socrates often juggled logic unpleasantly. [62]

This murder of 'symbolic thought, was fatal not only for the Etruscans, but condemned western civilization to over two thousand years of increasingly blasphemous living:

The old religion of the profound attempt of man to harmonize himself with nature, and hold his own and come to flower in the great seething of life, changed with the Greeks and Romans into a desire to resist nature, to produce a mental cunning and a mechanical force that would outwit Nature and chain her down completely, completely, till at last there should be nothing free in nature at all, all should be controlled, domesticated, put to man's meaner uses. [130]

Aldous Huxley was one of Lawrence's most sympathetic critics, but in his review of *Etruscan Places* he completely misunderstood what the Etruscans meant to Lawrence:

For the sake of the double flute and all that it stands for, he [Lawrence] was prepared to sacrifice most of the activities upon which, for the last two thousand years or thereabouts, humanity, at any rate in the West, has set the highest value. The philosophy and the practice of non-acceptance have made it possible for man to become, in some respects, more than human. But in the process he has had to sacrifice much of his former happiness; and while he has become spiritually and intellectually more, emotionally and physically he has, too often, degenerated and become less than human.¹

This would be an accurate enough account of Lawrence's position in, say, 1913; but it is a travesty of his position in 1927. The crude choice between the spiritual and intellectual on the one side and the emotional and physical on the other is no longer to be found in Lawrence's writings at this date. Nor is he searching for happiness - that is a desirable but not inevitable by-product of what he is seeking, which is wholeness. He wishes to reinstate the body and its emotions not because he values it higher than the life of the spirit and of consciousness, but because he now knows that to pursue the life of the spirit or of the mind in opposition to the

¹ 'Lawrence in Etruria', *Spectator*, 4 November 1932.

life of the body and to Nature, is to alienate, stultify or pervert the spirit and to turn the mind into a sterile mechanism or juggling act. It is because they had a rich physical life that the Etruscans were able to have a rich spiritual life, or vice versa, since to distinguish between them at all is part of the Socratic sickness.

Lawrence's effort, in these last years, is to respiritualize the world. The Etruscans confirmed for him what he had always known, that it is futile hubristic perversity to seek the life of the spirit apart from the given world; for God is in everything that lives and nowhere else. The Etruscans had their symbol for this divine spark at the centre, the patera or mundum:

It stands for the plasm, also, of the living cell, with its nucleus, which is the indivisible God of the beginning, and which remains alive and unbroken to the end, the eternal quick of all things, which yet divides and subdivides, so that it becomes the sun of the firmament and the lotus of the waters under the earth, and the rose of all existence upon the earth: and the sun maintains its own quick, unbroken for ever; and there is a living quick of the sea, and of all the waters; and every living created thing has its own unfailing quick. [36-7]

Here, in the flaked and faded frescos of the underground tombs of the Etruscans, Lawrence found what he had been seeking, evidence that it had been possible, if only for a century or two before Etruria came under the heel of the Romans, for a European people to get themselves into a right relation with nature. His long pilgrimage had brought him at last to these tombs, and in them he found the vivid human life he had been seeking, a life of perfect awareness and relatedness, without the crippling dualism of mind versus body, male versus female, human versus non-human, physical versus metaphysical, life versus death.

Here, in flowery Tuscany, Lawrence found a Pan with no malice towards men:

The intensive culture of vine and olive and wheat by the ceaseless industry of naked human hands and winter-shod feet, and slow-stepping, soft-eyed oxen does not devastate a country, does not denude it, does not lay it bare, does not uncover its nakedness, does not drive away either Pan or his children. [*Sketches* 225-6]