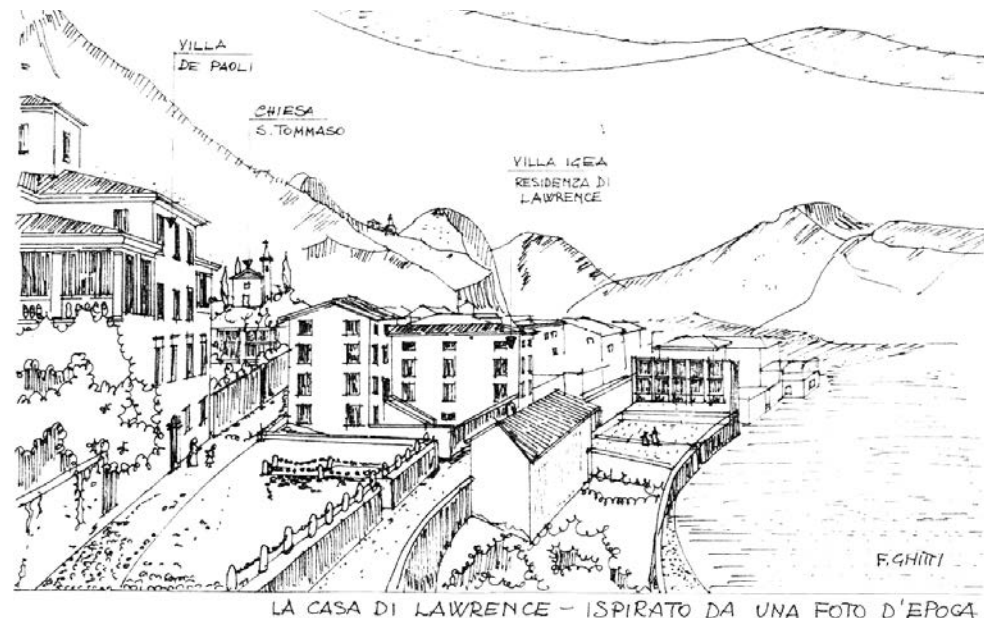
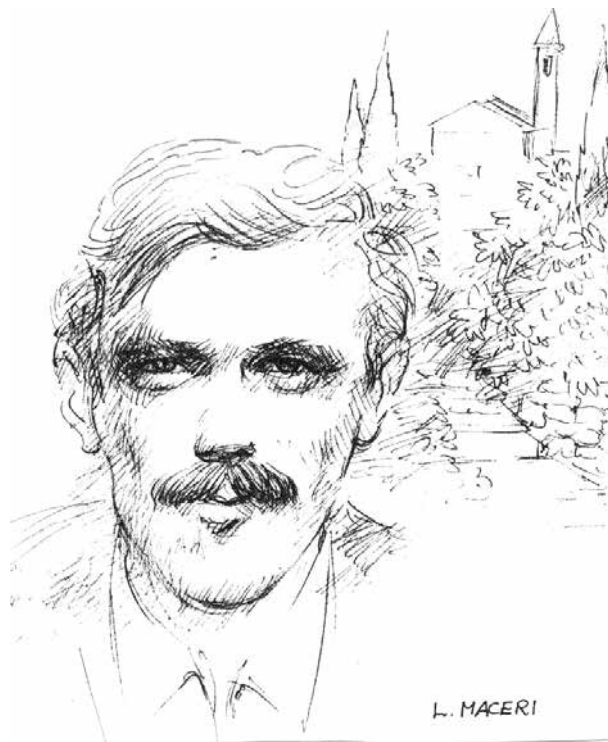


David Herbert Lawrence, celebrated English poet and writer, author of the famous “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, in September 1912, arrived in Gargnano with his companion Frieda Von Richthofen, living here till April 1913. This long lasting stay was not a simple holiday. Considering the wandering nature of Lawrence, known as a restless globetrotter, why did he choose Gargnano? “The Garda was so lovely, under the sky of sunshine...it was intolerable”. Coming from central Europe, probably he found in our lake an anticipation of the mediterranean ambience which attracted him. In Gargnano he found a shelter from machinery and from the money civilization he detested and in Gargnano’s people, the guardians of an archaic and impassible world not overwhelmed by modern life turmoil. This impression is still perceived by today’s visitor together with a sort of melancholia that deserves to be lived, to enjoy the feeling that can be positive or full of anguish, depending on one’s sensitivity. Very little in the ambience is changed and, after all, even Gargnano’s people are always the same. So, walking beneath lanes and stone paved paths, we can still revive his impressions comparing them with ours as though he were beside us.

WANDERING ON D. H. LAWRENCE TRACKS

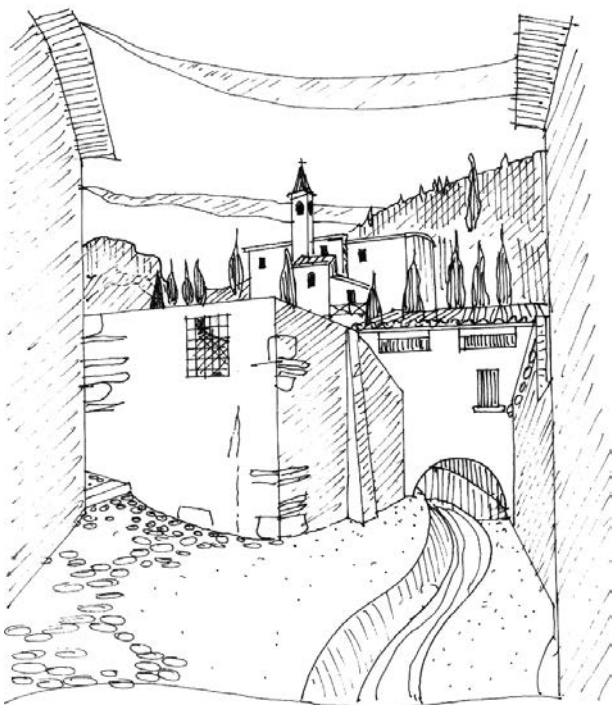
Starting from **Gargnano’s port (1)**, from where Lawrence probably took his first steps into the city, we cover the historical center taking the main road south (Via Roma). Where the road begins to climb, on the left, we pass beside the old **S. Francesco church (2)**, that he describes, crossing the “*silent, little square*”, as the “*Church of the Dove... shy and hidden*” (at the time, the street was narrow and the widening on the side was almost like a little square). His gaze was captured by the internal cloister with “*its beautiful and original carvings of leaves and fruits upon the pillars*”. Continuing on the coast road that downhill parallels the lake, after



the bus station, we enter Villa, an extension of Gargnano. We cross a **little stone bridge (3)**. If we look up, we see another church, dedicated to S. Tommaso “*Church of the Eagle, perched over the village*”... “*standing above, in the light as if it perched on the house-roofs with his thin, gray neck was held up stiffly*”. Penetrating the small heart of Villa, with its lanes surmounted by arches and with its cosy **little square (4)**, Lawrence surely spent some time with local fishermen seated on the small wall of the deck or with the women seated on the steps in front of houses. The house where he lived is not very far down this road. To get to it we have to pass under the arch of a large pink house, supported by massive pillars. Going in the same direction to Bogliaco (south), after approximately 100 meters, there is, on the right, a yellow house (at the time it was called **Villa Igea (5)**) where Lawrence lived (a small marble plate, high on the wall, commemorates his stay). His room faced the lake “*In the morning, I often lie in bed and watch the sunrise. The lake lies dim and milky, the mountains are dark blue at the back, while over them the sky gushes and glistens with light. At a certain place, on the mountain ridge, the light burns gold...*”. In the room he could observe, from another window, the wide facade of a villa, now the office of the **Comunità Montana del Garda (6)**, locally called “*i cadenu*” (big chains), because of the kerbstones and chains that marked the property. It was the most important building in Villa and it was directly connected to lemon houses that still exist, although the property has been converted to vineyards and olive groves, being not anymore convenient the lemon cultivation. At the time the main road was not

constructed and the property was undivided. On the side of the house, the small parking area is next to a garden beneath olive trees. Seated under the pergola, if we open his memory book *"Twilight in Italy"*, we are reminded of the encounter that Lawrence had with the owners of that important house, De Paoli-Comboni, and the impressions from the next visit to their lemon groves over the garden. Here too, between the olive-silver colour of the trees, we can see the steeple of **"Church of the Eagle" (7)** whose bells toll the passage of the day. The curiosity caused by this dominating presence inspired Lawrence to try to get there: *"I set out to find it... I went out of the back door into the narrow gully of the back street"*. The back door still exists, transformed into a window. We can still see the marble frame. Walking along the lane (at the time sided by walls higher than today's), heading to the church, let's try to imagine his route from his tale: Lawrence, since the wide main road was not made yet, must have taken the small uphill lane going left (Via Oliva) on the stone paved path, that in reality ends far from the church (in former times there was no connection); therefore, back in the port square, he must have tried again using the narrow lane besides the pink house with massive pillars we met before, going right this time. *"Going through these tiny, chaotic backways of the village was like venturing in the labyrinth made by furtive creatures"*. Leaving the village, crossing the main road, we take the

26 small **stone stairway** marked by a religious shrine that takes us to the church, between high stone walls and... *"I came out suddenly, as by a miracle... clean on the platform of my S. Tommaso, in a tremendous sunshine..."* It was all clear, overwhelming sunshine, a platform hung in the light. Just below, where the confused, tiled roofs of the village and beyond them, the pale blue water"... *"and opposite, opposite my face and breast, the clear, luminous snow of the mountain"*. After enjoying the view from the terrace, *"hang suspended, above the village"*, let's enter the church *"impregnated with centuries of incense"* and deep in shadow, like the narrow streets of the village.



The contrast between the bright sunlight and the shade and obscurity of the working and living places in Gargnano is a recurring constant in Lawrence's description. After we stop to rest and admire the view of Lake Garda, we go on with the walk, taking the stairway besides the convent and the next path that runs along a high wall and a deep, small, valley. The place is fresh and shady, and we can stop again, as Lawrence did, to *"hear the water tittle-tattling away, in the deep shadow below"*. Descending, Lawrence searched for flowers, but, he was overtaken by the oncoming evening dark, accentuated by the depth of the gorge. Back on his way, he stopped to observe the slow proceeding of the friars *"walking in their garden, between the naked bony vines, walking in their wintry garden of bony vines and olive trees, their brown cassocks passing between the brown vine stocks..."*. **The convent** still houses European Center of Reencounter and Reconciliation, and inspires a sense of spirituality. We also can envision a convent guest meditating in the garden of the compound: it seems like time hasn't past... On the stone paved *"strada vecchia"*, we proceed downhill passing under a stone arch, turning left at the junction to go back to S. Tommaso churchyard. To the right of the church is a downhill narrow stairway path. Probably this is the *"broken staircase where weeds grew in the gaps the steps had made in falling..."*, that he describes in his narration and that took him to the churchyard the first time. We take this stairway downhill, walking in the shade of high walls. 27 Once back to the main road Gardesana, instead of crossing it, we head to the center of Gargnano by walking along it. We turn uphill to the left, where Hotel Palazzina has an entrance road. Passing a little stream on the left (S. Tommaso valley we met before), we find two roads: the one on the right, flat and sided by a high wall, leads us to a point where, in front of a large building with "lemon house-style" windows, besides fragrant rosemary bushes, we have a further, surprising view of the lake and the houses. There, on the left, are the skeletons of some *"naked pillars rising out of the green foliage, like ruins of temples..."*. A little further on, we pass beside one of the few **lemon houses (8)** still active. It's possible, for small groups, to book a visit of it, by calling Gandossi family at tel. 0365 71543 or contacting the local Tourist Office. Lawrence indicated much of *"Twilight in Italy"* to Lemon Houses. He was attracted by the skill of carpenters, who framed these structures: *"at any rate, they went easily, from pillar-summit to pillar-summit with a great cave of space below..."* and the brisk labouriousness revealed by *"the rattle and clang of planks, being laid in order, ringing from the mountain side over the blue lake..."*. Visiting the interiors of Lemon Houses, Lawrence, lover of the sun and the bright light, must have been impressed by the spectral darkness... *"where the poor trees seem to mope in the darkness..."* *"here we are, trees, men, pillars, the dark earth, the sad black paths, shut in this enormous box..."*. Once away of the shaded Lemon House, we welcome too the brightness of

the lake. Back to the rosemary bushes, we take the lane dominated by an ancient stone building, storage for board and frames, standing by a tall arch, now transformed into a living house (this is the destiny of almost all those kind of structures), to meet a lovely intersection. From here, following Via

Torrione, also described in the **“Santelle Tour”**, we find ourselves again in Gargnano, in front of the *“Church of the Dove”* that we met at the starting, and we go on wandering beneath the lanes, populated by *“Children of the shadow”* as Lawrence called us.

Franco Ghitti

Legend

1. Gargnano's port
2. S. Francesco church
3. Stone bridge
4. Piazza Villa
5. Villa Igea (Lawrence's house)
6. Comunità Montana del Garda
7. S. Tommaso church
8. Lemon House La Malora

