

Si Vede la Primavera

On an early January walk in the Apennines a few years ago I sat down on a dry bank and looked at the clear blue sky, where the track was littered with last year's chestnut husks and fallen acorns, some still in their little cups. A 'Walker' strode by. He deserved the capital letter. He was wearing all

the right walking gear, as well as a jaunty cap. Did it have a feather in it? I'm not sure, but he sure was jaunty. *Che bella giornata*, I ventured. *Si*, he said, hardly breaking his stride, *Si vede la primavera*.

Ah, spring ... la primavera. Now you see her, now

you don't. What do we see first, as she comes and goes in her capricious way, for several months running up to the full flowering of April? D. H. Lawrence lived around here for a time, above the little village called Tellaro near La Spezia, which is still a relatively quiet spot on the coastal belt. In my copy of his *Selected Letters* which I bought in my student days in the sixties, Aldous Huxley called him 'a mystical materialist', someone like Wordsworth who was attuned to 'unknown modes of being'. In February 1913 Lawrence wrote enthusiastically:

Spring is here already: there are primroses in profusion, I have found a handful of the wild narcissus, with the yellow centres, and a few sweet violets, and some purplish anemones with dark centres. The birds are singing as the sun comes up even though the cacciatore is out in full costume [like my walker] stalking shadowily [DHL's word] through the olive trees in quest of wrens and robins.

But there are storms aplenty too, as he records, and violent rain. He describes his Italian maid Elide stamping her foot like a little horse as the rains streamed down the hill, and shouting *Se il Dio vuol mandare il fine del mondo: che lo manda!* Bring it on. Lawrence came down on the side of loving spring, however: *I feel as if my heart would jump out of my chest like a hare.*

Spring has a capricious way with her indeed. As Mark Twain said about the same transitional season, halfway across the world, *In spring I have counted 136 different kinds of weather inside of 24 hours.* Percy Bysshe Shelley, that sublime poet and revolutionary, or reckless adventurer, depending on your point of view, lived for a while at Casa Bertini above Bagni Di Lucca, with his rickety household: wife Mary, sister-in-law Claire, and children Clara and William, both of whom died young. Shelley wrote plaintively, *If winter comes can spring be far behind?* He composed *The Sensitive Plant* at Casa Bertini: *Spring arose in the garden fair;/ Like the Spirit of love felt everywhere;/ And each flower and herb on Earth's dark breast;/ Rose from the dream of its winter's rest.*

It all takes time, and the catkins popularly called lambs' tails in England and *amento* in Italy appear a long time before the lambs themselves.



On another walk this winter, on a beautiful day, an old man stopped his little Ape, which was sputtering up the hill, to talk to



me. Franco agreed that it was a long hard wait till spring. He said he was 84, but as the old proverb says: *Da settanta in più non si contano più* (After 70 you stop counting).

Lawrence advised his sister not to 'meddle' with religion. *I would leave that alone; I try to occupy myself fully in the present.* Be here now. He went on: *I believe that the highest virtue is to be happy* – as the Dalai Lama also said. We wait for spring to emerge, in Lucca and its surroundings as elsewhere – as we wait for the swallows, popularly supposed to arrive on March 21, the first day of spring

and the feast of St Benedict. *A San Benedetto, la rondine sotto il tetto* (For St. Benedict's Day, the swallow is under the eaves). Then we really are over the waiting. Well, let's hope....

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