

## **John Hands**

# **ON HEARING THAT D.H. LAWRENCE DIED IN VENICE, SOUTH OF FRANCE: MARCH 1930 (A RUMINATION)**

Roman remains they have there  
In that hot wide window-box town  
With the long-leaved lachrymose trees  
(Whose names I never learned)  
A-droop in the market square;  
And the poster-painted shop facades  
Where behind beaded curtains the sloe-eyed  
shop-keepers  
Drawn up like large limosines  
Squat waiting for customers.  
This is the town with a name difficult to pronounce —  
'Say it "Varn-arn-arn Varn-ce Englishman — no!  
"Var-r-r-nss"  
We like our name kept cultured at least.'

So this was his dying-town?  
Vamp-fisted Venice: squat little Venice,  
Gaudy and taut, like a pot of painted windmill sticks;  
High-priced Venice, with high-priced cars  
Carrying high-priced women with high-priced legs  
At a high price. I remember Venice —  
But I must stop being bitter:  
For this too is smart and conventional  
Comme il faut and thoroughly objectionable.

So this was his dying-town . . .  
With its obstreperous roar the omnibus of years  
Goes careering between: (even I remember them  
With the stairs outside and the top-deck  
Thrown open to the sun): he too loved the sun  
And her too he loved I have often marvelled upon  
Quaint in tight-buttoned costume, pocketed and  
tasselled  
Tam-'o-shanter hat awry,  
Her face a challenge to the sun  
Spiritus nebulae, a thing past all thinking of.  
Pre nineteen fourteen . . . Am I in love with the  
deader-than-dead  
Those who have lived past their prime?  
So we share memories of buses and photographs  
Roman remains in a petty French town;  
We share history, and we share gaggility  
Gimcrackery, mimicry, and modern exploitation  
Which have hardly changed much in half a century.

So his omnibus stopped just as mine started,  
And all that great work coasted to a stand-still,  
And the shop-men could continue as ever  
Counting coloured change behind beaded shop screens;  
And the town could grow corpulent and mean  
Indifferent to criticism, whilst we, a trifle apprehensive  
Gazed into their flashy windows  
Sensitive to the shade of his harrassed features.