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D H LAWRENCE AND THE DANCE

Mark Kinkead-Weekes

'... we dance together,
Out of the sunshine into the shadow,
Passing across the shadow into the sunlight,
Out of sunlight to shadow.'

'Frohnleichnam' (*Complete Poems* 210)

Dance runs like a vein of ore through Lawrence's work – a sensitive register of how his vision of the human-being-in-the-world grew and deepened. From George whirling across a flagged kitchen with Lettie in the first novel – to the couple dancing naked on Corpus Christi day in the poem just quoted – to the exquisite and joyous dance of life in the Etruscan place of death near the very end – Lawrence saw in human beings, dancing, a sudden bodily tapping into and revelation of what they are at their innermost, unbeknownst to themselves.

At the beginning, of course, Lawrence's attitudes to dancing were ambiguous, with the dividedness of his family and the animosity towards the father. For Arthur Lawrence was a great dancer in his youth, and even taught dancing at one time. Though we must be cautious about treating *Sons and Lovers* as biography, its picture of Mr and Mrs Morel meeting at a dance (where she is not dancing) may be true to life: in both the physical vitality of Lawrence's father and in his mother's puritanism. There are other suggestions that dancing was suspect. Mrs Morel is distinctly sniffy about the fancy-dress dance to which her eldest son is going as Highlander, with bare legs of which he is very proud and which he summons his younger brother to admire in a scene cut by Garnett, but restored in the new Cambridge edition of the novel. There is also a splendid scene in *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* where the tipsy husband has been dancing with two tipsy ladies in paper bonnets, whom he actually brings back to the house. By then, after *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence can see much more than he had done in the early version of 'Odour of Chrysanthemums'. The boozy ladies, though no better than they should be, are liable to act the injured wife off the stage while they are on it, and hence 'say' something quite important about what is missing from the Holroyd marriage.)

Mrs Lawrence did however permit a Christmas Eve dance later, at Lynn Croft, when about eight couples danced 'the polka, waltz, minuet and even lancers with great enthusiasm ... All the girls loved to dance with Bert. His movements were so light' (*Early Life* 45).¹ Later still there was a moment when Bert himself, after his mother's death, 'misbehaved' at a dance at Jacksdale – kissing a girl 'like nuts'

(*Letters I*, 369) – and was told off by Ada who (he thought) was trying to take their mother's place. He would not have that; yet his mother clearly went on in him for some time, both by way of inhibition, and also in the unconscious association of dancing with bacchanalia, when inhibition is broken through. But Frieda freed him from inhibitions, and forced him to let his feelings out. 'Frohnleichen' exults in their naked lively bodies dancing on the day dedicated to Christ's dead one. Yet there is an element of mockery in that, and – as with his vivid talents for charade and mime – we may suspect that Lawrence's own dancing may well have become like Birkin's in *Women in Love*, as sardonic as it was lively, and with a touch of wickedness too (168-9). He was very ready to perform with friends in 'Russian Ballet' terms – such as an uproarious 'Judith and Holofernes' on the balcony with Bunny Garnett in Icking, or elaborate group dance-playlets at Garsington, echoed at Hermione's Breadalby in *Women in Love*. But he remained shy of dancing in public – preferring to watch Frieda dance with Bavarian or Italian peasants, and contemptuous of the jazzy ballroom dancing which T.S. Eliot rather solemnly and surprisingly engaged in, but which Lawrence regarded as a substitute for real sex, and would have nothing to do with. In Frieda's absence, Merrild and Götzsche tried to tempt him to a dance hall in Los Angeles in 1923, but he wouldn't go. He would dance the Indian dances when young men from the pueblo came to 'Mabeltown' in Taos in 1924; but Mabel could not persuade him to do 'twenties' dances with her – except on one notorious occasion, under the influence of 'moonshine', when he and Mabel danced the one-step so wildly, cannoning again and again into Frieda and Clarence Thompson, that Frieda, Clarence and Tony were offended, and a quite serious breach occurred (Luhan 225ff). His opinion of 'the popular modern dances' (as opposed to the paintings of the Etruscan dancers he was seeing at the time) became quite clear in 'Making Love to Music' in 1927 (*Phoenix* 160). However, I am less interested just now – biographer or no – in Lawrence-as-dancer, than in what he saw in dancing, as his vision developed phase by phase.

As early as *The White Peacock*, dancing becomes a way of breaking through 'character' and 'social relationship', to reveal something deeper. For seven chapters, Lettie peacocks it before Leslie, son of the local mine-owner, and the uneducated young farmer, George. She is pretty, vivacious, 'artistic' (in her own view); superior, and pleased with her own power over men; but the real question for Lawrence even now is not so much Lettie's character or who she will marry, as what she will choose to be, how she will define her self and its 'laetitia' (as he had thought of calling the book). And that is a question about the nature of that self. What is more important to its happiness? – the world that opens up behind Leslie: not only the rich match and lifestyle, but the cultivation (and dominance) they bring? – or her sexual attraction to George, which we glimpse as she shows him Greiffenhagen's 'Idyll' or watches him scything, momentarily jolted out of her sense of superiority? Yet the 'natural' man is uncultured, slow, unambitious, liable (like Hamlet's unweeded garden) to go

to seed; and 'nature' can be rank, cruel, brutal. Lettie's capriciousness with both men is partly the satisfaction of exerting power, but partly also her uncertainty about who and what she is and wants to be. In Chapter 7, she seems to have decided to accept Leslie – though she cannot resist going to the Mill to see how George has taken it. And here is where dancing is used to point up the real nature of that choice, beneath the surface factors of character, personality, and social position.

... away they went, dancing over the great flagged kitchen at an incredible speed ... Emily and I joined in ... I was hot and perspiring, and she was panting, when I put her in a chair. But they whirled on in the dance, on and on ... her hair was shaken loose, and fell in a great coil down her back; her feet began to drag; you could hear a light slur upon the floor; she was panting – I could see her lips murmur to him, begging him to stop; he was laughing with open mouth, holding her tight; at last her feet trailed; he lifted her, clasping her tightly, and danced twice round the room with her thus. Then he fell with a crash on the sofa, putting her beside him. His eyes glowed like coals; he was panting in sobs, and his hair was wet and glistening. She lay back on the sofa, with his arm still around her, not moving; she was quite overcome ... When at last she recovered her breath and her life, she got up, and laughing in a queer way, began to put up her hair. (94-5)

There are some 'character' points here. For once George is on the move instead of sunk in lethargy and self-doubt; for once Cyril the narrator is jerked out of aestheticism; for once Lettie is no longer in control. There is a contrast between the natural and the social since, as soon as she can, Lettie turns the dancing into the 'civilised' minuet, where she can reassert her sense of superiority and make George look a fool. There is also something adolescent in Lettie's flaunting and in George 'paying her back' – mixed motives, and foolishness, and hurt. Yet, even this early, Lawrence is also reaching deeper, to an experience in which the personal and the social cease to count, and there is (suddenly) a quite different kind of 'relationship' between the man and the woman, an analogy of sex if we like, though we would have to pin down what that means to Lawrence in 1910. What is embodied here (i.e. captured alive in the movement of bodies) is a total abandonment of self in passionate movement, reaching out beyond normal control and endurance to a point of collapse – where lies strange fire and laughter. In near-Victorian provincial respectability there are few ways in which the virgin young can experience this, but

the dance will do it. Or perhaps not quite – for there is still the question of what the dance of the sexes (deeper than this man and this woman) has to do with the world outside. So Lawrence takes them into the night, hunting for mistletoe for Christmas among the old trees with their Druid associations; into the ‘great night’ that ‘filled us with awe’, where lantern-light holds two faces ‘as in a globe, in another world’, yet one somehow related to the bigger world of the dark, the woodland, the liquid stars (97-8).² Their kiss then gives a kind of lie to her engagement with Leslie. It is all very sketchy still – but Lawrence’s imagination seems to be stretching for what it cannot yet grasp: how the relation hinted by the dance, which takes them out of and beyond the selves they thought they were, is also somehow related to the dance of the cosmos. But we have been given a glimpse rather different from Cyril’s usual kind of vision, of what may be involved in Lettie’s choice – and its consequences for her and the two men.

In the final version of *Sons and Lovers* in 1912, Lawrence uses the first meeting of the Morels – the intelligent puritan girl; the animated, laughing, wholly unintellectual collier – to open up a clash of temperament, character, and class, all to be explored in the battles which follow. But now being a dancer suggests one side of an *internal* division, which not only destroys the Morel marriage, but (in a sense) ‘kills’ the eldest son, and so splits the younger one that he cannot mate more than half of himself, and drifts towards death at the end. As Gertrude, albeit ‘contemptuous of dancing’ herself, watches the young miner dance, she sees

a certain subtle exhalation like glamour in his movement, and his face the flower of his body, ruddy, with tumbled black hair, and laughing ... She was a puritan like her father, high-minded, and really stern. Therefore the dusky, golden softness of this man’s sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her. (18)

So she marries, attracted by what is so unlike herself. But before long she begins to try to re-form what has attracted her, and ends by destroying it. Turning for compensation to her eldest son, she so binds him to her that he destroys himself (also repeating her error with his girl). And the youngest, having become even more his mother’s son-and-lover, is split between two women who appeal exclusively to one side of him or the other: Miriam to the life of ‘thought and spirit’, but physically ‘baffled and gripped’; Clara to the ‘sensuous flame of life’ that (more certainly now) links human beings with life forces in the natural world ‘wild at the source’, yet so ‘impersonal’ that the personal, intellectual and spiritual side remains unsatisfied

(398). From the vantage point of his new relationship with Frieda, Lawrence could probe the split within his parents’ marriage and himself, across the gap which now separated him from his past. Indeed in a letter written to Ernest Collings on 17 January 1913, not long after finishing the novel in November 1912 he repeats the flame image he had used for Morel the young dancer, but now declares that the blood and flesh are *wiser* than the intellect – marking a break with all the writing that had been shaped by his mother’s point of view (*Letters* 1, 503). However, it still seems a choice of sides: to dance, as it were, or not to dance, the naked bodies of ‘Frohnleichnam’ (*Poems* 209-10),³ or the Corpus Christi of the other kind of life.

But in the summer of 1914 he uses dancing to probe deeper still. ‘The White Stocking’ began as one of his three earliest attempts at short fiction, submitted to a newspaper competition: about how a young belle at a dance embarrassingly produces a stocking instead of a handkerchief. In 1913, after *Sons and Lovers*, he rewrote it into a story of jealousy: a young wife feeling still free to flirt, an angry husband demanding commitment. Now it begins with the arrival of a ‘Valentine’; then goes back to the stocking incident after Elsie has been dancing with her employer Sam Adams, and to her marriage to Whiston later; then comes forward again to the quarrel on Valentine’s day. In 1914, Lawrence re-wrote yet again for *The Prussian Officer*. Elsie becomes even livelier and more sexy, but the real intensification in is the treatment of the dance: a far more disturbing sense of the power, not of Sam Adams himself, though he is made less comically vulgar, but of what Elsie experiences in the dance. This has to do with sex, but would be caricatured by suggesting that the Whiston marriage must have been sexually defective – a reading Lawrence has guarded against. Rather, the new leap of imagination precisely distinguishes between a sexual relationship that is satisfactory enough in obvious ways, and a quite different kind of sexuality, involving a loss of self as frightening as it is exquisite. The experience is transformed. In 1913:

She was afraid she did not dance well. But he gave her such support, she seemed to divine where he wanted her to go. This was the joy of it. His hand held her firmly in the small of her back, and seemed to speak to her, holding her, carrying her, telling her what to do, and a thousand other things. He was a man who knew what he was about. (*Smart Set* 102).

In 1914 however, in three cumulative passages, Adams himself is almost lost to sight in the extraordinary impersonal experience she has through him. In the first dance the emphasis is simply on ‘male warmth of attraction’ and on lapsing, flowing with him, united in one movement, ‘rhythmically, deliciously’. But in the second dance

she felt herself slipping away from herself ... and she seemed to swim away out of contact with the room, into him ... The room was all vague around her like an atmosphere, like under sea ... But she herself was held real against her partner, and it seemed she was connected with him, as if the movements of his body and limbs were her own movements, yet not her own movements ... Every moment, and every moment, she felt she would give way utterly and sink molten ... fuse down into perfect unconsciousness ... (*Prussian Officer* 151-3)

But after she pulls out the white stocking and sees it pocketed by Adams, she is torn between her obligation to Whiston and not wanting to lose what she has just experienced. Yet it is *fear*, of losing herself, that finally makes her marry Whiston; just as it is his 'yearning for surety' that makes him 'tense by not getting it' (149). So we see why her refusal to acknowledge commitment even after marriage, let alone the flaunting when she dances Sam's white stockings at her husband, should produce in this version a far more ungovernable rage than before, and finally an ugly crashing blow across the mouth which shocks both of them into new consciousness of each other, and of the choices they face. The more insecure the self the greater the fear to surrender itself; the more vulnerable love may make it; and the more threatening the other may become when love seems lessened – hence defiance, or rage, lashing out at the other. The violence is not endorsed, however. Rather it poses an insistent question, which the dance opened up, of what the choices for the young couple may ultimately involve. Sexual relationship may be a transformation, losing the self into new life at the hands of the other, or it may be a kind of war of self-preservation. It depends what you mean by saying 'my love' – the last words of the story. The dance is now exposing what lies deep inside people, more and more disturbingly.

Lawrence was on the threshold of his greatest work that summer of 1914. In his luggage, when he had arrived in London from Italy, was the typescript of '*The Wedding Ring*' which was to become both *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. He thought of it as a finished work and had a lucrative contract for it – but that August came the outbreak of world war. His publisher, like others, suspended plans and returned manuscripts. Though no pacifist, Lawrence was vehemently opposed to *this* war and to the wave of enthusiasm which greeted it. Frieda was German, which made them suspect. He now hadn't enough money to live on, having spent most of his advance. He felt more and more isolated from his society – but above all, he had somehow to come to terms with the conflict and violence that seemed to have overtaken the whole world, as though the ugly blow at the end of 'The White Stocking' had magnified by hundreds of millions. *Why* was conflict so universal? ... and how could it be turned from destruction?

As it happened, he had been commissioned to write a little book on Thomas Hardy. Into this he proceeded to pour these preoccupations, so that his 'Study' became a reading not only of the Wessex novels but of all life and relationship in terms of conflict, between opposite impulses or life-forces. Within every person, between all men and women, and throughout Nature, the impulse to unity and the impulse to separate individuality; the bodily life linking man with nature and the differentiation of consciousness; the desire for stability and the longing for change; were constantly and inevitably at war. But though this conflict, unresolved, would turn destructive, the *marriage* of opposites was the very ground of creative growth. I haven't space to pursue the zest and complexity with which he applies this to the Old and New Testament, to great European artists, and to the sexual and social relationships of Hardy's characters; but, clearly, what he had glimpsed in the dance before, would now take on wider and more searching implications. The 'Study' reads the Bible, too, as a great dance of opposites, in three movements, approaching, meeting, and passing into anguished separation; and as soon as he had finished the 'Study' he rewrote 'The Wedding Ring' into the three stories of *The Rainbow*: a study of 'marriage', and a new kind of 'sacred' history-book and prose for 'God', 'the Father' and 'the Son', the sources of creativity.

In their corn-stacking in Chapter 4 of *The Rainbow* the lovers of the second generation repeat the betrothal of Tom and Lydia, in a rhythm of opposites marrying, but with a difference that will turn out to contain something destructive. Anna in moonlight, Will out of the dark, approach each other and recede, stacking the corn, with the rhythm of tides and natural fertility, gradually nearing until they meet and kiss. It is not exactly a dance, but it is very like one (compare the dance between light and shadow in 'Frohnleichnam'), and is written in a wonderfully rhythmic prose enacting what it describes. But whereas Tom and Lydia had been able to abandon themselves to each other in an oblivion, a kind of death of the self, which proved the threshold to a 'promised land' of new being; we see and hear how Anna's more developed sense of self makes her hang back, and how Will becomes over-insistent. The kiss is broken off before that complete loss of self at the hands of the other which now seems (to the Lawrence of 1915) the condition for renewal and fulfilment. All sexual relationship involves conflict, but the battle of Anna and Will, though it partly attains a marriage of opposites, also partly fails, and turns into a case of victory and defeat. In her pregnancy, Anna feels the urge to dance naked in her bedroom; but she dances *herself* to *her* Lord in female triumph, and to the 'nullification' of the shadowy man in the doorway:

And she lifted her hands and danced again, to annul him, the light glanced on her knees as she made her slow, fine movements down the far side of the room, across the firelight. He stood away near the door in

blackness of shadow, watching, transfixed. And with slow, heavy movements, she swayed backwards and forwards, like a full ear of corn, pale in the dusky afternoon, threading before the firelight, dancing his non-existence, dancing herself to the Lord, to exultation. (170-1)

Yet there is a price. She eventually becomes 'Anna Victrix' in a battle for dominance; but because their marriage of the great creative opposites is only partial, her house cannot open into the Promised Land of fulfilment. Her husband is diminished, becomes a possession. Gradually she becomes another dominating wife-and-mother, against whom her children will rebel. The triumph of the single ear of corn is placed, ironically, against the promise in the stacking of the harvest.

It is in the third generation, however, that one can measure the imaginative distance since George and Lettie, and even since Elsie and Sam Adams: how much deeper the dance now probes under the surface of human relations, to expose hidden fields of force. The wedding at the Marsh Farm at which Ursula (not quite sixteen) dances with the young soldier Skrebensky is a social occasion in a world at peace; but what is revealed about the destructiveness inside civilised people, and its causes, can still prove shocking to the ideas my students have about themselves. As the third pair of young lovers dance, between the bonfires and the dark in which cornstacks loom, the scene harks back again to the betrothal of the first generation and the cornstacking of the second, showing how each pair has to meet the abiding challenge to marry their opposites, and allowing us to compare them.

Ursula's dance with Skrebensky is a long cumulative scene which really must be read as whole, but perhaps I can suggest something of its phasing. At first, as 'the music began and the bonds began to slip', they become 'one movement, one dual movement, dancing on the slippery grass', between the fires and the darkness, as if in some magic, glamorous, underwater world:

There was a wonderful rocking of the darkness, slowly, a great slow, swinging of the whole night, with the music playing lightly on the surface, making the strange, ecstatic rippling on the surface of the dance, but underneath only one great flood heaving slowly backwards to the verge of oblivion, slowly forward to the other verge, the heart sweeping along each time, and tightening with anguish as the limit was reached, and the movement, at crisis, turned and swept back. (295-6).

The 'anguish' is fear, of losing control, of losing oneself at the hands of the other; yet they are given over, Skrebensky's consciousness already 'melted away'.

But suddenly comes a dramatic change. Ursula feels something looking at her, 'Out of the great distance, and yet imminent, the powerful, overwhelming watch was kept ... She turned, and saw a great white moon looking at her over the hill.' It has a powerful effect (as on a Bacchante); she feels as though her body were completely open to it, wanting it to fill her completely, and free her from all restraint – but Skrebensky 'put a big, dark cloak round her, and sat holding her hand, whilst the moonlight streamed above the glowing fires.' When they dance again, the impulse to be at one with the lover and a whole unified world of nature, and the opposite impulse to be oneself, entirely separate and free, come into increasingly violent collision, as Skrebensky tries to bring her back to what the dance had been. But if we compare them with the previous generations, the emotional temperature has risen sharply; and conflict which could have been creative proves destructive as never before. For where Anna held back and Will was over-insistent, Skrebensky tries to compel, and Ursula is filled with uncontrollable rage, 'a rage to tear things asunder. Her hands felt destructive, like metal blades ...' (296-7).

The dance now becomes a contest of will and power. Instead of the opposites seeking to marry, to die to each other in order to be born anew, each tries to dominate completely, making the other nothing. 'She left herself against him, she let him exert all his power ... She was cold and unmoved as a pillar of salt'; for they are becoming denizens not of the Promised Land but of the Cities of Destruction. As, finally, Skrebensky tries to make love to her among the haystacks, she really does feel the bacchante's urge: 'a sudden lust seized her, to lay hold of him and tear him and make him into nothing'. The dance ends in sexuality become war; the man seeking to overcome, to compel, to possess utterly; the woman to hold as victim, to seethe around, to destroy. And though Skrebensky might superficially seem the stronger – as iron might seem stronger than salt water – yet it is Ursula, the individualist, who is victrix like her mother, but even more destructive of the selfhood of her lover, 'fierce, corrosive, seething with his destruction, seething like some cruel corrosive salt around the last substance of his being ...' (297-9). As they become conscious afterwards she is horrified at what has been revealed in her, and determined to blot it from his memory. She coaxes him back to a degree of self-respect. But the episode casts a long shadow ahead, to the terrible scene on the moonlit beach which damages Skrebensky permanently and ends their relationship. Do we think 'people' (so young, too) 'are not like that'? Though *The Rainbow* is a novel about marriage, what it reveals is by no means irrelevant to what was going on in the world of 1915, in the midst of the 'first world war'. For Lawrence, nations were only people writ large. The more developed the sense of selfhood; the harder to meet what are seen as the demands (or the threat) of the other; and the greater the urge to try to dominate or

even annihilate the other in the end. Conversely, the more insecure the self, the greater the temptation to lose it in some collective: an army, a state seeking *Lebensraum*. For Lawrence, atrophy of one great polar life-force must lead to over-development of the other, and vice versa, turning the sources of universal creativity into universal destruction. And the dance, peeling away the skin of 'civilisation' that hides us from ourselves, shows this beginning to happen - below the level of personality or choice.

On the other hand, might peasant dancing show the creative potential still? Between *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* came *Twilight in Italy*, published in 1916, one of whose finest episodes is 'The Dance', describing how Frieda and Antonia Cyriax had danced with Italian peasants at San Gaudenzio above Lake Garda, in 1912.⁴ As he watches the peasants, he notes how dignified yet intense and subtle their dancing is. As it grows more intense, the men seemed 'to fly and to implicate other strange inter-rhythmic dance into the women, the women drifting and palpitating as if their souls shook and resounded to a breeze that was subtly rushing upon them, through them', till the moment when 'the men caught up the women and swung them from the earth, leapt with them for a second'. Then it begins again more slowly, 'more subtly interwoven ... a rhythm within a rhythm, a subtle approaching and drawing nearer', and nearer, until 'oh, there was the surpassing life and swing of the women, when the woman's body seemed like a boat lifted over the powerful exquisite wave of the man's body, perfect, for a moment ...' (104-5). In that moment, the two-in-one are utterly physical, yet transcendent; a great movement of nature, yet a perfection of human art; male and female, yet both taken well beyond themselves and their ordinary consciousness. Even the crippled wood-cutter, in his wild energy, becomes 'like a god ... wonderful'. But when the northern women join in, they are only ecstatic for a while. Somewhere in their independent souls they are shocked at what seems not fully 'human', and begin to withdraw, sensing also a sexual threat which makes them angry. And the peasants in turn resent the 'superior' foreigners, and start singing obscene songs at them, in dialect. Once again the opposite potentialities become clearly visible, through the catalyst of the dance.

But it is in *Women in Love* (begun in 1916, but not published until 1920) that dancing reveals the full destructiveness within 'civilised people' - showing, incidentally, that Lawrence has also some awareness of significant movements in contemporary dance. At the water-party given by the local mine-owner, the Brangwen sisters persuade Gerald Crich to lend them a small canoe, so that they can escape the crowd to a private place where they can be themselves and swim naked and free. Dressed again, Ursula begins to sing. For all her uncertainties, she seems 'at the centre of her own universe', while Gudrun always has to demand that the other person become aware of her. "'Do you mind if I do Dalcroze to that tune ...?'" she asks, and begins to dance. It does not stay 'Dalcroze' for long, however, - eurhythmic, classical, a

beautiful harmony of music and movement, body and spirit - for as Gudrun dances, the mode changes.⁵ Ursula's singing becomes an 'incantation' to which her sister's body drifts in 'impulsive rhapsody', beginning to modulate, in 'shuddering ... little runs' and 'tossing rhythm' (like Isadora Duncan, perhaps, in one of her more Nietzschean/ Dionysiac moods?),⁶ into 'unconscious ritualistic suggestion'. But of what? Not, it seems, any reverence for or possession by something outside herself; but rather, in the now 'complex shuddering and waving and drifting' of her white form, a developing act of self-hypnosis. As Ursula sings on (ironically, 'My love is a high-born lady') so, 'quicker, fiercer went Gudrun in the dance, stamping as if she were trying to throw off some bond, flinging her hands suddenly and stamping again, then rushing with face uplifted and throat full and beautiful, and eyes half closed, sightless' (165-6). Her dance has become a ritual casting-off of inhibition in order to uncover and express what is embedded in the unconscious - as the German expressionist dancer Mary Wigman had done in her famous 'Witch Dance'.⁷ Here, too, there is something powerfully anti-male. Gudrun opens her eyes to find herself facing a group of Highland bulls, but far from retreating, she dances herself at them, careless of danger, rushing at them, driving them off. And when Gerald arrives, asking what she thinks she is doing, she strikes him a blow across the face. "'Why are you behaving in this impossible and ridiculous fashion?'" she asks herself (170-1), but the explanation is clear enough. Through the dance, something of Gudrunness has come out unmistakably. What has been unconscious is now exposed, uncontrollable. Behind her growing attraction to the dominant male is an even more powerful reaction, of female self-assertion. Her apparent supplication can itself be a mode of power, and can turn in a trice to aggressive violence. At this moment, both of them know that 'love' has become sex-war, in which she has struck the first blow and promises, in her aroused state, to strike the last - as indeed she will. (Similarly, Gerald will dance the Bavarian peasant dance in the ski resort in Chapter 30, not with any of the transcendence Lawrence had seen in San Gaudenzio, but as a spectacular assertion of male power, reaping the maidens, a power Gudrun increasingly resists.)

Yet the eventual tragedy is not determined, and there is another way for women (and men) to be 'in love'. In the narrow canoe later, with space between them, Gudrun is suddenly overcome by a sense of Gerald's male otherness and beauty, a wonder now, rather than a threat - and he, who always keeps such a tight grip, begins to 'lapse out' into his surroundings rather than trying to impose himself on them. Which 'way' will they finally go? And the other couple? For Birkin's wicked little dance seems self-assertive too, and Ursula reacts (168-9). Indeed, his whole attitude to love can sound sexist to her, to be fought. There are also bonds and oppositions between the sisters which dance can begin to bring out of the subconscious - this time, in something of the mode if not the expertise of the Russian Ballet, as they act out the biblical story of Ruth and Naomi at Breadalby (91-2), much as Lady Ottoline Morrell encouraged

her guests to do at Bedford Square and Garsington. But gradually Ursula and Birkin find a way of being in love which can contain all their oppositions, and create peace and tenderness out of conflict, even violence. The image of star-equilibrium expresses their discovery of how man and woman may both remain themselves, and yet be bound to each other like two stars in orbit, linked *and* separate, giving each other space. So the dance of human opposites echoes a cosmic choreography – if only in metaphor.

Yet there is also a terrible isolation for the lovers at the end; and in the next phase of his work Lawrence seems increasingly to feel, through his use of the dance, for some wider group-relationship – ensemble rather than pas de deux – and for a more precise understanding of the relation between the human and the cosmic dance. In 1919 he was at last able to leave the England which had destroyed one of his two finest works and rejected the other, and had expelled him from his home as a spy. In Italy, in 1920, he wrote *The Lost Girl*, the first part of which paints a sardonic portrait of the provincial background from which he came, and the second shows his heroine breaking away, to a richer if risky life with a foreigner, abroad. Ciccio is part of a travelling theatre which Alvina joins, as pianist for their ‘Red Indian’ dance-dramas and as his woman – though this makes her a lost girl in her society’s eyes. The Natcha-Kee-Tawaras blend memories of Teddy Rayner’s travelling theatre in Lawrence’s Eastwood childhood, with his love of Fenimore Cooper’s fictive Red Indians, and perhaps an impulse like that which moved dancers like Ruth St Denis to seek inspiration, at first merely exotic, but then more seriously, from non-European cultures.⁸ But the troupe also shows Lawrence playing with the idea of a small group (his abiding dream) bound by a kind of blood-brotherhood, and by older laws of relationship than those of the desiccated modern world – though finally Ciccio and Alvina have to make their way alone. Indeed, the bizarreness of the Natcha-Kee-Tawaras shows the strain of a European having to invent (or fantasize) what no longer seems to exist. But it did exist still – as Lawrence discovered late in 1922, in the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico.

His first response to the real thing, ironically, was shock and withdrawal. He had been brought there by Mabel Dodge Sterne, in the hope that he would do for New Mexico and its Indians what he had done in *Sea and Sardinia*. So, very shortly after arriving in Taos, he was sent off with Mabel’s Indian lover Tony Luhan to a gathering in the Apache Reservation. In ‘Indians and an Englishman’, he records the response of a ‘heart, born in England and kindled with Fenimore Cooper’ (*Phoenix* 94) to the first sights and sounds of ‘Red’ Indian singing, dancing and chanting of tribal history in the kiva. But deeper than the vivid new sights and sounds, and smells – for the Apaches, he claims, never wash – is an inner response that he knows exposes *him*. ‘It was not what I had thought it would be. It was something of a shock ... something in my soul broke down, letting in a bitterer dark ...’. There is sadness and nostalgia for

a lost past ‘when man was dusky and not individualized’ (95); but he also hears something mocking, and feels a deep sense of alienation. He ‘trembles, still alive to the all sound’, and *knows* for the first time his own derivation; but ‘I don’t want to live again the tribal mysteries my blood has lived long since ... My way is my own, old red father; I can’t cluster at the drum any more’ (99). For some time he continued to feel that the Indians in Taos were secretly mocking him: but both this, and his sense of alienation, are typical of the first stages of decolonising a European mind, proof of its feeling influenced. Already in his next essay, ‘Taos’, Lawrence has come to see the pueblo as similar to a medieval monastery, keeping something vital alive in a disintegrating world. Also, he has begun to imagine what it is like for the Indians to conduct religious ceremonies hemmed in by inquisitive tourists: ‘to sing and tread the slow dance between that solid wall of silent, impassive white faces’ (103). He has begun to understand the resentment of the colonised against the coloniser; but also to feel uncomfortable with the ‘sympathy’ of white liberals and romantics.

But it is in three essays written in Taos and at his ranch on Mount Lobo in the summer of 1924, that his imagination seriously attempted to decolonise itself: to get inside the communal culture and the religious feelings embodied in the dancing of Indians in New Mexico – an effort of imagination very unlike the ‘tradition’ of English writing, which tends to be richly but also narrowly provincial. For the most part Lawrence had to trust his own sensibility, though he read what he could, and some mistakes of interpretation came from seeing what he wanted to see; but as an evocation of dance that embodies a culture utterly different from the observer’s, the three essays now to be found in *Mornings in Mexico* are extraordinary.

Up to *Women in Love*, he had seen dance as expressing either individual being, or the relation between a man and a woman. But now, ‘Indians and Entertainment’ absolutely opposes Indian to European consciousness because the essence of Indian dance is not merely communal, but *all-communing*. Even the Hebridean (outermost of Europeans) feels himself, as human, a fraction distinct still from the world of nature that enters his wild song. Even the ancient Greek performing a communal ritual, did so for a God conceived as watching, outside – which is why from that ritual could spring the whole of European drama, actors, audience, entertainment. But in the Indian dance the individual is lost in the tribe which merges into the natural world; and there is no God (or gods) separate from that world. God, the gods, are ‘immersed in creation’ (62) and ‘Creation is a great flood, for ever flowing, in lovely and terrible waves’ (61); thus everything, terrible or lovely, is godly. In the Indian dance, then, the drum is a heartbeat of communal blood, in which body and spirit – no distinction there, either – to unite man, god and nature. In the corn dance, ‘the spirits of the men go out ... in waves ... seeking the creative presence ... seeking the identification, following on down ... into the germinating quick of the maize that lies under the ground’ to stimulate the power to grow. There are dances that mime single

combat, power, heroism; but always the centre is the dance in unison, where men 'move with the soft, yet heavy bird-tread' (57) as though from each separate existence the blood falls back, from mind, sight, speech and knowing, through the feet, to the great central source for renewal. In the same way, in the Deer Dance at New Year, the male dancers identify themselves with deer, buffalo, bear, wolf, coyote, following also the magical power of woman who leads the dance, and co-celebrating in wonder the godly creativity in all.

In 'The Dance of the Sprouting Corn' Lawrence describes the great dance held annually in San Domingo Pueblo. This time he recreates, as it were, the rhythm of his own immersion into the dance, as he watches. First comes the realization that you have been hearing distant drumming before you actually hear it coming; then a distant vision of tossing boughs (held by the dancers) like a forest, in which the wind of song booms; then the eye begins to realise the line of dancers and the cluster of singers near the drum, and the black and white jesters hopping in and out. The ear begins to distinguish the drums, the ripple of knee bells, the rattles; then the eye at last to focus on the dancers, the dancing women 'who poise like solid shadow, on woman behind each rippling, leaping male' – faces, costumes, rhythmic counterpoints of colour, foliage, flesh. 'Bit by bit you take it in' (66) – but it is difficult to get a whole impression. For first you have to focus the black-clothed women and the subtle sway of their movement; then to concentrate on the men, bent forward, foxtails swaying, the drive of their 'rhythmic hopping leap ... as the strong heavy body comes down, down, down, down' (67) bringing his life down, from mind to breast to knees, to ankles, plunging the feet into the red earth with which their bodies are smeared. All day long the dancers from one side of the pueblo alternate with the dancers from the other side. Man dances between the forces of the seasons, the sky, and the earth. 'Between them all, the little seed: and also man, like a seed that is busy and aware. And from the heights and from the depths man, the caller, calls: man, the knower, brings down the influences and brings up the influences ... Commands in that song, in that rhythmic energy of dance ... He partakes in the springing of the corn ...'(70-1).⁹

The last of the three essays, 'The Hopi Snake Dance' is perhaps the one most marked by Lawrence's own conceptions and by his reading in Aztec religion. It also has the most sardonic contrast: three thousand tourists in motorcars, come to see 'primitive' men dancing with live rattlesnakes, as to a 'circus-performance'(73), understanding nothing; and on the other hand the grey rocky semi-desert and mesa, a half-ruined village, two little groups of priest-dancers smeared with ashy grey and black – but behind them a tremendous meaning, for Lawrence. For he has come to believe, now, that this ritual dance, like those of the Aztecs, has to do with the acquisition of *power*, by *conquest* of the elemental potency which abides like a dark sun at the centre of the earth – power to become more god-like, for gods are

outcome, not origin. (This will be the preoccupation of the cult of Quetzalcoatl the snake-god in *The Plumed Serpent*, published in 1926.) So the snakes, having been washed, soothed, propitiated, are finally danced with in an act of concentrated communion, held by the neck in the mouths of the dancers, the delicate snake-heads 'as if wondering and listening', and 'their clean slim length' dangling 'like soft quiescent lightning' (85). Finally, they are released to act as emissaries, with man's 'messages of tenderness, of request, and of power ... of love ... But ... also as arrows shot clean by man's sapience and courage, into the resistant, malevolent heart of the earth's oldest, stubborn core' (87) – to wrest from thence the rudiments of godhead for himself. But as the white tourists leave, the buzz of their car engines, their materialist technology, sounds 'like the biggest of rattlesnakes' (90), threatening.

It was not however in terms of power that Lawrence's last and perhaps greatest response to dancing was to be couched. In 1927 he went with Earl Brewster to see the Etruscan painted tombs in Tarquinia, and there, especially in the Tomb of the Leopard, the Tomb of the Feast and the Tomb of the Lionesses, were wonderful lines of dancers that seemed to him to embody all the old pagan wisdom which held that "'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'" (144).¹⁰ In the very place of death the Etruscans reaffirmed the vivid energy and continuity of life in a living cosmos. 'To the Etruscan all was alive; the whole universe lived; and the business of man was to live amid it all ... to draw life into himself' (146-7), even in the tomb. So the dead man is seen feasting with his friends and his lover, holding between finger and thumb the egg that speaks of life renewed, beginning all over again. On all sides is a splendidly animated and colourful world of birds, beasts and flowers, in which men coloured vermilion move at home, having 'gathered into themselves core after core of vital potency from the universe, till they are clothed in scarlet, they are bodily a piece of the deepest fire' (148). Liveliest of all move the players on the double flute, and the dancers half naked '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.' Yet he also notices that though the limbs are 'full of life to the tips', the dancers show 'a strange powerful alertness', and neither feasters nor dancers are ever uncontrolled: 'they keep their life so beautifully and richly inside themselves, they are not loose, they don't lose themselves even in their wild moments' (136-7). This is most powerfully rendered in the greatest frieze of all, in the Tomb of the Feast:

The band of dancing figures that go round the room still is bright in colour, fresh, the women in thin spotted dresses of linen muslin and coloured mantles with fine borders, the men merely in a scarf. Wildly the bacchic

woman throws back her head and curves out her long, strong fingers, wild and yet contained within herself, while the broad-bodied young man turns round to her, lifting his dancing hand to hers till the thumbs all but touch. They are dancing in the open, past little trees, and birds are running, and a little fox-tailed dog is watching something with the naïve intensity of the young. Wildly and delightedly dances the next woman, every bit of her, in her soft boots and her bordered mantle, with jewels on her arms ... Towards her comes the young man piping on the double flute, and dancing as he comes ... his strong legs dance of themselves, so full of life. Yet, too ... a certain solemn intensity in his face ... (138-9)

Lawrence notices also how the subtlety of Etruscan painting 'lies in the wonderfully suggestive *edge* of the figures.' They are not outlined or drawn separately; rather there is a 'flowing contour where the body suddenly leaves off' (166) and the world starts, but in living contact. Here, in these complex harmonies expressed in dancing bodies, wild yet controlled and vital, man and woman dancing together in ecstasy, yet with still a little space, and all in harmony with a living world of nature, is the touchstone against which we have to measure all those other dancers from George and Lettie onwards. Now, also, the dancers are not interested in gaining power – rather, *Etruscan Places* is an elegy for a lost civilisation crushed by the arch power-seekers, the Romans, and a final criticism of all imperialism, of which Mussolini's 'Roman' fascism was the latest.

Late in 1928 Lawrence's last thoughts on dancing can be found in the essay called 'New Mexico'. He had searched the world 'for something that would strike *me* as religious.' He had found religious people, but their ways never involved him, for one cannot feel religion at will. Perhaps once, for moment, he saw 'a hint of wild religion' in 'the utter dark absorption' of a group of devil dancers in Ceylon, but 'I had no permanent feeling of religion till I came to New Mexico' (*Phoenix* 143-4), and saw embodied there, unbroken, a 'vast old religion which once swayed the earth ...'

... never shall I forget watching the dancers ... Never shall I forget the utter absorption of the dance, so quiet, so steadily, timelessly rhythmic, and silent, with the ceaseless down-tread, always to the earth's centre, the very reverse of the upflow of Dionysiac or Christian ecstasy. Never shall I forget the deep singing of the men at the drum, swelling and sinking, the

deepest sound I have heard in all my life ... the wonderful deep sound of men calling to the unspeakable depths ... It was a vast old religion, greater than anything we know. (145-6)

And it was dancing that opened it up to him.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Margaret Needham for the reminder of this reference. Jean Temple also writes of the incident recorded in George Neville's *Memoir of D.H. Lawrence*, when Lawrence danced on Central Pier in Blackpool with a mill-lass, who cried after a few turns, 'Lead me aht, ah'm, ma-a-zy!', at which Lawrence 'chucked with glee' (145).
2. I have Fabienne Blakey to thank for a perceptive comment.
3. The poem may originally have been written in Bavaria after Corpus Christi in June 1912, but may also have been influenced subsequently by *The Rainbow*.
4. How much more Lawrence saw than other people can be gauged by comparing Tony Cyriax's account in *Among Italian Peasants*, pp. 20-22.
5. There is a later ironic reference to Dalcroze in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), when Connie dances naked in the rain 'with the eurhythmic dance-movements she had learned so long ago in Dresden', but then presents her rump to Mellors in wild and comic obeisance. (221)
6. For the influence of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* on Isadora between 1900 and 1905, see Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*, pp. 87-8.
7. Wigman had moved (precisely) from training with Dalcroze to create, under Laban's influence at Ascona, an Expressionist form of dance in which 'she committed herself to venting the demons within ... Often, in her solos, a force seemed threatening to take over her body' (Jowitt 158-60). For J. Martin in his *Introduction to the Dance*, it was the embodiment of inner conflict within the soloist that distinguished Wigman from Duncan: 'Instead of being lyric – that is, consisting of a simple outpouring of feeling of whatever depth and intensity – [dance] became dramatic, presenting the conflict between two forces (230)'. This sounds highly Lawrencian – but could Lawrence have known about Wigman? He certainly could. Before meeting him, Frieda had had affairs with the psychoanalyst Otto Gr-ss and the painter and anarchist Ernst Frick, both habitu-és of Ascona; she may have visited Ascona herself; and in 1912, when she had left her husband for Lawrence, was still in correspondence with Frieda Gr-ss who lived there. Lawrence could also have heard about the dancers of Ascona from his talks with Alfred Weber in 1914, at a moment when Max Weber was actually in Ascona investigating the counter-culture there. See the section on Laban and Wigman in Martin Green, *The Mountain of Truth*.
8. St. Denis sought inspiration from India, Egypt and the Far East, but Ted Shawn came a little nearer to the Indians of the Americas in *Xochitl* in which a young Martha Graham danced a fiery Indian girl to his Aztec emperor (Jowitt 141).
9. In 'The Woman Who Rode Away', written in 1924, Lawrence would recreate this dance as the essence of

the Indian religion-of-life. The wind of singing is many individuals in one breath; the dancers are 'streams', of bending men paired with upright women, and the stream from the Summer people always answers the stream from the Winter House, treading their kinship with the earth. The life of the elements and landscape, humans, animals, birds, all enter into and are unified by the rhythms of the dance. It is against this sense of cosmic inter-relationship, that the writing on the wall for the Woman's 'intensely personal and individual kind of womanhood' has to be seen, and finally sacrificed – though I think that is made questionable in the story. See Mark Kinkead-Weekes, 'The Gringo Senora Who Rode Away'.

10. Lawrence does not identify 'the old pagan writer' from whom these words are apparently a quotation

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THE COST OF LIBERATION: SEXUAL POLITICS IN LAWRENCE'S 'TICKETS PLEASE'

Paul Wood

In a letter to Cynthia Asquith written out of profound discouragement with the war, Lawrence insists that the 'whole crux of life now lies in the relation between man and woman' (11 November 1916; *Letters* 3, 27). In his fiction, however, this relation is often depicted as somewhere between a skirmish and an all-out battle, in which, many contend, he shows no sympathy with the female combatants. Although 'Tickets Please' is not a usual source of evidence either for Lawrence's defenders or detractors, perhaps no story can better focus the continuing debate about whether he is essentially an ally of his women characters or their adversary. A careful reading might even resolve the debate in his favour.

This could be one of the stories Lydia Blanchard has in mind when she offers the general contention that in Lawrence's fiction women are not always dominated ('Love and Power' 439). In one of the handful of essays to focus exclusively on this story, however, Judith Breen insists that Lawrence's main interest is to demonstrate the 'fundamental impotence' of the women characters (64). No less an authority than his wife suggests the reason for such wishful thinking: his appreciation of female power, Frieda says, is precisely why 'In his heart of hearts ... he always dreaded women' (57).

This is the same writer who indirectly acknowledging his wife's enormous contribution to *Sons and Lovers*, declared to his friend A.W. McLeod that 'the only re-sourcing of art, re-vivifying it, is to make it more the joint work of man and woman. I think the one thing to do is for men to have the courage to draw nearer to women, expose themselves to them' (2 June 1914; *Letters* 2, 181). There does seem sufficient cause to wonder if this is anything more than the bravado John Thomas shows himself master of in 'Tickets Please' before the women so forcefully challenge it. Indeed, given the specific sexual indignity the young Lawrence supposedly underwent in a factory storeroom, it seems an awful unintended irony.¹

Irony there might be. Clearly there is outright self-contradiction ensuing from this ambivalence towards women, most clearly in the non-fictional prose. His claim in the *Study of Thomas Hardy*, for instance, that '[t]he supreme desire of every man is for mating with a woman' (*Phoenix* 444) is greatly compromised by his insistence in a letter to Katherine Mansfield that in the union 'the woman must yield some sort of precedence to the man' ([5 December 1918]; *Letters* 3, 302). However, his direct insistence to men in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* that they should '[m]ake her yield once more to the male leadership' is undercut with qualification within this very sentence: 'if they've got anywhere to lead to' (191-2).