

Katherine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence: A Parallel Quest

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Abstract

Near the end of their lives, Katherine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence embarked upon spiritual adventures inspired by ancient or extra-European religious and philosophical beliefs. Mansfield's adventure unfolded at G. I. Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleau where she died in January 1923. Lawrence's 'savage pilgrimage' took him from Taos, New Mexico, then back to Italy to investigate the Etruscans in his travelogue, *Etruscan Places*. Drawing on their letters and Lawrence's travel writings, this essay explores the similarities between their experiences in these very different cultural contexts. Mansfield's responses to Gurdjieff's sacred dances are compared to Lawrence's thoughts on the sacred dancing of the Southwest American Indians and of the Etruscans as portrayed in their frescoes. It is shown that both writers believed that in those ritual gestures and movements, they had found a trace of an ancient science of life-enhancement.

Key words: Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence, *Etruscan Places*, G. I. Gurdjieff, Sacred Dance, Taos

In October 1922, Katherine Mansfield was welcomed at G. I. Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in

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Fontainebleau, housed in a former Carmelite monastery known as the Prieuré, where she would die in January 1923. The letters she wrote from there were recently published in Volume V of the *Collected Letters*.¹ In those pages, the long list of her correspondents has dwindled to an essential few: her husband, John Middleton Murry; her companion, Ida Constance Baker; her father, Harold Beauchamp; and her friends, Dorothy Brett and the Russian translator S. S. Kotliansky (known simply as 'Kot'). After her death, unsent missives were also found addressed to her sisters and her cousin. 'I have so little time to write', she apologised to Brett on 28 October 1922.² 'I am fearfully busy', she informed Murry on 10 November, for the schedule at the Prieuré was particularly demanding.³

The letters she did write were scribbled, partly, in stolen time, with the knowledge of transgressing a rule, as she confided to Murry on 24 October: 'I am writing this on the corner of the table against orders for the sun shines and I am supposed to be in the garden'.⁴ But it was not only her need for rest or the lack of leisure that explained her reticence with former friends. She felt a widening gulf with her previous life. 'People are almost nonexistent', she confessed to Kot on 19 October.⁵ 'All the people I have ever known, don't matter to me', she reiterated to Murry.⁶

There was, however, one former friend whom she did think of fondly at this time: D. H. Lawrence, although the volatile relationship that had bound Mansfield and Murry to the Lawrences since 1913 had evolved through several explosive phases in the previous two years. Lawrence was furious with Murry's denigrating reviews of his recent work. Nor could he bear reading praise of Mansfield's work in the English press. '*Vermin*', he would later write of the Murrays.⁷ Writing to Mansfield in February 1920 while she recuperated in a French sanatorium not far from where he would die, he had fumed, perhaps in a moment of self-projection: 'You revolt me stewing in your consumption. You are a loathsome reptile – I hope you will die'.⁸

To this vituperation, Mansfield gallantly replied in her last months of life by remembering Lawrence in her will, leaving him a book of his choice from her library. On 13 October, before going to the Prieuré, she clarified in a letter to Murry that, despite all, 'I care for Lawrence'.⁹ She would elucidate further on 24 November: 'I should like very much to know what he intends to do – how he intends to live. He and E. M. Forster are the two men who *could* understand this place if they would. But I think Lawrence's pride would keep him back'.¹⁰

'This place' was the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. From her letters, it was clear that Mansfield was anxious that the

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people closest to her should understand why she had gone there. She even urged Murry to join her, '[s]uppose you throw up every single job in England, realize your capital & come over here to work for Gurdjieff!', she proposed on 27 October.¹¹ Twice she suggested he meet Ouspensky for a talk, a recommendation she also made to Ida Baker: '[i]f you are in London why do you not write and ask if you may attend his lectures?'.¹² On Christmas Eve, she gave Ida some pointers on how to begin self-observation, one of the first steps in Gurdjieff's method:¹³ 'Why don't you begin taking photographs of yourself, take them all day'.¹⁴

In unfinished letters to her sisters and cousin, she tried to explain the spiritual crisis which had led her there, while to her father, she masked her true intention, claiming she was there for a 'medical cure'. Her most soulful revelations were made to Murry and Koteliansky, stating that what brought her to the Prieuré was a 'private revolution':¹⁵ 'I am a divided being [...] I am always conscious of this secret disruption in me [...] and I mean to change my whole way of life'.¹⁶

That change was in part inspired by the teachings of Gurdjieff, which offered a method of 'work on oneself' for 'balancing the centres' – head, heart and body – and for learning to live in a state of 'presence' or enhanced awareness, to which one must first awaken in order to distinguish one's essence or true self from more superficial personality which is prey to mechanical laws.¹⁷

This language resonated for Mansfield, who adopted it in her letters and diary:

It seems to me that in life as it is lived today the catastrophe is *imminent*; I feel this catastrophe in me [...] This world to me is a dream and the people in it are sleepers. I have known just instances of waking but that is all. I want to find a world in which these instances are united.¹⁸

'I really can't go on pretending to be one person and being another any more'.¹⁹ Her chief aim was to escape the mechanicalness of life around her and also in herself: '*I want to be REAL*' was her heartfelt cry to Murry on 26 December 1922.²⁰

In these same months, a parallel quest for authentic sensations had drawn Lawrence to another destination in his 'savage enough pilgrimage' far from industrial, mechanised Europe,²¹ namely the New Mexican desert, where after some hesitation he had accepted Mabel Dodge Luhan's invitation to reside at her compound in September 1922. To their new patron, Frieda Lawrence remarked that Taos corresponded to Lawrence's need for 'something genuine'.²² Lawrence himself once summed up his philosophy of the genuine in 'Why the

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Novel Matters' as the striving to become a 'whole man alive'.²³ It was a goal that would have made sense to Gurdjieff's pupils at the Prieuré, but Lawrence would have none of them.²⁴

The search for the wholeness of an authentic self was only one of the many points of similarity linking the lives of Mansfield and Lawrence, for they died of the same illness on French soil, felt sexually or emotionally drawn to some of the same people (Murry, Brett, Koteliansky) and espoused similar philosophies of daily life, which might best be defined in the words of Lawrence's biographer, L. D. Clark, as 'a constant state of delight with the world',²⁵ while suffering from debilitating periods of illness and despondency. Among the minor passions they shared were a love of flowers, as attested by the rich plant imagery in their writings, and a horror of cities. Mansfield herself admitted the similarity between them in terms of a temperament prone to black moods and outbursts, perhaps linked to their disease. 'I am more like L. than anybody. We are *unthinkably* alike, in fact', she confessed to her journal on 20 September 1918.²⁶ Lawrence's unflattering and sometimes spiteful portraits of her in his fiction suggest an obsession aggravated by his refusal to accept her growing literary success. Both are recognised among the innovators of English modernism and both later became cult figures whose reputations rest not only upon their considerable literary merit, but on the myths that have arisen inspired by their nonconformist lifestyles.

Mansfield's quest for wholeness led her to a cloistered retreat outside Paris; Lawrence's compelled him to undertake a series of sea voyages—Australia, Ceylon, the Pacific rim, America, Mexico. Mansfield strove to follow a method of inner transformation, or 'work on oneself', through which she might strengthen her 'real I' from within, while Lawrence eschewed the very idea of 'conscious endeavour',²⁷ which he interpreted as a perverse form of self-control.²⁸ He sought instead a location or culture where a new way of life might be founded, untouched by modern society. At first, that location seemed to him within physical range—the Andes, a Pacific island, Florida, or simply a community of his own making in a faraway place. Towards the end he situated it in what Clark terms 'the Minoan distance',²⁹ a primordial dimension to which one must return in order to recapture a sense of the sacred that once illuminated every aspect of human life. Only after having 'perfected oneself in the great past' was it possible to move forward to spiritual renewal.³⁰

It is in this shared eagerness to cross the 'Minoan distance' in order to discover their essential natures that Mansfield and Lawrence most closely resemble each other. In the twilight of their lives,

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both believed they had found the source of an ancient, regenerative science of life. For Mansfield this science was epitomised by the philosophy of Gurdjieff; for Lawrence, by his idealised interpretations of Native American and Etruscan culture. Their parallel quest led through similar stages: isolation from England and their intellectual communities; relocation in an exotic locale; rejection of urban life and a return to basics comprising self-expression through manual skills and greater contact with nature; attempts at new modes of socialisation, and interest in art forms, philosophies or religions remote from modern European culture. In both quests, sacred dance appeared to be a vehicle for a deeper knowledge of self and of the divine.

Fontainebleau and Taos

When Mansfield arrived at Gurdjieff's Institute, his pupils were readying the place for the grand opening scheduled for January 1923. 'The plumbing, the lighting & so on done by our people', she boasted to Murry on 27 November.³¹ As she sat in the crisp autumn air, admiring the feverish efforts to complete two annexes, the Turkish Bath and the Study House, Lawrence had just finished settling into an adobe house Mabel Dodge Luhan had prepared for him over the summer of 1922. His journey had been much more adventurous than Mansfield's excursion by train to Fontainebleau, for he had sailed from Australia on a ship that put in at Wellington and Tahiti before docking in San Francisco. From there, he had travelled by train to Lamy, New Mexico, and then by car to Taos along a 'narrow dirt road full of ruts and rocks'.³²

Both locales were satisfyingly exotic and un-European, so that one felt one had travelled far. The Turkish bath had a small room 'hung with carpets which looks more like Bokhara than Avon'.³³ The Study House was decorated with hand painted designs and inscriptions in a mysterious script, and equipped with a fountain illuminated by coloured lights. 'In three weeks here I feel I have spent years in India, Arabia, Afghanistan, Persia', she wrote to Murry on 10 November, 'oh how one wanted to voyage like this – how bound one felt'.³⁴

On the other side of the globe, Lawrence's adobe residence was: '[a] long, low house with thick walls, and portal between two wings that project at either end, the portal supported by twisted columns chiselled out of trunks from pine trees [...] painted sky-blue',³⁵ furnished with Mexican rugs and village furniture. 'In front the desert, with grey yellow-flowering sage bushes',³⁶ a sacred mountain and an Indian pueblo nearby.

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The charm of handmade, sun-dried adobe bricks, as opposed to industrially manufactured ones, was emphasised by Luhan: 'it looked [...] as it had been made with hands', with 'uneven surfaces, irregular lines, as true as hand and eye could make them'.³⁷ Lawrence himself later wrote of adobe constructions that: 'the naked human hand with a bit of new soft mud is quicker than time, and defies the centuries'.³⁸

Lawrence exulted in the touch of the naked human hand in his essay, 'Why the Novel Matters': '[m]y hand is alive. It flickers with a life of its own. It meets all the strange universe in touch'.³⁹ For him, the tender touch – the transmission of nurturing human energies upon both living and inert matter – was the greatest human value, and the key to the transformation of society and to individual spiritual rebirth. In Lawrence's fiction, from *The White Peacock* to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, touching a lover or a flower, kneading bread dough, or drawing a thread of lace all partake of this sacred tenderness and transforming power of the naked human hand.

At the Prieuré, Mansfield had been discovering her own hands from a new perspective while peeling mountains of carrots. For the first time in her life, those lovely hands were chafed by housework. Practice of all kinds of manual skills was an essential part of life at the Prieuré as a means to self-awareness and Mansfield warmed to the challenge: 'I mean to learn to work in every possible way with my hands, looking after animals, and doing all kinds of manual labour',⁴⁰ she explained to Koteliensky on 19 October, later expressing hopes that she might learn carpentry.⁴¹ She had no doubt that the modern emphasis on intellectual development, on 'the head', was partly to blame for her inner distress: 'I see no hope of escape except by learning to live in our emotional & instinctive being as well and to balance all three', she wrote to Murry on 26 December 1922.⁴² In an earlier letter on 15 October, she had encouraged him to take up gardening instead of chess in order to balance his centres: 'Sweep leaves. Make Fires. Do anything to work with your hands in contact with the earth [...] chess only feeds your already over developed intellectual centre'.⁴³ This was a change for her. Months earlier she had admonished Brett for wasting time on housekeeping: '[d]on't work anymore than you can possibly help!'.⁴⁴ In her own household, such tasks were always entrusted to Ida. Contact with animals was also an important part of life at the Prieuré. Gurdjieff advised pupils to practice love on plants and animals before trying people.⁴⁵ Mansfield's daily routine involved visits to cows, pigs, and rabbits. 'Why don't you get some animals?', she suggested to Murry, 'I'm not joking'.⁴⁶

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Lawrence, for his part, took pride in his manual skills. 'We are very practical', he wrote to Luhan from Sicily on 5 November 1921, making arrangements for their arrival in Taos, 'do all our own work, even the washing, cooking, floor-cleaning'.⁴⁷ His friend Catherine Carswell shows us a man who embroidered baby clothes for gifts and sometimes made his own clothes (including matching suits of blue linen for himself and Frieda).⁴⁸ According to Aldous Huxley, Lawrence could darn stockings and milk cows.⁴⁹ In New Mexico, he also baked bread, mended fences, and made shelves.⁵⁰ Such versatility would have been much prized at the Prieuré.

After three months, Lawrence's relations with Mabel Dodge Luhan grew strained, and he moved north to the Del Monte ranch. Out there, the great 'unbroken spaces' stimulated him, as did contact with horses, a symbolic animal in Lawrence's personal mythology. Caring for them became part of his daily routine after moving to the ranch, where at times he experienced extreme isolation. The letters from this period describe long rides on horseback to fetch fresh provisions, and contain requests for supplies of meat, eggs, medicine, to be brought or sent. The isolation suited his mood, for like Mansfield, he desired a break from society and from the people he had known. 'To ride alone—in the sun—in the forever unpossessed country—away from man. That is a great temptation because one rather hates mankind nowadays'.⁵¹

Self and Others

Lawrence tried over the years to cajole his acquaintances into helping him found a commune, a project he would call Rananim, but these plans never amounted to much more than living near a friend or two. His relations with his neighbours tended to become overwrought, for he could not help becoming involved in their personal affairs. 'I get mixed up in people's lives', he confessed to Rolf Gardiner in July 1926.⁵² Aldous Huxley and Catherine Carswell have recorded episodes in which Lawrence urged them, and other friends, to escape with him; yet all these projects fell through and his isolation weighed upon him: 'I should love to be connected with something, with some few people [...] As far as anything that matters I have always been very much alone and regretted it'.⁵³

Yet he believed that Mansfield and Murry could assuage the stark aloneness he felt. They had first met in 1913, when he and Frieda paid a call on the offices of *Rhythm*. He later remarked that he found them daft but nice, and when asked if Mansfield was pretty replied: '[i]f you

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like the legs of the principal boy in the pantomime'.⁵⁴ It was to Murry that both he and Frieda were most strongly attracted. Mansfield and Murry later served as witnesses at the Lawrences' wedding, during which Frieda gave her old ring to Mansfield, the same ring Murry would push upon her finger four years later when they married. Mansfield believed it was a gift; Carswell claims Frieda meant it only as a loan.⁵⁵ The uncertain status of this gift suggests the difficulties involved in interpreting the Lawrences' offers and demands.

Their intimacy deepened as the First World War progressed with its horror, distress, and grief. Lawrence found himself suspected of espionage and harassed by the military police. Mansfield's loss of her beloved brother Leslie triggered a depression which dogged her for months. Lawrence comforted her at that time with a moving letter on 20 December 1915, promising joyous rebirth of a new self. The imagery of the letter prefigures his late poem 'The Ship of Death', inspired by Etruscan symbols. Yet this resurrection was also bound to his desire for a closer bond with them: 'I want so much that we should create a life in common [. . .] that we should add our lives together to make one tree'.⁵⁶

Within months, he had convinced them to follow him to Cornwall. So anxious was he to oversee the domestic arrangements, that he dictated to the landlord the colour scheme for the Murrays' new abode: 'dining room *red*, as it is, downstairs tower room *cream*; large bedroom, *pale pink*'.⁵⁷ Despite such solicitude, proximity to the tempestuous Lawrences was too much for Mansfield and after witnessing several dramatic rows, the Murrays opted out.⁵⁸ They were later appalled to see themselves portrayed as the destructive, arid Gudrun and Gerald of *Women in Love* (1920).

Although some of his letters to Mansfield reveal genuine affection, Lawrence viewed her as secondary to Murry, a foil to Murry's manliness, to which he felt attracted and with which he was in keen competition. It was Murry not Mansfield that Lawrence regarded as his intellectual equal. He did not think highly of her work.⁵⁹ Mansfield, though she disliked Lawrence's treatment of sex, admired him and felt an affinity with his work.⁶⁰

Lawrence's wanderlust took him far from Europe after 1920 and from this point his fiction largely focuses on journeys to distant settings where a new life may arise. He kept in contact with Murry during this period, though his attitude remained critical and deprecating. In 1923, hearing of Mansfield's death, he wrote a consolatory letter to her and, upon returning to England, begged Murry and other friends to join him in Taos. Murry promised he would, but never did. Dorothy Brett

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was the only one willing to undertake this adventure and stayed on long after the Lawrences had moved on.

Except for these brief experiments, Lawrence never experienced real communal living. Rather it was the more retiring Mansfield who uncharacteristically embraced collective life at the Prieuré,⁶¹ together with forty other people, mostly Russians.⁶² The Prieuré, however, was not a commune in the sense that Lawrence intended Rananim to be. Not a utopian experiment based on a shared ideological vision, inspired by a mission to change society, it was rather a school in which to reside for a time in order to receive a special training, after which pupils returned back to their 'normal' lives.

Although Mansfield felt estranged from many former friends while at the Prieuré, she was enthusiastic about the new people she had met there, who were mostly artists, intellectuals, and musicians. 'There is another thing here. Friendship. The real thing that you and I have dreamed of. Here it exists between women & women & men & women & one feels it is inalterable'.⁶³

The human warmth she received at the Prieuré must have seemed welcome compensation for her previous solitude. Since the winter of 1918 she had spent months away from home, in rented rooms, often ill, worried about money; with only letters and her work for stimulation and Ida Baker for companionship. At the Prieuré, she was free from major preoccupations: domestic and financial details were mostly seen to by others and two resident doctors were always on call. Stimulating company surrounded her and two charming young women had been assigned to assist her. Orage and Ouspensky, whom she held in high esteem, were also present. Above all, she was putting into practice a psychological training which she believed offered remedy for her inner state of fragmentation.⁶⁴ Mansfield was a guest, not a 'pupil', and as such had a much less stringent routine:⁶⁵ 'And yet I feel I can't enter into it as I shall be able to; I am only on the fringe'.⁶⁶ For everyone else the pace of life at the Prieuré was more demanding.

From her letters, we may assume that after entering the gates of the Institute, she never left the premises again. She referred to the world beyond the Prieuré as 'la-bas'.⁶⁷ In fact she tells Ida that she could not even get to Fontainebleau to shop for the most necessary personal items, and showered her with requests for stockings, mouth antiseptic, tooth powder, and warm underwear, which she had no way of procuring for herself. Not all guests or pupils at the Prieuré chose such a sequestered existence, as we know from other accounts of life there, such as the letters of Jane Heap, co-editor with Margaret Anderson, of the *Little Review*. Heap mentions that the composer

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Carole Robinson, a pupil at the Prieuré, travelled to Paris for concerts; she herself describes weekends away from the Prieuré, drinking too much at her favourite cafes, and visiting Brancusi's studio.⁶⁸ In his memoir, C. S. Knott recounts his experience at a cabaret party and the peculiar impression it made on him after having spent a month at the Prieuré. Pupils were free to spend time away. Contact with the outside world was even necessary. But Mansfield's physical condition was such that it probably precluded even short excursions. In October she had written to Brett, 'I am a cough – a living walking or lying down cough'.⁶⁹ Yet she did not intend to stay forever at the Prieuré. 'And of course I shall not be here all my life. Connected with this work and these ideas, yes, but that is different. As soon as I am cured I shall leave here and set up a little place in the South and grow something'.⁷⁰ She considered her sojourn there as a revitalising stop on a longer quest.

Dancers in the Twilight

In New Mexico, Lawrence investigated the religious rituals of Native Americans, attending several ceremonies, including a performance of sacred dancing during the Christmas holidays of 1922. Though initially he was not impressed, his appreciation of the symbolism matured as we read in his essays 'Dance of the Sprouting Corn' and 'The Hopi Snake Dance' published in *Mornings in Mexico*. He came to believe that the art of primitive peoples was based not on imitation but participation in the ongoing creation of the cosmos. Ritual gestures could summon cosmic energies from natural forces into human actions: 'And when he eats his bread at last, he [...] partakes again of the energies he called to the corn from out of the wide universe'.⁷¹ The dancing he was learning to appreciate was a means of circulating this great energy.

While Lawrence sat round the ceremonial fires musing on the Indians' 'effort to gather into their souls more and more of the creative fire, the creative energy which shall carry their tribe throughout the year',⁷² Mansfield contemplated the huge logs burning in the great stone hearths of the Prieuré, meditating, perhaps, on a lesson from Gurdjieff: 'fire is condensed sunlight'.⁷³ The culmination of each day at the Prieuré was the sacred dance class held after dinner. Though she had never cared for dancing, this dancing, she explained to Murry, was something different: it appeared to her as 'the key to a new world within one'.⁷⁴ 'I have no words with which to describe it. To see it seems to change one's whole being for the time'.⁷⁵

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A photograph from this period shows her sitting in a high-backed chair, her eyes trained on the dancers who with uncanny synchronisation, whirled to eerie melodies in a minor key and moved their limbs to contrapuntal rhythms.⁷⁶ Mansfield 'watched so eagerly she seemed mentally to do the movements with all the rest'.⁷⁷ Her favourite was 'The Initiation of the Priestess, a Fragment of a Mystery': '[i]t taught me, it gave me more of women's life than any book or poem'.⁷⁸ This may have been one of the dances she witnessed just before her death, which occurred a few hours after the class concluded.

These dances were believed by some pupils to have ancient origin, deriving from such diverse cultures as Assyria, Afghanistan, or Tibet⁷⁹ – transmitted across the dark abyss of time, from a dimension akin to Lawrence's Minoan distance. Henri Thomasson, a French pupil of Gurdjieff, described practice of the movements as follows:

When all thoughts and imagination drop away and only the vibrations of the living body are the centre of attention, the other world becomes accessible. Here all accustomed motives of desire and curiosity become completely unreal and a new kind of thought, liberated from form and composed of a pure but very fragile energy, appears. [...] the body is the instrument of a new source of life [...] we see the possibility of [...] opening up channels for those other, higher influences which are always flowing through us.⁸⁰

What is important is not the outer form, dexterity or control but the dancer's attempt to engage a special energy for which the dance itself becomes a vehicle. Through the Gurdjieff movements, the dancer became an intermediary between forces above and below, sky and earth, which Gurdjieff defined as influences: 'Influence A' from the earth, 'Influence C' from the planets.⁸¹ It was such an intermediation of forces that Lawrence saw in the dancing of the Southwest Indians:

The sky has its fire, its waters, its stars, its wandering electricity, its winds, its fingers of cold. The earth has its reddened body, its invisible hot heart, its inner waters and many juices and unaccountable stuffs. 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.⁸²

He would find an even more refined vision of such sacred dancing in the Etruscan tomb-frescoes of Tarquinia.

In 1927, his tuberculosis far advanced, Lawrence travelled to Italy to complete a book about the Etruscans. The return to the archaic Mediterranean where the gods wore a human semblance was a

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homecoming after the faceless gods of Mexico. In Etruscan civilisation, Lawrence believed he had found a culture of 'phallic consciousness', in which men and women were equal, where religion taught man that 'by vivid attention and subtlety and exerting all his strength could draw more life into himself, more life and more and more glistening vitality till he became shining in the morning, blazing like a god',⁸³ and where immortality might be achieved through the eternal renewal of natural cycles. 'The treasure of treasures is the soul [...] in every creature, every tree or pool [...] in death it does not disappear but is stored in the egg, in the jar, or even in the tree which brings it forth again'.⁸⁴

The figures in the Etruscan frescoes celebrated these cycles with a rich display of feasting, drinking, hunting, fishing, playing music and games; all rituals by which cosmic energies could be absorbed into the self. But above all, it was through their dancing and through the dancers' attention or 'alertness' – that divine energy was captured and transmitted by the human body, every limb permeated with godlike energy 'to the tips'.⁸⁵ To Lawrence's eyes those fading human shapes dancing on in a 'field of obliteration still know the gods and make it evident to us' – still transmit the electricity of divine knowledge.⁸⁶ A dying man, he looked to them for revelation. The Etruscans, he stressed, were, above all 'an *experience*'.⁸⁷

These two writers, obsessive perfectionists in regards to their craft, reached similar conclusions: the focalising of attention in bodily movement is a timeless art through which extraordinary states of being may be experienced and transmitted without the encumbrance of words. Dance, more than any other art, opened the door to the Minoan Distance. Mansfield longed to join the dancers,⁸⁸ Lawrence to tap into a well spring of eternal renewal. Their journeys rewarded them with a vision of a life-transforming boon, but neither one lived long enough to put the gift to use. We have only their testimonies – Mansfield's letters, Lawrence's Etruscan writings – suggesting the fulfilment brought, or only promised, by dancers in the twilight at the end of their parallel quest.

This essay is dedicated to James Moore.

Notes

1. V. O'Sullivan and M. Scott, eds, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*. Vol.1 (1984), Vol 2 (1987), Vol 3 (1993), Vol 4 (1996), Vol 5 (2008) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984–2008). Vol. 5. Hereafter referred to as *Letters 5*, followed by the page number.
2. *Letters 5*, p. 312.
3. *Letters 5*, p. 319.
4. *Letters 5*, p. 309.

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5. *Letters 5*, p. 304.
6. *Letters 5*, p. 308.
7. James Boulton, ed., *Selected Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 195 [D. H. Lawrence to Mary Cannan, 12 February 1921].
8. Mansfield recounted the episode in a letter to Murry on 7 February 1920. J. M. Murry, ed., *Letters of Katherine Mansfield to John Middleton Murry, 1913–1922* (London: Constable, 1951), pp. 469–70.
9. *Letters 5*, p. 296.
10. *Letters 5*, p. 326.
11. *Letters 5*, p. 311.
12. *Letters 5*, p. 312.
13. See P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), for a detailed study of Gurdjieff's teaching.
14. *Letters 5*, p. 340. Taking 'mental photographs' was a first phase of self-observation; see Ouspensky, pp. 146–7.
15. *Letters 5*, p. 303
16. *Letters 5*, p. 304.
17. See Ouspensky, pp. 140–9.
18. *Letters 5*, p. 304.
19. *Letters 5*, p. 305.
20. *Letters 5*, p. 341.
21. Boulton, ed., *Selected Letters*, p. 251 [Letter to John Middleton Murry, 2 February 1923].
22. Mabel Dodge Luhan quotes Frieda's letter in *Lorenzo in Taos* (New York: Knopf, 1933), p. 19.
23. Michael Herbert, ed., *D. H. Lawrence: Selected Critical Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 209.
24. Lawrence had a very negative view of Gurdjieff's Institute. Writing to Mabel Dodge Luhan on 9 January 1924, he described it as 'a rotten, false, self-conscious place of people playing a sickly stunt'. Luhan, *Lorenzo in Taos*, p. 128.
25. L. D. Clark, *The Minoan Distance, The Symbolism of Travel in D. H. Lawrence* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), p. 232.
26. J. M. Murry, ed., *Journal of Katherine Mansfield* (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 99.
27. See Luhan, p. 128.
28. Lawrence's advice to Mabel Dodge Luhan about Gurdjieff was: '[m]y I, my fourth centre, will look after me better than I will look after it. Which is all I feel about Gurdjieff. You become perfect in the manipulation of your organism and the I is in such perfect suspension that if a dog barks, the universe is shattered'. See Luhan, p. 265.
29. The phrase is from a late poem by Lawrence. See Clark, p. 356.
30. D. H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 117.
31. *Letters 5*, p. 328.
32. See Luhan, p. 43.
33. *Letters 5*, p. 328.
34. *Letters 5*, p. 319.
35. Luhan, p. 20.
36. Richard Aldington, ed., *D. H. Lawrence, Selected Letters* (London: Penguin, 1950), p. 142 [Letter to Catherine Carswell, 29 September 1922].

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37. Luhan, p. 20.
38. D. H. Lawrence, 'Dance of the Sprouting Corn', in *Mornings in Mexico* (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 122.
39. Herbert, p. 204.
40. *Letters* 5, p. 304.
41. *Letters* 5, p. 315.
42. *Letters* 5, p. 341.
43. *Letters* 5, p. 298.
44. *Letters* 5, p. 150.
45. G. I. Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: Dutton, 1975), p. 244.
46. *Letters* 5, p. 298.
47. Luhan, p. 17.
48. Catherine Carswell, *Savage Pilgrimage: A Narrative of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), pp. 108, 117.
49. Aldous Huxley, 'Introduction', in Richard Aldington, ed., *D. H. Lawrence Selected Letters*, p. 27–8.
50. James Boulton, ed., *The Cambridge Edition of the Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Vol 5*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 75 [Letter to Earl Brewster, 15 July 1924].
51. Aldington, p. 144 [Letter to Catherine Carswell, 29 September 1922].
52. Aldington, p. 158.
53. Aldington, p. 158.
54. Carswell, p. 11.
55. Carswell, p. 23.
56. Aldington, p. 91.
57. Boulton, ed., *Selected Letters*, p. 123 [Letter to Captain John Short, 25 March 1916].
58. See John Middleton Murry, *The Autobiography of John Middleton Murry: Between Two Worlds* (New York: Julian Messner, 1936), pp. 403–17 for his version of this living experiment.
59. Carswell records overhearing a conversation between Lawrence and Murry in which Lawrence insisted that Mansfield's work was little more than a charming gift (p. 207).
60. *Letters* 5, p. 225.
61. In his autobiography, Murry claims that Mansfield 'distrusted the very idea of a community'. Murry, p. 402.
62. See C. S. Knott, *The Teachings of Gurdjieff: A Pupil's Journal* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1961).
63. *Letters* 5, p. 319.
64. See James Moore, *Gurdjieff and Mansfield* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).
65. C. S. Knott gives a fuller picture of the bustling Institute in Knott, p. 45.
66. *Letters* 5, p. 312.
67. *Letters* 5, p. 310.
68. Holly Baggett, ed., *Dear Tiny Heart: The Letters of Jane Heap and Florence Reynolds* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 98. Heap later became a transmitter of Gurdjieff's ideas in England. Among her pupils was the theatre director Peter Brook who describes his work with her in Brook, *Threads of Time* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Books, 1998), pp. 60–1; 70–1.
69. *Letters* 5, p. 290.
70. *Letters* 5, p. 335.

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71. D. H. Lawrence, 'Dance of the Sprouting Corn', p. 132.
72. D. H. Lawrence, 'Indians and Entertainment', *Mornings in Mexico*, p. 117.
73. Ida Baker, *Katherine Mansfield: The Memories of LM* (New York: Tapplinger, 1972), p. 214.
74. *Letters 5*, p. 310.
75. *Letters 5*, p. 319.
76. See Moore, pp. 143–160.
77. Olgivanna (Mrs Frank Lloyd Wright), 'The Last Days of Katherine Mansfield', *Bookman* LXXIII (March 1931), p. 12.
78. *Letters 5*, p. 322.
79. See Knott, p. 8.
80. Henri Thomasson, *The Pursuit of the Present* (Avebury: Avebury Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 53–8.
81. Influence B instead is connected to philosophy, religion, and art. See G. I. Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: Dutton, 1975), pp. 254–65 for a general discussion. See also Henriette Lannes, *Retour à Maintenant* (Lyon: Editions Tournadieu, 2003), pp. 56–65.
82. 'Dance of the Sprouting Corn', p. 132.
83. D. H. Lawrence, *Etruscan Places* (London: Secker, 1932), p. 90.
84. *Etruscan Places*, p. 100.
85. *Etruscan Places*, p. 74.
86. *Etruscan Places*, p. 86.
87. *Etruscan Places*, p. 194. Emphasis mine.
88. *Letters 5*, p. 310.