

FROM *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*
TO *THE DEER PARK*: MARRIAGE,
INSTINCTUAL PRIMACY, AND THE
DIALECTIC OF EROTIC RISK

P E T E R B A L B E R T

"A man has to fend and fettle for the best, and then trust in something beyond himself."

D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

"Poor memory is so indispensable to passionate lovers."

Norman Mailer, *The Deer Park*

"I shall put forward the view that psychical impotence is much more widespread than supposed."

Sigmund Freud, "*On the Universal Tendency to
Debasement in the Sphere of Love*"

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I

The acumen of Norman Mailer's spirited defense in *The Prisoner of Sex* of D.H. Lawrence's life, art, and vision should come as no surprise to those who follow the open book and embattled advocacies of Mailer's personal and intellectual history. The initial publication of that polemical work appeared as the sole content of *Harper's* in May 1971, and the ensuing controversy over

its explicit language and masculinist perspectives ultimately led to the cowardly dismissal of the journal's talented and innovative editor, Willie Morris, and soon to the resignation, in impressive support of Morris and the mandates of artistic expression, of several talented writers and senior staff members. Mailer's empathetic and admiring preoccupation with Lawrence long precedes his capstone discussion of him in *The Prisoner of Sex*. In several interviews, essays, and letters prior to that embattled volume of catharsis, prophecy, and criticism, he generously acknowledges the seminal influence of Lawrence on both himself and the socio-cultural climate of the twentieth century. Mailer's intensely Manichean novels—through their familiar litany of concern with ego, sex, inhibitive society, and modern conformity—appear like a karmic reformulation of Lawrence's most prominent doctrines. As he observes in *The Prisoner of Sex*, and as his prolific career variously insists until his passing in 2007, it is a vastly transformed world since Lawrence's death in 1930, "technologized and technologized twice again" (151). Such radical transformation of society is reflected in the conjoined visions yet dissimilar tapestries and textures of art in the two writers. The sprawling urban environments and political agendas of much of Mailer's fiction and his "new journalism" contrast (and also coalesce) with that integration of biblical intensity and pastoral landscape so predominant in Lawrence's work. Mailer's modern hell, teeming with cancer, plastic, and cowardice, and Lawrence's lost utopia, rife with personal betrayal, entrenched repression, and the destructive "censor-moron" (*Letters VI* 613), also suggest the disparity between Mailer's metafictional coverage of a contemporary event and Lawrence's angry indictment of mankind's misguided goals and mechanized habits of living.

It is the genre of the novel that they both outspokenly regard as most conducive to the sexual aesthetics, conflicted marriages, and rampant infidelities that infiltrate the subject matter of their writing—and ultimately the substance of their lives. Mailer's praise of the intrinsic power of fiction insists, in recognizably Lawrencian terms, on an intimate relation between the metaphysics of a novel and the novelist's obligation to emphasize that philosophy within the respective work, and even at the risk of awkward narrative intrusion. In this regard he argues that "the novel at its best is the most moral of the art forms, because it's the most immediate, the most overbearing, if you will" (*Advertisements* 384). Such a superlative declaration manages to integrate notions of an ethical imperative ("most moral"), uncensored

honesty (“most overbearing”), and instinctual judgment (“most immediate”). This sweeping affirmation precisely recapitulates the tone and imagery of Lawrence’s more celebrated statement of genre preference in “Why the Novel Matters” and in chapter nine of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. In the essay, Lawrence employs a series of organic metaphors to assert that the novel’s special quality “can make the whole man tremble” as it depicts “the whole hog” of “man alive” (195); in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* he further highlights the intimate and revelatory potential within any extended work of fiction: “Therefore the novel, properly handled, can reveal the most secret places of life” (101).¹ That daring prehensile image, in effect, connects to the focus on physical touch between Connie and Mellors, and it also emphasizes the special irony and urgency implicit in Lawrence’s abiding preoccupation with his markedly different version of “propriety”: the eminently proper goal to eliminate what he describes in “Pornography and Obscenity” as the “dirty little secret” of sex (243)—that is, to openly oppose the extremes both of Victorian prudery and postwar decadence.

Mailer further privileges the intrinsic power of the novel with analogous Lawrencian terminology. He describes the subject of sex as “the last remaining frontier of the novel which has not been exhausted by the nineteenth and early twentieth century novelists” (*Advertisements* 270). His praise of that genre and his belief in the doctrinal responsibility of art cohere in an assertion that also remains at the livid center of Lawrence’s own vision: “The final purpose of art is to intensify, even, if necessary, to exacerbate, the moral consciousness of people” (*Advertisements* 384). Such definitive phrasing by Mailer echoes the amplitude and conviction of Lawrence’s well-known assertions that “even art is utterly dependent on philosophy” (*Fantasia* 65) and “every work of art adheres to some system of morality” (*Study of Hardy* 89). His direct influence on Mailer even extends beyond such notions about the special status of the novel. From early in his career he admits to a more precise debt than the tone of moral fervor or the imperative for prophetic insight emanating from Lawrence’s works. Mailer’s prominent sexual aesthetic—that active dialectic of risk, openendedness, and growth dramatized most graphically in such fiction as *The Deer Park*, “The Time of Her Time,” *An American Dream*, and *The Castle in the Forest*—reflects his essential recognition that Lawrence’s insistence on instinctual primacy remains the bedrock faith from which all discussion of the novelist from the Midlands must begin. Mailer further maintains that Lawrence’s visionary insis-

tence to get beyond the self in the act of love paradoxically includes the demand to stay in close, sensuous touch with the very self that is to be transcended. In this counterintuitive synthesis of the existential and transcendent (virtually a sexually energized form of Thoreauvian and Emersonian ethics), Mailer absorbs Lawrence's dictum that the true test of personal courage is the willingness to abandon the accustomed props of self-definition in favor of a Truth that resides beyond the protected confines of the Freudian ego.²

Amid the waves of cynicism and disillusion that permeate culture after the devastation of The Great War, Lawrence is prominent among those artists who adhere to a vision of the transformative power of the self; for him this intrinsic potential exists through the guidance of emotional and sexual impulses that he defines in "Introduction to These Paintings" as the realm of "instinctive-intuitive" awareness (186). Lawrence firmly believes that our modernist reliance on mentalized rather than instinctual prompting offers merely a culturally conditioned and often unhealthy blueprint for action and/or restraint, for throughout one's life and—here is the crux of his credo—"the thought-adventure starts in the blood, not in the mind" ("On Being a Man" 214). His focus on blood-consciousness, on the inner truths conveyed by spontaneous reactions, along with his penchant for the uncircumscribed implication of the term "adventure"—all this will prove useful in my later consideration of the correlative notions of risk and growth. But for now it is important to note that Mailer begins to derive his own brand of existentialism, inherited in part from various elements in the work of Lawrence and Hemingway, in his novel *The Deer Park* (1955) and—in more volatile and theoretic fashion—in his controversial essay, "The White Negro" (1957). While the latter work notoriously expands on concepts of violence that Lawrence would not admire, the direction of Mailer's remarks clearly is derived from Lawrence's doctrines about instinctual motivation and repressive society. In the preliminary pages of that essay Mailer asserts, in what he approvingly describes as Hemingway's guiding dictum "that what made him feel good became therefore The Good," a list of formative influences on his own developing philosophy: "the intellectual antecedents of this generation can be traced to such separate influences as D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Wilhelm Reich" (*Advertisements* 340). In the years following "The White Negro," Mailer increasingly clarifies Lawrence's legacy to him, as he expands on issues of risk and courage that intersect, in different ways, with relevant preoccupations in the work of Ernest Hemingway.³

II

In D.H. Lawrence's short but trenchant review of Hemingway's first major book, *In Our Time* (1925), he praises the young and relatively unknown writer for his precocious talent in persuasively depicting an elusive quality in fiction: "It is really honest. And it explains a great deal of sentimentality. When a thing has gone to hell inside you, your sentimentalism tries to pretend it hasn't. But Mr. Hemingway is through with the sentimentalism" (*Introductions* 312). Just a year after that auspicious collection of short stories, Hemingway publishes *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel in which the narrator, Jake Barnes, attempts to cope with his war-trauma of impotence through a stringently unsentimental view of the world; years later, in a cathartic story entitled "Fathers and Sons," Hemingway uses the (by then) transparently bio-fictive Adams family to openly indict his own father for hiding from the realities of life by cowardly displaying the same flaw in character that the writer-son cannot forgive. The sentimentalist's profoundly warped view of life leaves him open to poisonous regret and inevitable mistreatment by others: "he was sentimental, and, like most sentimental people, he was both cruel and abused. [. . .] All sentimental people are betrayed so many times" (*Complete Short Stories* 370). It is not surprising that Lawrence remains sensitive to this adamant strain about the ravages of self-induced frustration in Hemingway's credo. He displays an emphasis throughout his work on many of the same issues that Mailer absorbs from Hemingway and that Mailer further acknowledges as a major component of Lawrencian ideology in the *Prisoner of Sex*: the integrated themes of personal courage in modern society and an individual's willingness to embrace change and undertake risk in order to avoid the peril of stasis in erotic relations. In this sense the "sentimental" failure of people to adhere to forms of instinctual primacy, amounting to an aversion at all costs not to endanger their social and/or professional standing—such themes motivate Lawrence's writing as he takes a valedictory look at the embattled courage and accumulated wounds of his own life and begins to write *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Lines from his essay, "Apropos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" declare his own kinship, in effect, with the thrust of Hemingway's early fiction, as Lawrence defends the urgency of his own most controversial novel by reiterating an important epithet: "Never was an age more sentimental, more devoid of real feeling, more exaggerated in false feeling, than our own. Sentimentality and counterfeit feeling have become

a sort of game, everybody trying to outdo his neighbor" (*Lady Chatterley's Lover* 312).

In *Cannibals and Christians* (1966), Mailer reprints a 1963 interview that more precisely connects his developing dialectic to a psychosexual attitude that requires the special kind of honesty he gratefully absorbs from the British novelist: "I learned from Lawrence that the way to write about sex was not to strike poses, but be true to the logic of each moment. There's a subtle logic to love" (197). His emphasis on "logic" conveys an interesting clue to the paradoxical insight about erotic passion that he derives from Lawrence. It embodies a powerful motivation that is emotional rather than rational, for it relies on the guidance of instinct and the related messages relayed by the five senses. Such a fiercely existential basis for love—or for *any* intensely committed action—is further confirmed and augmented by the accumulated life-experience of the individual.⁴ This tripartite nexus of instinct-sense perception-experience provides Lawrence, Hemingway, and Mailer with a more confident Truth than is supplied by formal education or popular societal trend. Thus the "logic to love" cannot be rehearsed or pre-formulated and it often will supply revelations in subtle, even inscrutable ways, as if absorbed from the recesses of one's soul. The direction of depicted passion in the work of the two writers is characteristically spontaneous and unpredictable; the tenor of a scene depends on the transitions of mood in characters that result in moments of sexual exchange that are searing and unorthodox. The drama emerges without a blueprint.

Even a minor scene of seduction in Mailer's *The Deer Park* illustrates the dialectic of erotic risk, and with a serio-comic touch that enhances the sense of unrehearsed libido unleashed by the lovers. It occurs in the torrid yet awkward vignette that plays out amid the frustrating twists and turns in the car seats during the initial sexual encounter between the voluptuous and available movie star, Lulu Meyers, and the occasionally impotent and—in Mailer's coded term—"adventuring" Korean War veteran, Sergius O'Shaughnessy. Lulu's neurotic fears and coquettish restraint at first foil his adolescent aggressiveness and priapic urgency; given his recent history of sexual problems, his understandable anxiety about erectile function makes any delay in his desire a possible inhibitor of his performance. But the scene provides an unanticipated conclusion, with its own persuasive rationale only after the chances for success diminish with the greater likelihood of Sergius's anguished failure. When he finally feels exhausted and resigned by the coy

adamance of her refusals, she suddenly and gently caters to his needs as she rouses Sergius and helps them make love. The transitions in this intense encounter are unpredictable and intense, and they all make perfect sense in the context of Mailer's notion of erotic risk: in an ad-libbed strategy that combines instinct and guile, Lulu must reconnoit the tenor of foreplay and devise her own scenario of control and encouragement before she will yield. As a much pursued siren in Hollywood, she well knows the terrain of falsity and manipulation that often precedes courtship and submission. In this scene her inimitably charming and ingenious "logic" is to discover, fresh for herself, that "feel good" temperature and posture for sex. To Lulu's generous praise that he is a "wonderful lover," he correctly answers that he's "just an amateur" (95)—his acknowledgement, no doubt, of the lesson in patient passion he has learned from her in the sedan's front seat. It is the resonant texture of creative surprise that defines it as a Mailer sex scene, sprightly influenced by Lawrencian notions of spontaneity and the "subtle logic to love."⁵

The developing dialectic of erotic risk in the above encounter—as the exchange transitions through moments of lust, fear, courage, and resolution—recalls an anecdote Mailer relates about Marilyn Monroe (surely an iconic version of Lulu Meyers) and the existential element in any sexual episode. It concerns an incident that Lawrence would understand in light of his emphasis on the self-defining and inchoate territory intrinsic to the act of love: "Once after going to bed with Marlon Brando, she said next morning to Milton Green, 'I don't know if I do it the right way,' but then which of us does know? [. . .] Sooner or later we all reveal our innocence about sex in a candid remark" (*Marilyn* 75). Thus Mailer's phrase, the "subtle logic to love," comprises an appropriate oxymoron in which the heart, not the mind, creates and directs the sexual impulse. That terminology provides a provocative echo of Lawrence's comparable formulation, the "logic of the soul," a term that he uses decades earlier in *The Rainbow* (1915); it occurs as Lawrence poignantly describes the aura of otherness of Lydia Lensky, who entrances Tom Brangwen from the moment of their first meeting. Tom's need to formally propose marriage to this inscrutable woman functions as an example of erotic risk that embodies a species of courage in this young and relatively isolated man. His earlier intimate experiences with women were limited to unsatisfactory episodes that disillusioned him and frustrated his "innate desire to find in a woman the embodiment of all his inarticulate, powerful re-

ligious impulses" (21). In the scene in which the phrase "logic of the soul" appears, Tom abandons—as a graphic instance of that transcendent faith in the "unknown"—the rational and incremental steps of an ordered courtship. He has scarcely met this older, divorced, foreign, and reticent mother, a woman who—by dint of that precise litany of qualities—formidably radiates an "otherness" to Tom on multiple and profound levels. He feels this compelling need for her in his blood, and he abruptly leaves his farm on the strength of that feeling: "It's got to be done, so why baulk it?" (41). As he resolves to propose to her, Lawrence is superb at establishing a line of motivation in him that remains concrete and abstract at the same time—the synthesis that creates the fourth-dimensional prose he initiates at this stage in his career: "There was an inner reality, a logic of the soul, which connected her with him" (40).⁶

Lawrence's visionary doctrines include a correlative notion that integrates his transcendental doctrines with a bedrock conservatism concerning an essential tradition of modern society: his belief that a man's instinctual need for the unknown, embodied in that otherness of a woman, must receive its apotheosis in the "risky" undertaking of the volatile state of marriage. Such a heterodox integration of instinctual primacy with the most basic social contract anticipates Mailer's blended designation of his own ideology in *The Armies of the Night* as "Left Conservative" (124); that hybrid term suggests his view of gender relations, which seeks to combine an existential eroticism with the drive to engage and maintain the institution of marriage.⁷ Mailer's prolific output lacks the range and frequency of primal urgencies that dominate Lawrence's works. For example, Tom Brangwen's yielding to the logic of his soul reflects the same intense command of blood consciousness that urges Ursula to annihilate Skrebensky under the moon ("not on any side did he lead into the unknown" (439), or which spurs her mother, Anna, to dance naked before Will as an annulment of her defaulting husband (she "danced before the unknown" (169)).⁸ Often the urge does not directly encompass the unknown, or even the integrating theme of marriage; instead, the spontaneous mandate involves entanglements with the opposite sex that are risky, open-ended, and even exclude any notion of committed love. While Mailer's intention is to courageously "encounter" the state of marriage in his fiction and life, his six wives suggest that he reserves the freedom to leave when he so chooses.

The shape and texture of instinctual responses in Lawrence's fiction re-

main as varied as the idiosyncratic emotions of the characters themselves. His creative imagination conjures up scenarios that demonstrate the powerful force of mandates from the soul. In the following examples, there is no equivocation about the need for the specified action. It is the existential imperative that rules here—Mailer’s version of “if it feels good it is good”—and it is irrelevant if the end result proves not good at all for the respective individual. Characters seem captured by forces both within and beyond them; the pattern is conveyed as part of the inimitable texture of Lawrence’s fourth-dimensional prose, as it probes “really a stratum deeper” (*Letters I* 526) into the uncharted domain of blood-motivation. The dominant instigation is never defined—but it is strongly felt: the Princess feels that she *must* continue the trip into the mountains with Romero, and that she *must* invite him into her bed to warm her frightened body and soul; Yvette *must* meet the gipsy at the door when he peddles his wares, and she *must* visit him at his camp; Daphne *must* visit the Count at the hospital, and she *must* come to his darkened room at the house; Captain Hepburn *must* climb up to the Karlinger Glacier, and he *must* attempt to negotiate the dangerous ice face; Ciccio *must* depart from his scripted role in the playlet, and he *must* take Alvina back to his native village; Lou Carrington *must* rescue the stallion, and she *must* commit herself to a solitary and strenuous life in the cabin above Taos. Henry Grenfel *must* shoot the fox and *must* capture March as his wife. In effect, all these sequences of urgencies provide no possibilities of alternative action or response. The reader feels their inevitability as intensely as the characters enact their fate.

While the force of blood-consciousness remains both immediate and relentless in the above cases, it is not instinct alone that influences the “logic of the soul.” Recall the challenge so intrinsic to Lawrencian doctrine: a character’s faith in the “beyond” must be sufficiently strong to transcend the security and strength that the ego generally provides. In Lawrence’s fictional world, such transcendence—often carrying a religious tone of ritualistic communion—can be initiated by a powerful natural object, force, or landscape, such as moon, mountain, sun, tree, flame, and animal. Mailer also is especially sympathetic to the commanding presence of irrational inclinations and irresistible objects and desires. Throughout his novels characters enact their passion with a perverse abandon their head and nerves cannot comprehend or ratify, but which their heart and courage insist is the only recourse. One thinks most graphically here of the obsessed walk on the para-

pet that Rojack takes in *An American Dream*, and—two decades later—the analogous climb up the needle that Madden must endure in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, and—also two decades later—the compulsive need for perilous rock climbing mandated at the start of *Harlot's Ghost*. Such scenes of enrapture and taboo-violation are different in degree but not in kind from the frenetic sex in the rain between Connie and Mellors, or their ritualized benediction of genital decoration with flowers. Their actions emanate from the guiding logic of their souls. They intensely feel what is right for them.

III

For a comparative portrayal in Lawrence's writings of ego-dominated "poses" that Mailer insists comprise a crucial influence on his own depiction of sexual tensions, the examples are numerous and graphic: the evasive gamesmanship of Michaelis in his affair with Connie; Birkin's decadent diversions with Hermione and her willful demands on him; Skrebensky's pompous affectations with Ursula and her belabored devastation of his inadequate being; Paul's increasingly bored sex with Clara, and his prolonged tolerance of Miriam's stifling nullity; Rico's effete prancing on the stallion in London, and his immature flirtations with the Mamby girls; Phoenix's macho posturing with Lou, and the childish assumptions about his suitability for marriage to Yvette by her local suitor; Daphne's obscene infatuation with the seductive count. What Mailer, in effect, absorbs from Lawrence's fiction is how a novelist can portray, with variety and insight, society's entrenched habits of cheap sex, manipulative passion, and aggressive posturing. *The Deer Park* reveals, through the wide-angle lens that frames a movie community, how poses become *de rigueur* in this artificial environment because of their easy utility and wide acceptance in personal and community relations. No one talks about the game-playing because everyone takes part in the charade. The litany of poses creates liaisons at the lowest level of erotic risk, offering narcissistic sex that superficially enhances career confidence in its tawdry catering to self-image and silly notions of romantic conquest. Thus characters in Mailer's work often desire what Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (and in his related essays) calls mere sensation. He angrily insists—with the Bloomsbury circle of promiscuous egotists no doubt on his mind—that most sexual affairs amount to masturbatory gymnastics, and he primarily blames men for the prevalence of this narcissism: "It is the hardest thing in life to get one's soul and body satisfied from a woman, so that one

is free from oneself" (*Letters II* 115). Without the ability to achieve this freedom-through-transcendence, men are incapable of taking that crucial step within the dialectic of erotic risk: "Today men don't risk their blood and bone. They go forth, panoplied in their own idea of themselves ("On Being a Man" 217). Lawrence directly describes his insistence on a necessary linkage in men between sexual energy and the encompassing cycles of time and nature. He defines the "real sex in a man" as one that "has the rhythm of the seasons and the years" (*Apropos* 318).

Mailer's discussion of Lawrence in *The Prisoner of Sex*, and his forays into psychosexual speculations about the volatile marriage to Frieda, center on a precise and unadorned formulation of the essential credo evident throughout the earlier novelist's life and work. Forty years after Lawrence's death, a single sentence by Mailer captures the basic theme with an inimitable mixture of the lyrical and the vernacular: "He believed nothing human had such significance as the tender majesties of a man and a woman fucking with love" (*Prisoner* 134-135). That lingering qualifier, "with love," correctly suggests the one element that infiltrates all the phrases of Lawrence's career, from *The Wintry Peacock* through *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. But it is only by the time of his last novel that he has abandoned the earlier stages of belief in utopia and leadership to formulate the doctrine that Mailer recognizes as the touchstone of Lawrence's existence as man and artist. Here are Oliver Mellors's unequivocal and unadorned words, refracted courageously from the humane and experienced perspective of the impotent and dying writer who created him: "Yes, I do believe in something. I believe in being warm-hearted. I believe especially in being warm-hearted, in love, in fucking with a warm heart. I believe if men could fuck with warm hearts, and the women take it warm-heartedly, everything would come all right. It's all this cold-hearted fucking that is death and idiocy" (206). Although Lawrence considers men, with their characteristic tendency for ego-driven sex, as primarily responsible for such lack of warmth, he does not exempt women from his censure. At one point Connie consciously tries to suppress her passion for Mellors, as the scars from her experiences with Michaelis and Clifford prevent her from yielding: "She resisted it as far as she could, for it was the loss of herself to herself" (135).

Mailer's memorable rumination on both the urgency and authenticity of sex in Lawrence's fiction—replete with Hemingwayesque metaphors of military engagement, risk-taking, and mortal stakes—functions as the most

trenchant explanation of why sex-with-love remains the ultimate and elusive goal in the work of Lawrence and Mailer.

Lawrence's point, which he refines over and over, is that the deepest messages of sex cannot be heard by taking a stance on the side of the bank, announcing one is in love, and then proceeding to fish in the waters of love with a breadbasket full of ego. No, he is saying again and again, people can win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it of ego, position, or identity—love is more stern than war—and men and women can survive only if they reach the depth of their own sex down within themselves. They have to do deliver themselves “over to the unknown.” No more existential statement of love exists, for it is a way of saying we do not know how the love will turn out. (*The Prisoner of Sex* 147–148)

Such an existential reading of Lawrence's sexual ethics, which Mailer, in effect, defines (as above) as an organic synthesis of central notions variously configured in Hemingway and Thoreau, must be viewed through the perspective of Mailer's own advocacy of risk and openendedness in the conduct of one's life. His brief discussion in *The Prisoner of Sex* of the spirited conflict between Ursula and Birkin about marriage and love, properly stresses how and why Birkin's proposal to her avoids a neo-platonic relationship that inevitably would be tied to the cloying habits of vanity and narcissism. While both writers extol the institution of marriage and acknowledge the challenges it presents, they also remain leery of any extended erotic affair that is built on sex-without-love. But an obvious problem remains engrained in this very perspective: How does such a conservative impulse that celebrates marriage reconcile with the abundant evidence of Mailer's serial adultery, with Mailer's litany of marriages, with Lawrence's intimacy with Rosalind Baynes and Dorothy Brett, and with Lawrence's tolerance of Frieda's infidelities? There are possible answers to all such understandable queries, however inadequate they may be to fully explain the gaps between doctrine and behavior. An excellent and recent biography of Mailer by Michael Lennon anatomizes the “double life” of the late writer, and the work describes with abundant detail how Mailer attempts to compartmentalize (in the European manner) his hectic sex life in and out of marriage.⁹

As for the essentially monogamous Lawrence, he understands—from the start of his connection to Frieda—the perils of attachment to this headstrong and sexually liberated woman; there remains little doubt that he supremely valued her and their embattled marriage despite her pattern of cheating.¹⁰ In addition, Lawrence's one-night affair with Rosalind occurs during a period of great frustration with his wife, and the warmth and understanding he received from this younger woman briefly satisfied needs in him that Frieda could not—or would not—meet at the time.¹¹

It is true that sex-without-love often is depicted as passionate and satisfying in the work of both writers, but they share a measured “caution” about such affairs: unless the lust develops into the complexity and challenge of committed love, these prophetic artists invariably document the corrosive nature of the respective relationship. They disapprove not for puritanical reasons, of course, but because of the greater tendency of liaisons outside of marriage failing to transcend over to “the unknown,” as they often remain mired in petty competitions for power and prominence. Surely the same flaws and pitfalls exist in marriage, but in Mailer's demanding dialectic the existential states of failure and success are energized by the legal authority of the union. Put simply, there is more to lose, more guilt to assume in failure, and thus more “edginess” and self-definition to appropriate when the marriage succeeds. Perhaps Mailer best describes the stakes implicit in this appropriation in an oft-quoted passage from *The Armies of the Night*: “For guilt was the existential edge of sex. Without guilt, sex was meaningless. One advanced into sex against one's sense of guilt, and each time guilt was successfully defied, one had learned a little more about the contractual relation of one's own existence to the unheard thunders of the deep” (24). Now add on to this self-defining dimension of committed obligation the legal contract of marriage, and Mailer's thunder roars even louder as he defiantly moves from wife to wife.

In the context of unmarried lovers failing to achieve the link to the unknown, recall Skrebensky and Ursula in *The Rainbow*, as she virtually bypasses her inadequate lover to commune with the stars. She reaches for the transcendent by reducing him to the level of convenient gigolo: “He served her. She took him, she clasped him, clenched him close, but her eyes were open looking at the stars, it was as if the stars were lying with her and entering the unfathomable darkness of her womb, fathoming her at last. It was not

him" (430-431). Denise and Sergius commit themselves to a similar form of masturbatory passion in Mailer's "The Time of Her Time," when his superficial victory as a sexual athlete is undercut by a neurotic lover who punctures his bravado with a witty and unanswerable final riposte. In a published letter, Mailer articulates the issues inherent in the conjoined and the separate incarnations of sex and love, and he also provides some pertinent ruminations about authorial influence on his own perspective. His remarks are especially notable for the cathartic nature of their revelations, and also for the transformative power he ascribes to one novel in particular:

Lawrence's main influence for me was *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. I had the privilege of reading it back in 1941 in the unexpurgated edition. That was in the Treasure Room of the Widener Library. [...] It changed my sex life, or rather, accelerated it into a direction it had been proceeding on nicely by itself. I accepted Lawrence's thesis about untrammelled rights and liberties of sexual love and the tension between the two. I don't think anyone ever before, whether in literature or personal life, had stated it so forcefully for me, that one could not have sex-without-love, or love without sex, period. I know from the other side of 40-plus years, that this is an extraordinary thesis, and can be half right, or all-wrong, as well as absolutely so. For this reason Lawrence's hypothesis has lived with me as my own, with all the excitement of an ongoing hypothesis that you can never quite confirm or deny (hypotheses are so much more life-giving than obsessions!). At any rate, such is my essential debt to Lawrence. His other works I admire, and I think he was a great writer, but *Lady Chatterley* changed by life. (Meyers 11)

Thus Mailer recognizes that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is profoundly persuasive in its depiction of a relationship that begins in opportune lust and ends with open-ended prospects of love and marriage. In 1955 Mailer publishes *The Deer Park*, a novel that engages the same dichotomies of love and sex in a narrative framework not unlike *Women in Love*: two couples who move through various stages of love and sex within a developing plot-line that provides occasional intersections among four characters. Both affairs in Mailer's work scarcely progress beyond the level of sex-without-love; each

dramatizes the lack of *growth* in the relationship—the crucial quality that Mailer and Lawrence regard as fundamental for any affair or marriage. But it is *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that Mailer emphatically cites in the letter. I want to build on his assertions about the seminal importance of the novel by considering its provocative connection to Mailer's first extended fiction on the dialectic of erotic risk, *The Deer Park*.

IV

What Mailer calls his “essential debt” to Lawrence is evident when *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the book that “changed [his] life,” is compared to *The Deer Park* in terms of setting, character, and thematic emphasis. The similarities are striking and they suggest the full extent of Mailer's generous acknowledgement of how Lawrence's “hypothesis” has “lived” with him since his student days in Widener Library. The 1920's setting of the English Midlands bears distinct resemblance to the early 1950's environment of Desert D'Or. Mellors's post-World War One disillusion and anger are not unlike the depression and lack of direction that afflict Sergius O'Shaugnessy, a traumatized veteran of the Korean War. Similarly, the decadent indolence and repeated posturing of the wags at Wraghy, presided over by Clifford Chatterley, anticipate the hypocritical and amoral court of the movie mogul, Herman Teppis. Two analogous communities in which everyone knows his place, as coal miner and starlet, housekeeper and film director, colliery superintendent and publicity executive, chief booty and hair stylist—all are subjected to the mandates of sociosexual conformity and public righteousness. Whether it is through the autocratic control imposed on the colliers or through the hierarchical subjugation of Hollywood movie stars and ambitious hopefuls, both Clifford and Teppis demonstrate how a lust for power and sexual perversity can be satisfied through subtle hypocrisies and useful poses. Even the choric framework of the two novels drums an echoing beat: the cacophonous sounds of relentless bins of coal and clanging tools in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are replaced in *The Deer Park* by the repetitive clicking of celluloid reels in projectors and by the curt shouts of anxious movie directors.

Both cultures remain indistinguishable in their obsession with the “bitch-goddess” of money and success (*Lady Chatterley's Lover* 62). When such versions of mechanization and officious control reign supreme, inevitably the qualities of humane nurturance and genuine passion are under assault. De-meaning notions of sex as mere commodity and as overrated diversion an-

imate the cynical discussions at Wragby estate, as competing versions of evasion and nihilism emanate from Strangeways, Dukes, Michaelis, and Clifford. In the incestuous film network of *The Deer Park*, Munshin, O'Faye, Teppis and other fawning hanger-ons enthusiastically exchange their lovers, pimps, business partners, and friends in that casual promiscuity so fantasized by the futurist talkers at Clifford's country mansion. The Herman Teppis-Clifford Chatterley comparison extends to crucial parallels between the novels, as both characters, who each control his own dominion, bear primary responsibility for the crass instrumentalizing of the theory and practice of love and sex. Teppis's pathetic demand—not unfamiliar in the flippant land of filmdom—that Lulu Meyers marry the leading man and homosexual actor, Teddy Pope, is similar to Clifford's calculating suggestion that Connie get impregnated by another man in order to ensure an heir for the estate. Both the studio head and the owner of the mines feel eminently comfortable with an utter contempt for the distractions and obligations of real fatherhood, genuine marriage, and sexual fidelity. An entrenched and cowardly mendacity underlies their warped perspective on prostitutions of the body: paintings in Teppis's office loudly glorify for his gullible public the beauty of innocence and marriage, while Clifford is eager for his deluded village to believe that Connie's anticipated baby is his own.

When the various couples in the two novels are not engaged in the dehumanizing and manipulative sex that exists between Connie and Michaelis, or between Connie and her former lovers on the continent, or between Munshin and Elena, or between Marion and Elena, the men often face the fact or fear of impotence. Mark Spilka suggests nearly sixty years ago the profoundly humane "love ethic" that is embodied in Lawrence's final novel. Spilka persuasively argues that Clifford's literal paralysis and sexual incapacity are not meant as gratuitous or cruel symbols, but as a resonant metaphor that reflects the organic depth of his inadequacy as a man. His literal crippling thus documents what a reader must feel about his diminished stature: he has "no moral feet to stand on" (Spilka 183). Lawrence himself comments on this aspect of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and on the symptomatic evasions of his generation when he remarks that "when people act in sex, nowadays, they are half the time acting up. They do it because they think it is expected of them" (*Apropos* 308). Mellors initially worries about his sexual energy and performance with Connie. Although not impotent, in recent years he has chosen chastity and isolation after his beleaguered history of intimacy with his wife.

In his spontaneous and unanticipated rebirth of love and passion with Connie, he defiantly risks the return of painful memories as well as the social and legal turmoil that he will encounter because of this unorthodox and illicit affair. One aspect of the poignant poetry of this novel is the structural symmetry and irony that frame the accounts of Mellors's history with women: before his experience with Connie, the choice of chastity clearly reflects his depressed and embittered soul; by the novel's conclusion the same choice embodies his confident strategy and optimistic hopes, as Mellors now loves the period of chastity "as snowdrops love the snow" (301).

That Mellors trusts his instincts about Connie and remains willing to initiate the reengagement with sex—such faith indicates the quality of courage that informs Lawrence's dialectic of erotic risk. Some speculation about Lawrence's life at this time seems inevitable. Shortly after he completes *The Virgin and the Gipsy* in 1926, and only months before he begins a version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, he meets his friend and admirer, Dorothy Brett, in Capri during a period for him of deepening illness, increasingly strained relations with Frieda, and the final months of any sexual potency in his weakened body. Brett's written description of her alleged and aborted sexual encounter with him has received its share of speculative commentary through the years as to what actually transpired between them—and it would appear, at least, that nothing in bed was consummated. I am inclined to believe her account of his last-minute spurning of her body for the simple reason that it would be illogical for anyone to recount such a deflating account if it did not occur.¹² But I am less interested in the causes or conclusion of this minor event than in the response of the participants in the following days. Lawrence's essential humanity resonates in his understanding that their failed attempt at sexual connection had deeply affected Brett's self-image. She has always idolized Lawrence, and he writes her a generous letter in the hopes of lifting her spirits. One sentence artfully combines notions directly relevant to this essay: "The greatest virtue in life is real courage, that knows how to face facts and live beyond them" (*Letters V* 408).

This humane response to Brett amounts to a Hemingwayesque acknowledgement of the power of dynamic self-definition, an unequivocal homage to the courageous resources of the spontaneous self and to the primacy of instinctual motivation. In addition, that use of "beyond" in the letter points to the urgency of transcendence for Lawrence, the mandate for the "lapsing-out" that is as much an act of faith for him as it is the goal of a secure

existential self. Thus at this final stage in his life, Lawrence's letter revives his benchmark beliefs via some pertinent advice to a forlorn friend. Perhaps he writes it as much to himself as to Brett. He will start on early versions of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* within months of the letter. It is notable that Mellors is tempted intermittently to use the scars from his experience in the war and with his wife as an excuse to back off from intimate connection to a woman who is also devastated by the war and by her marriage, a woman who amazingly wishes to enter the passionate arc of his fractured life: "Especially he did not want to come into contact with a woman again. He feared it: and he had a big wound from old contacts" (88). Mellors initiates the healing process within the risky crucible of his affair with Connie, and he begins to display the quality of erotic risk-taking that an astute Connie recognizes as an uncommon and organic trait in his character. It is an instinctual courage that in its genuine passion erases class differences and—through Mellors's vernacular directness—plays havoc with the words and assumptions of political correctness. Even Lady Chatterley's downright speech—absorbed no doubt from her lover—summarizes those sociosexual aspects as the titled woman enunciates it with a naked appreciation that is close to poetry:

"Shall I tell you?" she said, looking into his face. "Shall I tell you what you have that other men don't have, and that will make the future. Shall I tell you?"

"Tell me then," he replied.

"It's the courage of your own tenderness, that's what it is: like when you put your hand on my tail and say I've got a pretty tail."

The grin came flickering on his face.

"That!" he said. Then he sat thinking.

"Ay!" he said. "You're right. It's that really. It's that all the way through." (277)

V

In "On Being a Man," an essay written in 1925 that anticipates several procrustean doctrines in Mailer's *The Prisoner of Sex*, Lawrence writes that "when a man and woman actually meet, there is always terrible risk to both of them," and he continues with prescriptive terms that inform aspects of this volume's subtitle: "Take the risk. Make the adventure" (217). In Lawrence's fiction both genders inevitably share the peril and the beauty

of this risky “adventure,” but in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* Connie is aware of the special nature of the groundkeeper’s daring: “Don’t you care about a’ th’ risk” (124)? For D.H. Lawrence the crucial “prompt” for risk-taking, and the related presence of real courage, remain instinctual rather than cerebral—an assertion reflected by him in that pithy and oxymoronic remark noted earlier: “The thought-adventure starts in the blood, not in the mind” (“On Being a Man” 214). Mailer builds on this synthesis of blood, courage, and adventure by directly engaging the issue of sexual performance as he formulates a useful definition that is relevant to any comparative discussion of Mellors and Lawrence: “A firm erection on a delicate fellow was the adventurous juncture of ego and courage” (*Prisoner of Sex* 44–45). One looks in vain for commentary of Mellors that sufficiently stresses the delicate condition of his body and soul when he undertakes sex with Connie. Similarly, a dying Lawrence, a survivor of the oedipal scars from his young manhood who now must cope with the ravages of impotence, surely he would understand an essential notion that Mailer adapts from Hemingway as he writes about the arc of Lawrence’s life-journey: “The phallus erect is nothing less than grace under pressure” (*Prisoner of Sex* 164). It is a form of secular grace related to two correlative and politically incorrect doctrines by Mailer that mesh with an implicit ethic in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*: “The sexual force of man was [. . .] his finest moral product” (*Prisoner of Sex* 45) and “a man can become more male and a woman more female by coming together in the full rigors of the fuck” (*Prisoner of Sex* 171). At bottom Lawrence’s self-image could only conceive the moral power of that force in heterosexual terms, and given the ambiguities and conflicts in his own sexual preferences, the “courage” of his creation of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* remains especially impressive. As the beleaguered and desperately ill writer nears the end of his life, his creation of Mellors’s renewal must stand as an unusual species of artistic and personal transcendence.¹³ Such is the superb and empathetic understanding by Mailer of the turbulent voyage of Lawrence’s life.

It is not just Mellors who experiences a form of sexual revival, and not just Lawrence who dramatizes the conjoined issues of conflict, change, and courage. In an intriguing pattern of cultural synchrony and comparable authorial thematics, both *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *The Deer Park* can be viewed as postwar depictions of male confrontations with and recoveries from impotence. In Mailer’s novel, Sergius, Eitel, and Pelley all fitfully en-

gage the residue of their past sexual trauma by searching for manipulative and ego-driven erotic relationships to repair their problematic libidos and enhance their career-confidence. While Pelley achieves a temporary solution through his unconventional liaison with Dorothea, the extended “tests” levied on the sexual performance of Sergius and Eitel comprise the emblematic themes in the novel. Both men initiate passionate and renewing affairs that at first bring them close to genuine love and enduring relationships. Their contrasting responses to the respective affairs serve as a valuable index to the province of risk and courage in erotic relations. Sergius discovers enough about himself to develop an independent strength and stability that he lacked at the start of the novel; his achievement of this reconstituted self is most evident when he ends his affair with Lulu on the realization that the relationship only provides him with food for his ego. In an interesting contrast, the real risk for Mellors consists in his decision to continue his intimacies with Connie on the future possibility of marriage. Sergius willingly takes the risk of declining the offer of fame and money when he lets Lulu go.

Predictably the once powerful Charles Eitel is again seduced by filmdom’s offer of money and prestige to make bland but successful commercial movies. He decides to abandon a woman who potentially could help him achieve an uncompromised career as an artistic director as well as a secure and meaningful personal life. Thus Eitel’s cowardice—in the stipulated doctrines of Lawrence and Mailer—emerges when he abandons his passionate union with Elena. When the affair inevitably demands more of his real and vulnerable self he will not, in Lawrence’s terms, “take the risk.” Similarly, in the words of Mailer’s existential reading of Lawrencian ideology, Eitel remains unable to “win at love” because he is not “ready to lose everything he brings to it of ego, position, or identity,” and thus he cowardly rejects that transcendent “delivery to the unknown” in favor of his old support system of celebrity and material comfort. On this notion of courage, it is also true that Elena can be partially blamed for the lost opportunity with Eitel: her progressive lack of self-confidence and her neurotic fear of failure move her from depression to a deep despair that understandably frightens and alienates him. It is a not uncommon vicious circle of deterioration for the lovers, but Mailer leaves little doubt that primary blame rests with Eitel. By the novel’s conclusion, with neither able to commit to the other, they seem to embody those contemporary souls that Mailer describes in *Advertisements*

for *Myself*, lovers who “cut a corner, tried to cheat the heart of life, tried not to face our uneasy sense that pleasure comes best to those who are brave” (23). Eitel’s pattern of narcissistic deliberation and unmanly indecisiveness recalls Lawrence’s admonition that obsessive thought exempts one from the instinctual motivations that must take priority: “In order to think, man must risk himself” (“On Being a Man” 213).

VI

Early in *The Deer Park* Eitel confidently makes an assertion that integrates a seminal concept shared by Lawrence, Hemingway, and Mailer, and he packages it in a single sentence: “I’ve always thought that everything you learn is done by fighting your fear” (102). This statement by a once shunned movie director reflects his optimism and adrenaline early in his affair with Elena, a sanguine perspective that is unsustainable once he sacrifices her for his career. The metaphors that Mailer uses to anticipate the delimited arc of their passion are recognizably Lawrencian. In “Apropos of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*” Lawrence writes caustically that “nearly all modern sex is a pure matter of nerves, cold and bloodless” (326). Even when the sex is intense between Eitel and Elena, it never moves them beyond routinized connection—never beyond the constraints of their dueling egos. Mailer’s fundamental insight about the imperative need of lovers in Lawrence’s fiction (“they have to deliver themselves over to the unknown”) remains especially relevant in considering Eitel’s inability to fulfill this mandate. In the following refracted passage of self-analysis by him, there is no “delivery” but only the meager satisfactions rooted in the easy lust of present time:

It had happened before. He had had women who gave him their first honest pleasure, and he had taken all the bows for his vanity, but he had never met so royal a flow of taste. It was remarkable how they knew each other’s nicety between love-making and extravagance. It had always been his outstanding gift, or so he felt, to be able to know a woman, and he had the certainty at little instants that he could discover every sympathetic nerve. “The onanist at heart,” he had thought, and made love to a woman with care enough to have made love to himself. But Elena carried him to mark above mark. (110)

It is a passionate rumination about new love and grand sex, but the praise is mired in the self-congratulation of performance and achievement “Love to oneself”—Eitel remains the onanist in heart, habit, and soul. All he aspires to is a love-project that functions as a way station to petty power and prestige, not unlike the manner in which Clifford Chatterley—pathetically buoyed by his dream of a Wragby heir and namesake—goes back to manage the mines with the conviction of a man who has discovered a lost paramour. Lawrence well knows how intrinsic vulnerability and insecurity in men lead them easily to onanistic temptations. The Lawrencian mandate for love requires a transcendent freedom from the security of self, and Mailer’s touchstone passage about the delivery “to the unknown” is precisely confirmed by that comment in Lawrence’s letter, in which he writes that “it is the hardest thing in life to get one’s soul and body satisfied from a woman so that one is free from oneself” (*Letters II* 115). For Lawrence the satisfaction remains elusive when the self-liberation is thwarted by the enclosures of pride and ego.

Even the predictable failure of the Eitel-Elena affair is conveyed by Mailer in exactly the metaphoric terms he will use fifteen years later in *The Prisoner of Sex* in his discussion of Lawrencian doctrine; recall again the key portion of that lengthy trope as he aptly discusses Lawrence’s antagonism to “taking a stance on the side of the bank, announcing one is in love, and then proceeding to fish in the waters of love with a breadbasket full of ego” (*Prisoner of Sex* 147). This image of the vain and persistent fisherman working his trade is painfully relevant to Mailer’s imagery after Eitel contemplates his own unholy bargain with the treacherous Collie Munshin. At various stages in the weeks that follow the searing sex between Eitel and Elena at the start of their romance, there is ample opportunity for the lovers to build productively on their passion and to get beyond the petty games of easy lust stimulated by teacher-student fantasies. But when the high-profile director’s job beckons, Mailer’s fishing metaphor, inherited from Lawrence, becomes contorted and sadistic:

At the same time he did not want to end it immediately; that would be too disturbing to his work. The proper time was in a month, two months, whenever he was finished; and in the meantime, adroitly, like fighting big fish on slender tackle, he must slowly exhaust her love, depress her hope, and make the end as

painless as the blow of the club on the fatigued fish brain. “My one hundred and fourteen pound sailfish,” Eitel would think, and what a match she gave him. He was as cool as any good fisherman, “I’m the coolest man I know,” he would think, and with confidence, aloofness, and professional disinterest he maneuvered Elena, he brought her closer to the boat. There was always the danger she would slip the hook before he pulled her in, so the battle was wearying. (203)

Thus Eitel now fishes with a Lawrencian metaphor that Mailer shrewdly reduces to its pointed essence; the ego itself is the primary lure—a grotesque form of hook and bait geared to bring Elena, alive and kicking, onto the bank, where the doomed affair eventually will suffocate as the necessary sacrifice on the altar of Eitel’s career. Yes, a mixed metaphor, but Eitel’s eclectic motivations encompass a pathetic mixture of sadism, narcissism, and indulgent fun-and-games.

The domain of water in Eitel’s cruel imagery also makes sense in terms of the narcissistic, self-reflecting element that infuses his relationship with Elena. Both Eitel and Elena—for different reasons and at different periods—remain unwilling to undertake the *growth* that is intrinsic to the dialectic of erotic risk—that is, they prefer to settle for the same rhythms by repeating the petty rewards of reliable and static love. Throughout *The Deer Park* there are eloquent passages about risk and change that strikingly resemble the tone and meaning of Lawrence and Hemingway’s aversion to any form of sentimentality. Perhaps the most evocative lines on this issue in Mailer’s novel echo both Hemingway’s sharp criticism of his bio-fictional father in “Fathers and Sons,” and Lawrence’s admiration for the young writer’s understanding of the inevitable relation between stasis and deterioration. Here is Mailer’s quasi-biblical formation in *The Deer Park*: “There was that law of life so cruel and so just which demanded that one must grow or else pay more for remaining the same” (346). In Mailer’s world there exists a divine economy imposed on successful sexual performance and on the emotional intensity of a love affair. This perspective insists that protecting the stability of present success through a conveniently static marriage or a routinized sex life reflects the sentimentalist’s fundamental error that no payment comes due: “There were the laws of sex: borrow technique in place of desire, and sex life

would demand the debt be paid just when one was getting too old to afford such a bill" (*The Deer Park* 204).

Eitel's stated reason "not to give her up" confirms a selfish fear in him that undercuts the motive for his anticipated wedding. Real growth for him—once he has irreparably tired of Elena—would be to suffer his loneliness alone and without sentimentality. Eitel lacks the existential courage that would make his marriage to Elena meaningful in terms of Mailer's "law of life." He will merely borrow more technique and try to employ another affectation. The animus to stasis also informs Lawrence's life and writings, and often in acutely personal terms. In "Why the Novel Matters" Lawrence writes: "If the one I love remains unchanged and unchanging, I shall cease to love her. It is only because she changes and startles me into change and defies my inertia, and is herself staggered in her inertia by my changing, that I continue to love her" (*Hardy* 196–197).¹⁴ The following lines from Lawrence's "The State of Funk" offer an even more incisive prediction of the state of Charles Eitel's mind and emotions at a key stage in his involvement with Elena. His comments also provide a salient summary of the temperament and actions of Clifford Chatterley when he returns from the war:

If we fall into a state of funk, impotence, and persecution, then things may be very much worse than they are now. It is up to us. It is up to us to be men. When men are courageous and willing to change, nothing terribly bad can happen. But once men fall into a state of funk, with the inevitable accompaniment of bullying and repression, then only bad things can happen. (220)

VII

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, of course, it is Mellors and Connie who "explicitly"—in the double sense of the term appropriate for this novel—provide for Lawrence a dramatized standard of what is admirable erotic risk. John Worthen writes an incisive summary of the fundamental intent and effect of this work: "The novel acquired an exemplary tone: this is how to live and love, it says; it becomes a kind of testament" (*Life as an Outsider* 367). As I have described at length in *The Phallic Imagination* in relation to the coordinates and terminology of Lawrence's heat imagery, the sexual component of nurturant and normative warmth functions as the most valuable yet most

elusive character-attribute in his fiction. Its crucial expression depends—in its frequent metaphoric embodiment—on an organic “forging” process that burns off the impurities of ego and will in the act of love. Connie’s progressively receptive and stimulative response to Mellors, and his increasing confidence in his own sexual awakening and commitment to Connie—all this pervasive and courageous renewal of real “tenderness” (the novel’s first tentative title) can be charted through the novel’s integrated sex scenes by way of the images of flame and purgation that inform their responses.

But the characterization of Mellors is also a poignantly personal affair for the author. Lawrence’s fictional achievement resonates even more impressively in light of certain patterns and tendencies in his own life. One of the major contributions of Marder’s discussion of Lawrence in *The Prisoner of Sex* is his compelling account of why Lawrence’s ability to engage in heterosexual sex was essential to him, and its consummation could not have been easy:

But he had become a man by an act of will [. . .] he had lifted himself out of his natural destiny which was probably to have the sexual life of a woman, had diverted the virility of his brain down into some indispensable minimum of phallic force—no wonder he worshipped the phallus, he above all men knew what an achievement was its rise from the root, its assertion to stand proud on a delicate base. His mother had adored him. Since his first sense of himself as a male had been in the tender air of her total concern—now and always his strength would depend upon just such outsize admiration. (*Prisoner of Sex* 154–155)

In this speculative context of family influence and psychosexual inclination—the gist of it confirmed by Lawrence’s many biographers after Marder’s words in 1970—the dimensions of Lawrence’s achievement in *Lady Chatterley’s Love* carry a special poignancy. Mellors’s return to health and potency is charted by an impotent and dying writer who now fully understands, and without bitterness, the long road he has travelled—in his books and in his life—to his current state of relative emotional stability in a mortally infected body. Who can know for sure how closely Mellors’s sexual temptations in the war corresponded to Lawrence’s repressed inclinations with several men with whom he established close friendships?

He thought of his life abroad, as a soldier. India, Egypt, then India again: the blind, thoughtless life with the horses: the colonel who had loved him and whom he had loved: the several years he had been an officer, a lieutenant with a very fair chance of being a captain. Then the death of the colonel from pneumonia and his own narrow escape from death: his damaged health; his deep restlessness; his leaving the army and coming back to England to be a working man again. He was temporizing with life. He had thought he would be safe, at least for a time, in this wood. (141)

“He was temporizing with life”—that is, even amid the flash memories of his painful past, Mellors instinctively knows that his isolation in the woods is a temporary stay against the confusions and lividities of his personal history; in effect, he understands that his disengaged life amounts to a convenient and intermittent form of evasion and escape. In Mailer’s reading of Hemingway’s ethic, and in Lawrence’s review of Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, respectively, it now doesn’t “feel good” to him, and it is now time to be “through with sentimentality.” In *The Deer Park* Eitel has it exactly wrong, as the perspective for him becomes sadly reversed: he becomes convinced that the temporizing consists in his affair with Elena. His pathetic vision of transcendence amounts to the distorted view that in rising beyond the complications of intimacy and the demands of marriage, he has made life worth living.

VIII

Evidence of Lawrence’s significant influence on Mailer receives an additional and unexpected embodiment. In a magazine piece eight years after *The Deer Park* that is later published in 1972 in his collection, *Existential Errands*, he quotes several of his favorite passages by other writers that he inscribed over many years in his writing notebook. He values the passages because they produce for him “a shift in [his] memory, a clarification of the past” (*Existential Errands* 266). One passage remains especially interesting in the context of the current essay, for it has obvious relevance to the ethical choices and doctrinal centers of both *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *The Deer Park*:

The essence of spirit, he thought to himself, was to choose the thing which did not better one's position, but made it more perilous. That was why the world he knew was poor, for it insisted morality and caution were identical. He was so completely of that world, and she was not. She would stay with him until he wanted her no longer, and the thought of what would happen afterward ground his flesh with pain as real as a wound. (267)

Such sentiments might have been contemplated by Mellors early in his affair with Connie as he ponders the courage of her visits to the hut against the reality of her own anxiety and vulnerability. In much the same way, the words easily could describe the confidence Eitel feels at the start of his affair with Elena, before his cynicism and weakness undermine his strength and moral center.

This range of hypothesis seems correct, for Mailer designates the above passage—curiously without any citation of title—as “D.H. Lawrence” (267). Although I could not find the corresponding lines within Lawrence’s prolific work, I am almost willing to take Mailer’s word for its authorship, under the single assumption that I had not looked carefully enough to find it. But a more troubling issue remains, and one that suggests added complexities about my notion of Lawrence’s dialectical influence on Mailer, and more specifically on *The Deer Park*. It is not surprising that the passage also recalls the context of the Eitel-Elena affair, for Mailer *includes it verbatim* in that novel at the crucial moment when Elena gradually gains Eitel’s respect for refusing his transparent and pathetic offer of marriage. The marriage matrix for both writers—throughout the complete corpus of all their fictional and nonfictional prose—insists that such a marital proposal is only admirable and morally legitimate when it emerges from a position of existential strength reflected in the willingness to undertake that “delivery to the unknown.” Eitel undercuts his authenticity with the sentimental baggage of ego and his immature reliance on stasis. Here is the passage from *The Deer Park*, misleadingly identified as “D.H. Lawrence,” with the duplicated lines italicized by me:

Finally, she had gained his respect, and he could never explain it to her. With numb fingers he touched her foot. *The essence of spirit, he thought to himself, was to choose the thing which did not*

better one's position but made it more perilous. That was why the world he knew was poor, for it insisted morality and caution were identical. He was so completely of that world, and she was not. She would stay with him until he wanted her no longer, and the thought of what would happen afterward ground his flesh with pain as real as a wound. "I'm rotten" he said aloud, and with the desire to prove his despair, he began to cry, clutching her body to him, his fist against her back, while his chest shook from the unaccustomed effort to weep. (257)

Who can explain the intriguing mystery of the passage's appearance in Mailer's novel in 1955, or its later *republication* in *Esquire* magazine in 1963 and *Existential Errands* in 1972? If it turns out that the passage is not from Lawrence's work at all, but is a quotation from another writer forgetfully inserted by Mailer under Lawrence's name in his notebook, *Esquire* article, and *Existential Errands*, and under his own name in *The Deer Park*, then Mailer's Lawrencian preoccupations must appear even more obsessive—to the odd extent of confirming a precise inheritance that remains untraceable. Mailer's notebooks were intended to produce a clarifying shift in his memory that might produce an engaged and active self-perspective so patently useful for a writer of fiction. Is the issue of Lawrence's profound influence on Mailer so entrenched that the contemporary writer cannot untangle his own language and vision from the enthusiasm of his acknowledged indebtedness? Have we finally uncovered a case of the amnesia of influence?

Happily, it turns out, Mailer himself explains the mystery, both in an earlier magazine piece and in a letter to me. No, it was not forgetfulness nor an inexplicable tangle in those notebooks—just a playful homage by Mailer to the considerable influence of D.H. Lawrence on his own work. For I quote below the relevant text of a letter I received from him, written on his birthday in 1989. My prompting letter to him, naturally enough, requested clarification of his inaccurate attribution in 1963 of the lines he used in *The Deer Park* in 1955. I have since confirmed the accuracy of this explanation. My reaction was both irritation that I failed to fully unravel Mailer's Nabokovian game, and pleasure that my essential point about the Lawrencian elements in his work receives even more resonant documentation. Further, that Mailer derived the masquerade—or better yet, developed this ventriloquistic skill—makes perfect sense to me. His novel remains, as all novels inevitably do, a

pastiche of the writer's own craft and the lingering voices of a chosen few who preceded him. But one echo of influence rings loud and clear for Mailer, and my thanks to him for his confirmation:

I have to tell you that the piece in which the "quote" from D.H. Lawrence occurs was a spoof. I was doing a column for *Esquire* back in the 60's, and at one point wrote the preface that you saw in *Existential Errands*, and then took quotes from six or seven of my books, ascribed other authors' names to them, put it in the piece, and waited to see how many people would spot the trick, which, as I recollect, was very few indeed, maybe one or two people. Then I came back to it in the following column and gave the game away. It was a humbling experience; I realized that people do not read me all that closely. I must say, however, that the authors I chose had all been influences, and the effect of their influences can be proved by the fact that no one argues with the authenticity of the quotation, and although I did give clues, for instance, Hemingway offers, "Nobody could sleep." Those are the first words of *The Naked and the Dead*. At any rate, this ought to clear up your natural confusion twenty and more years later.¹⁵

NOTES

1. See chapter five in my book, *D.H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination*, for a more in-depth discussion of the relevance of this seminal quotation to issues of form and meaning in this novel.
2. The considerable skill of Emerson and Thoreau at lyrically "reading" the promptings of the inner self remains integral to both their transcendental doctrines and the uncompromising conduct of their lives. In this regard, Mailer's meticulous and comprehensive biographer, J. Michael Lennon, quotes from a journal that Mailer kept during and after the writing of *The Deer Park* in the mid-1950's. The entry reveals the novelist's guiding awareness of the importance for him of a synergistic interrelation among instinctual primacy, negative capability, and accumulated experience in the world-at-large. Here are the pertinent comments by Lennon followed by the Mailer passage from the journal: "Toward the end of the journal, Mailer reflects on several of his salient mental faculties, which, as they developed, resembled Emerson's":

My capacity to do something exceptional comes from the peculiar combination of powerful instincts face to face with my exceptional detachment. I am one of the few people I know who can feel a genuinely powerful emotion and yet be able to observe it. [. . .] Instead of

poring (pouring) over all the relevant books, and there are five hundred I “ought” to start studying tomorrow, I do better to “waste” time and discover things for myself. (Lennon 190–191)

The passage conveys a distinct echo of Emerson’s “books are for the scholars’ idle times” (“American Scholar” 68), as well as Thoreau’s rhetorical fire: “What is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen” (*Walden* 101)? Lawrence, of course, writes brilliantly about the great nineteenth century American writers in his innovative study, *Studies in Classic American Literature*. It is not widely known that his original outline for that volume included a long section on Emerson’s essays (see *Letters III* 66). While Lawrence apparently never drafted that chapter, he surely would empathize with the adamance of the perspective enunciated early in “The American Scholar,” with its missionary denigration of the limits of book knowledge and its celebration of an immanence that is recognizably Lawrencian: “The first in time, and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, night and her stars. [. . .] The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages” (65).

3. I analyze more fully a range of interweaving issues about doctrine and influence concerning these three writers in my essay on *A Farewell to Arms* and in chapter five of *The Phallic Imagination*.
4. In an interview in France in 1999, during which Mailer ruminates on aspects of his doctrinal perspectives during the 1950’s and 1960’s, he sounds much like a committed advocate of Lawrence’s notions about the wisdom of blood-consciousness: “Let’s get back to the instinctive life. Let’s get back to where we can feel what’s going on in ourselves” (Lennon 274).
5. Lennon’s impressive research discovers that Lois Mayfield Wilson, “a blond graduate student whom [Mailer] met at a party,” was the likely model, not for Lulu, but for the bodily gyrations in the car: “She recalled that she left the party with him, and they had an erotic wrestling match in the car, which became the basis for Sergius O’Shaughnessy’s tussle with Lulu Meyers in *The Deer Park*” (Lennon 118). Another example, it would seem, of Mailer using primary experience—in which he “discovers things for [him]self”—as the material for a zany and sensual episode in his fiction.
6. Occasionally Mailer’s attraction to dominant Lawrencian notions about love, sex, and marriage is evident in surprising, almost karmic ways. Before he marries Norris, who would become his sixth and final wife, Lennon recounts that during the passionate months of their developing relationship, “Mailer recommended that Norris [. . .] read D.H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* with its frank examination of sexual relationships. His vision of the love he hoped to achieve with her owed something to the dynamics of Lawrence’s” (Lennon 480).
7. Although Lennon surely is correct (see note 6) about the controversial “frankness” he notes in *The Rainbow* (copies would be confiscated and destroyed by way of the draconian and obscure Obscene Publication Act of 1857), Lawrence frames the erotic content of that novel with an

undisguised celebration of the transcendent power and value of marriage. Indeed, it is that intimate depiction in the novel of varieties of sexual passion *within* the context of marital life that appears to have most upset the censors. See chapter two of *The Phallic Imagination* for more on the thematic and stylistic treatment of this prothalamic doctrine in *The Rainbow*. Note also Mailer's acknowledgement, in an interview in *The Paris Review* shortly before his death, of the centrality *and* the challenge represented in marriage: "Every wife is a culture, and you enter deep into another culture, one that's not your own, and you learn an awful lot from it. And given the fact that marriage is not always a comfortable institution, you chafe in that culture" (75). Mailer also distinguishes between mere cohabitation and the special aura of marriage. It is a distinction by him that meshes with Lawrence's insistence on the visionary texture of legalized union: "First there's living together, it's often thought equal to marriage. Not by half. You can live with a woman and never begin to comprehend her at all, not until you get married to her" (Lennon 595).

8. Mailer even shares Lawrence's numinous obsessions about moon power. In *Of a Fire on the Moon*, he writes about his fourth wife, whom he "had met on a night when the moon was full." Mailer continues: "She was extraordinarily sensitive to its effect; she was at best uneasy and at worst unreachable when the moon was full. Through the years of their marriage Aquarius had felt the fullness of the moon in his own dread, his intimations of what full criminality he might possess, had felt the moon in the cowardice not to go out on certain nights, felt the moon when it was high and full and he was occasionally on the side of the brave" (Lennon 420–421, *Of a Fire* 436–437).
9. Lennon's analysis of Mailer's motivations smartly combines several explanations for his pattern of adultery, and he may understate the powerful effect of a paternal example during Mailer's formative years: "A few months before his death, he told his biographer, 'When in doubt about my motivation, *cherchez la femme*.' Barney's double life gave Mailer a model and even sanction for his own. His infidelities were numerous, but they were not motivated solely, or even mainly, by his desire for sex, although it was always strong. His thrust for new experience was the final cause of his duplicities. If risk was involved so much the better; it added sauce" (Lennon 124).
10. See David Ellis's poignant discussion of Lawrence's alleged comment to Frieda in 1925 in Oaxaca when he was deathly ill: "'If I die, [Frieda] reports Lawrence as saying, 'nothing has mattered but you, nothing at all'" (*Death and the Author* 34–35). Ellis persuasively suggests that Frieda's recollection of the comment sounds credible. Certainly Lawrence by the end of his life in 1930 has known about (or suspected) Frieda's intimacies *at least* with Hobson, Murry, and Ravagli; his assertion in 1925 to Frieda (and perhaps a comparable one on his deathbed) of the absolute primacy of his wife in his own journey through life indicates the extent of his need for her and his commitment to their rocky but enduring marriage. Although he ponders leaving Frieda several times, his sense of the marriage's importance to him is acutely related to his *felt* perception of the animate universe that he evokes (and celebrates) in his fiction. To end their union for him would signal a retreat from his belief in the connection of their marriage to the unknown

- infinitudes that define and nourish him as a man: "Marriage is the clue to human life, but there is no marriage apart from the wheeling sun and the nodding earth, from the straying of the planets and the magnificence of the fixed stars" (*Apropos* 323).
11. There is no illusion in Lawrence that the centrality of his conception of marriage assumes a pleasant voyage into the sunset. He never loses sight of the impinging reality of life on earth: "The sense of the eternality of marriage is perhaps necessary for the inward peace both of man and woman. Even if it carry a sense of doom, it is necessary" (*Apropos* 317).
 12. See David Ellis for a balanced consideration of the relationship between Brett and Lawrence (*Dying Game* 205).
 13. Lawrence anticipates Mailer's insistence on the "moral" centrality of this phallic role of the male and its function in the transcendent power of marriage: "The phallus is a column of blood, that fills the valley of blood of a woman. The great river of male blood touches to its depth the great river of female blood [...] And it is one of the greatest mysteries: in fact, the greatest, as almost every apocalypse shows, showing the supreme achievement of the mystic marriage" (*Apropos* 324-325).
 14. Mailer precisely echoes the same sentiment as he considers a major aspect of his relation to a woman, as he "can remain in love only so long as the love keeps changing" (Lennon 489).
 15. Letter from Norman Mailer to Peter Balbert, January 31, 1989.

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