

WRITING OF A WOMAN'S SOUL:
GENDER PILGRIMAGE IN
LAWRENCE AND MAILER

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THERE IS A DEEP LITERARY RELATIONSHIP between D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930) and Norman Mailer (1923–2007)—particularly in their writing on sexuality. The relationship began early, while Mailer was at Harvard. Starting here, I ask three questions. First, can a male author write convincingly of a “woman’s soul?” Second, did Lawrence and Mailer create women characters that we find credible? Third, are we persuaded that they understood women?

My answers are a qualified *yes*. If we believe in the power of literature, we *may* acknowledge that a man can write convincingly of a woman. If we empathize with Lawrence and Mailer, we *may* find their women characters to be credible. If we understand something of their own gender and sexuality struggles, we *may* be persuaded of their understanding of women. It is true that my answers are three conditionals, each with a modal in the result clause: my qualifications are obvious.

But such qualifications are necessary: intersections of gender, sexuality, and identity are mysterious. The *liminal* regions between male and female, and between gender and sexuality, are controversial. This year of 2016, we have witnessed an ugly presidential campaign between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. It is not exactly “a battle between the sexes,” but gender is undoubtedly a major factor in this election.¹ For many reasons, the gender visions of Lawrence and Mailer are still relevant.²

I. LAWRENCE AND MAILER

It is clear that Lawrence was a formative influence on Mailer. Their lives barely overlapped: Lawrence died in 1930 aged forty-four, when Mailer was about seven. Lawrence was six years older than Mailer's parents, Barney and Fan.³ There are two decades between Lawrence's final novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), and Mailer's first, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948). Mailer died eight decades after Lawrence, in 2007.

Mailer is more often linked⁴ with Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961). Both are supremely *American* icons, breaking barriers literary and personal. What Hemingway wrote of Harry, the dying writer, would not be inappropriate applied to Mailer:

There was so much to write. He had seen the world change; not just the events; although he had seen many of them and had watched the people, but he had seen the subtler change and he could remember how the people were at different times. ("The Snows of Kilimanjaro" 17)

Yet, in Michael Lennon's words, "it is clear that [Mailer] identifies with Lawrence as much as Hemingway, and owes him a deeper debt" (438). I think that is true, and their literary relationship—in particular, their writing on women—is my starting point. Hemingway remained a major influence on Mailer, but perhaps more in a negative way—what Harold Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence" (10). But it is Lawrence—older than Hemingway by fourteen years—with whom I deal.

Lawrence's influence began in 1941, when in the Treasure Room of the Widener Library at Harvard Mailer encounters the unexpurgated version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Lennon 32–33). Mailer took on the Englishman's battles, particularly in the area of sexuality.⁵ Their time-lines are different. Yet their writing careers, either side of the Great Depression, encapsulate the twentieth century.⁶ In a significant 2015 article in *The Mailer Review*, Peter Balbert examines the relationship,

Indeed, Mailer's intensely manichean novels—through their familiar litany of concern with love, sex, inhibitive society, and modern mechanization—appear like a karmic reformulation of Lawrence's own most prominent preoccupations. But as Mailer

acknowledges in *The Prisoner of Sex*, it is a frighteningly transformed world since 1930—“technologized and technologized twice again . . . since [Lawrence's] death” [1]—and such a radical transformation of society is reflected in the different tapestries of art in Mailer and Lawrence. (From *Lady Chatterley's Lover*” 250)

If the Laurentian influence began in 1941, it certainly came of age three decades later, in *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971). There Mailer defends Henry Miller, D. H. Lawrence, and himself against the attacks of the feminist critic Kate Millet. Lennon calls the chapter on Lawrence “arguably his most incisive piece of literary criticism” (438). Mailer charges Millet with distortion and misrepresentation. According to him, “Millet's critical misdemeanor is to conceal the pilgrimage, hide the life, cover over that emotional odyssey . . .” (*Prisoner of Sex* 141).

It is that *pilgrimage* that I examine. Lawrence and Mailer want to write *from* a woman's vantage point. Mailer pays this fulsome tribute to Lawrence,

It is not only that no other man writes so well about women, but indeed is there a woman who can? . . . Yet whoever believes that such a leap is not possible across the gap, that a man cannot write of a woman's soul, or a white man of a black man, does not believe in literature itself. So, yes, Lawrence understood women as they had never been understood before, understood them with all the tortured fever of a man who had the soul of a beautiful, imperious, and passionate woman, yet he was locked into the body of a middling male physique. . . . (*Prisoner of Sex* 152)

For Lawrence and Mailer, the vantage point involved this personal pilgrimage. Both art and life had to be transformed. In the liminal area of gender, in a *no-man's land* between literary point of view and “emotional odyssey,” we may discover their vision.

5. WRITING OF A WOMAN'S SOUL

I believe that Mailer is right about Lawrence and “a woman's soul.” But he is right also about the power of literature. Great literature can cross barriers of race, class, gender. Stories bypass our defenses: they fly under our radar. How

else could they move us, disturb us, change us as they do? But, like Lawrence and Mailer, I write as a man. Can I understand a woman's soul? Philosophically, I am skeptical: how would I know when I gain such understanding? But, with less philosophical rigor, understanding a woman's soul is still a goal.

So, how *do* we compare the writings of Lawrence and Mailer on women? I begin by contrasting two women characters—Ursula Brangwen in Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1921) and Hadley Kittredge Gardiner in Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* (1991). Our authors attempt to comprehend a woman's soul, her mysterious interaction with a man, and the deeper prior relationship that human beings have with the Universe. So far, so good. However, while Ursula is regarded as a realistic creation, most commentators find Kittredge far less plausible. Reluctantly, I agree. So, I extend the discussion by looking at Mailer's imaginative creation of Marilyn Monroe, seen in *Marilyn: a Biography* (1973) and in later work. While controversial, his attempt seems a more credible attempt to understand a woman—her uniqueness and relationship to a man—than his writing of Kittredge. Marilyn, of course, as cultural icon is both real person and fictive character. But this is the nature of celebrity in a postmodern world.

What of the risky landscape that we call *sex*? It was probably inevitable—writing honestly as they tried to—that Lawrence and Mailer focus on sexuality. Where men and women are concerned, sex is part of the equation—always. Lawrence writes, “The flame of sex singes your absolute, and cruelly scorches your ego” (“The Novel” 173). Half a century later, Mailer replies, “Yes, sex was the presence of grace and the introduction of the stranger into oneself” (*The Prisoner of Sex* 150). Good words if we agree with Anthony Burgess that “all literature is subversive” (273).⁷

But traditional societies are far less welcoming. Tribes welcome not the burning of “absolutes” or the introduction of “strangers” into intimate situations. Sex disturbs: gender is controversial. Lawrence and Mailer's challenge involves what Balbert calls “erotic risk,”

Mailer's sexual aesthetic—that existential dialectic of risk and open-endedness dramatized most graphically in such works as *The Deer Park*, “The Time of Her Time,” *An American Dream*, and *Tough Guys Don't Dance*—begins with his recognition that Lawrence's celebration of instinct is a bedrock faith from which

all discussion of the prescient novelist from Nottingham must begin. (“From *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*” 251)

Because of their subversive aesthetic, both writers are counter-cultural. Half a century after the Lady Chatterley trial, that remains true. America has been embroiled in a leadership battle between Clinton and Trump. Sexuality, gender identities, and concepts of masculinity and femininity are all highly contested issues. Sex still disturbs.

2. UNDERSTANDING GENDER PILGRIMAGE

The task Lawrence and Mailer set themselves was literary and personal: I use the term *gender pilgrimage* to describe it. Pilgrimage is suggested by that sentence from Mailer’s *The Prisoner of Sex* already quoted. The word *pilgrimage* was used first in a religious context, “A journey (usually of a long distance) made to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion; the action or practice of making such a journey” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

But why *gender* pilgrimage specifically? By the twelfth century, “women as well as men flocked to local shrines” (Bailey 197). Susan Morrison describes pilgrimage in these terms,

The act of pilgrimage, an act of personal devotion, was a deeply social act. It is performed—often—for social reasons which, in the case of women pilgrims, are family reasons. Pilgrimage is a religious activity, socially sanctioned, for healing the woman’s body or the offspring of that body If the family is well, so is the society that spins the family into its web. (4)

Despite a male-dominated Church, in the twelfth century the status of women started to change dramatically. There were many reasons: men leaving for the Crusades, the powerful example of Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122?–1204), the rise of the Troubadours, lyric poetry, and *the art of courtly love*. Some women, such as Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), rose to surprising heights of influence.

So, as Morrison argues, “the act of pilgrimage” was important in developing women’s status. The complicated process that is the feminist revolution began back in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. That revolution would progress and regress but came to fruition after the Great War with votes for

women, and in the 1970s with more profound changes. Lawrence and Mailer had their own pilgrimages, but society had been on this particular journey for centuries. And, with issues of gay marriage and gender identity, the journey continues today.

What does it mean to write of a “woman’s soul”? First, this is a *literary* task; Lawrence and Mailer were able to develop more complex *points of view* compatible with modernity and with contemporary gender expectations. They began to reject a privileged male vantage point. There are parallels outside literature. In 1905, Albert Einstein took the revolutionary step of rejecting the absolutist vantage point of Sir Isaac Newton on time and space.⁸ We are still working out the implications of Einstein’s “irresolvable break” with traditional frameworks (Galison 14).

Second, for both Lawrence and Mailer, the pilgrimage was *personal*. Both men experienced a succession of stormy relationships with women—in marriage and outside. Both men attempted to understand their own masculinity in an age where expectations were much in flux. Art has a complex relationship to sexuality: with these two writers this was true in spades.

Third, the journey was social and political. Their respective societies were slowly, painfully learning new sexual realities. In many ways, Lawrence and Mailer were far-seeing artists, often ahead of the curve. But, inevitably, they were also constrained by their gender and era, sharing the myopia of their *zeitgeist*.⁹

3. URSULA BRANGWEN IN *WOMEN IN LOVE* (1921)

We turn now to Lawrence and Ursula. We first encounter Ursula and her sister, Gudrun, in Lawrence’s earlier novel, *The Rainbow* (1915), as the third generation of a family saga begun in 1840. On the first page of *The Rainbow*, we have this magnificent passage, linking the Brangwen family, the natural world, and the mystery of sexuality.

But heaven and earth was teeming around them, and how should this cease? They felt the rush of the sap in spring, they knew the wave which cannot halt, but every year throws forward the seed to begetting, and falling back, leaves the young-born on the earth. They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in

the daytime, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn
 . . . (9–10)

In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence shows human sexuality to be deeply embedded in a traditional English landscape—teeming with the mysteries of life and an integral part of a vast Universe.

However, with *Women in Love*, there is an abrupt change. The later novel has a different rhythm; characters seem frenzied, isolated from the natural world, traumatized by an unnamed sense of violence. Relationships and sex are more difficult, divorced from “the intercourse between heaven and earth” (*The Rainbow* 10). The disjunction between the two novels is not hard to analyze. *Women in Love* was written during the Great War; more precisely, between April and October of 1916. Kinkead-Weekes says it “is a war novel, even though its society is apparently at peace and its date left deliberately vague. Uncovered in the depths of all the characters is violence, threatening to destroy the self and others” (xv).

At Sarajevo in June 1914, as Stefan Zweig so memorably has written, the old world of “security and creative reason” had been irrevocably “shattered” (213).¹⁰ Much of *Women in Love* was written during the traumatic break in European culture, named by Verdun (Feb–Dec 1916) and the Somme (Jul–Nov 1916). Lawrence’s response to the Great War, contemporary to Sassoon and Graves, is very different from Eliot’s or Joyce’s.¹¹ In 1923, Lawrence wrote,

It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the winter 1915–1916 the spirit of the old London collapsed; the city, in some way, perished from being a heart of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors. (*Kangaroo* 220)

This “vortex of broken passions, lusts, fears, and horrors,” is the context for *Women in Love*. That context is qualitatively different from *The Rainbow*. The landscape of modernity should not be forgotten: it is the new waste land.

What of Ursula and gender? The first three words are *Ursula and Gudrun*, in keeping with the novel’s title. On the final page, Rupert Birkin apparently gets the last word, desiring the male relationship foreclosed by Gerald’s death. Yet Ursula describes his view as “an obstinacy, a theory, a perversity . . . false, impossible” (*Women in Love* 481). Not quite the ringing endorse-

ment that Lawrence might expect from his primary female character. Birkin's reply, "I don't believe that" (481), is opaque. It reminds me of Hemingway—of Jake's final ambiguity, "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (*The Sun Also Rises* 251).

Often, Birkin advocates for the Laurentian view but is contradicted immediately by Ursula. Lawrence uses Ursula "to criticize Birkin, to pin down the prig and preacher, the pretentious Sunday-school teacher and salvationist in him" (Kinkead-Weekes xxx). More than a dialogue between characters, this is a complex *dialectic* woven into the novel's very structure. Joyce Carol Oates says, "Ursula is no ordinary woman but a fiercely intolerant creature who detests all forms of insincerity. She is Birkin's conscience, in a sense; his foil, his gadfly; a taunting form of himself" (29).

We see such "taunting" in Chapter 23 of *Women in Love*, Excuse, witnessing a violent argument between Ursula and Birkin.¹² The climax is Ursula throwing his gift of rings into Birkin's face and storming off down the country lane. But, after some while, she returns. They embrace.

It was peace at last. The old, detestable world of tension had passed away at last, his soul was strong and at ease. She looked up at him. The wonderful yellow light in her eyes was soft and yielded, they were at peace with each other. He kissed her, softly, many, many times. A laugh came into her eyes. 'Did I abuse you?' she asked . . . 'Never mind' she said, 'it is all for the good.' (310)

"It is all for the good," says Ursula. There is resolution. Consciously or unconsciously, we realize that truth has come from their interaction—rather than only from man or woman. Yet that insight still disturbs many today, locked into rigid codes of masculinity or femininity. Imagine the shock evoked in the 1920s, where a woman's right to vote had only just been acknowledged—and reluctantly.

The modernist revolution in literature, I would argue, starts with Lawrence, particularly in developing this more gender-inclusive point of view. Why did he in particular achieve this? Was it perhaps because Lawrence—most English of writers—was always the outsider, the writer in exile?¹³ Sandra Gilbert suggests that Lawrence was more the outsider than Woolf:

Thus, like the few other poets of his class whom Virginia Woolf discussed in *A Room of One's Own*, he was as alienated from the Oxbridge-Bloomsbury circles that shaped much of England's modernist literary culture as any woman was . . . In fact, he was more of an outsider than, say, Woolf herself, who after all had, among other advantages, her father's library to compensate for being kept off the grass outside King's College Chapel. (44)

As part of the Bloomsbury group, Woolf was accepted into society more easily than Lawrence: he would always be the miner's son. In England, class trumps gender.¹⁴

Gilbert argues that Lawrence depended not only on "the female imagination" but also on "women's memories and manuscripts" (44). She gives numerous examples of how Lawrence's titles and plots "emphasize female primacy," how "women are frequently the central consciousness in this writer's fiction" (45). It is hard to see any parallel in, for instance, T. S. Eliot, another Modernist icon. As F. R. Leavis points out, Eliot did all he could to denigrate Lawrence's writing and reputation.¹⁵ Yet it was Lawrence, the working-class outsider from the Midlands—the region where I grew up—who develops this remarkable new point of view.¹⁶ It is Lawrence, not Eliot, who could write of a woman's soul, making women "the central consciousness" (Gilbert 45).¹⁷

This is not simply a technical achievement. It arose, I believe, from the peculiar circumstances of Lawrence's life. For example, describing Ursula as a "female corrective," Balbert writes of her skepticism,

It is a skepticism which is rooted in the instinctual essence of her being as a female, and it strikes at the essential vulnerability of Birkin's less instinctive, more mind-centered formulations" ("Ursula Brangwen" 267).

That English skepticism motivated Lawrence to challenge society, as the Suffragettes of his day—probably sharing much of Ursula and Gudrun's ethos—attacked the same power structures. Lawrence paid a price for his challenge—in social rejection, in legal censorship, and in exile from the country of his birth and culture.

Where does Ursula come from? Frieda von Richthofen (1879–1956), the Prussian wife of his English professor—and later lover and wife to Lawrence—is one source. In 1952, Frieda wrote a letter to Harry T. Moore, quoted in his biography, *The Priest of Love*. She claims, “although Louie Burrows may have been the model for Ursula outwardly, ‘the inner relationship is Lawrence’s and mine, like the ring scene in *Women in Love*, where I throw the ring at him’” (224).

Lawrence’s tumultuous, conflicting—but ultimately creative—marriage with Frieda was very much part of his journey. But his earlier friendships with “new women,” his coming-of-age at a significant point in English intellectual history (including that English skepticism), his traumatic experience of the Great War, and his positioning between the working-class and the middle-class, all shaped his complex pilgrimage. All that, I believe, enabled Lawrence to write convincingly of a woman’s soul, describing new, evolving relationships between men and women.

4. KITTREDGE GARDINER IN *HARLOT’S GHOST* (1991)

What of Mailer and Kittredge in *Harlot’s Ghost*? First, we have to say that Kittredge, while interesting, is not as believable as Ursula. J. Michael Lennon calls her “perhaps the least convincing major fictional character in his work,” suggesting she is called into being to show that he could “create a female character who is both passionate and intellectual” (636). Kittredge is successively wife of Hugh Tremont Montague—“Harlot” is his CIA code-name—and lover and wife of Harry Hubbard, Hugh’s godson. She also articulates the Alpha-Omega psychological theory (*Harlot’s Ghost* 170–177). Harlot is “wholly fictional” yet also modeled on “Mother” or James Jesus Angelton (1917–1976), Counterintelligence Chief at the CIA from 1954 to 1975.¹⁸

Let me ask a question. How do spies deal psychologically and emotionally with the tension of their double life?¹⁹ Kittredge believes her Alpha-Omega theory is a useful explanation, but her colleagues are reluctant to trust it, since she is “just a girl,”

But so many of the people I work with are afraid to trust it. I’m just a girl to them. So they can’t believe that this could prove the first reliable psychological theory to explain how spies are able to live with the tension of their incredible life-situations, and in

fact, will not only bear up under such a double life, but indeed, go looking for it. (177)

I find the theory—more Mailer than Kittredge—plausible. From time to time, do we not wonder about our identity? Yet spies must lie about their identity constantly and consistently: their very survival depends on it. Like traumatized children, they appear caught in a web, divided “between innocence and disillusionment, between loyalty and betrayal” (King 65).²⁰ We acknowledge that fascinating questions of character and motivation are posed in *Harlot's Ghost*.

But what can we say of Kittredge as character? Despite flashes of plausibility, too often we seem to be reading a psychological theory rather than encountering “a woman's soul.” I have to admit that Mailer has not made a woman the “central consciousness,” unlike Lawrence (Gilbert 45). So, in the development of a gendered point-of-view, Mailer is no Lawrence. But then *Harlot's Ghost* is no *Women in Love*. What do I imply? That Mailer's post-modern world is very different from *Women in Love*. Seven decades separate the two works—the Depression, World War II, the Cold War, and its violent aftermath. David Rampton describes *Harlot's Ghost* as “one of the most intricately plotted novels about American history ever written” (50). Ambiguity, he says, is at “the centre of the novel” (51). Indeed it is. Amid such ambiguity, multiple identities, and betrayals, there is little room for a nuanced view of gender. Inevitably, Kittredge seems an afterthought.

There is also the mystery of Harry's “fixation” on Kittredge. According to Marina Rosenthal, Kittredge is “only one in an array of Harry's unattainable objects of affection” (257).²¹ Is the unconvincing portrayal of Kittredge more a reflection of Harry's inability to commit to *any* woman, and his own inadequacies as man and spy? In *Harlot's Ghost*, the CIA is “rife with trauma, sexual violence, and corrupt but powerful people” (Rosenthal 258). It is a wonder that Harry and Kittredge survive at all.

Traditionally, intelligence agencies are highly male-directed institutions. That may be changing. In Britain, from 1992 to 1996, Dame Stella Rimington (born 1935) was MI5's Director General, so Rimington was appointed the year after *Harlot's Ghost* appeared (*MI5: The Security Service*). There may be similar developments in US intelligence.²² So Mailer's placing of Kittredge deep in the womb of the CIA seems more credible now. But her role as pro-

fessional analyst in the labyrinth of the CIA is hardly fleshed out: she exists more as a foil to Harlot and Harry.

What of Mailer's gender pilgrimage—his exploration of a "woman's soul?" This is a tough question to pose, even harder to answer. Certainly, with six wives and numerous lovers, Norman possessed an abundance of material to write his erotic odyssey. But that odyssey, it is clear, incurred profound costs—to him, to the women concerned, and to his children. In his biography, Lennon admits, "Unfaithful in all his marriages, Mailer was a serial philanderer. His affairs caused him and his family much misery over the next fifty years" (82).

Further, for most of his life, Mailer did not value women as fellow professionals. In *Advertisements for Myself*, he dismissed most women writers (to be fair, he castigated many male rivals also). Much later, he may have regretted those dismissals, but that ship had sailed.²³

When asked about his comment on women writers a few years before his death, he said, 'I happened to grow up in a family with a lot of wonderful, adoring women—a marvelous, strong mother and a lot of terrific aunts. So I took it for granted that I could say anything I wanted about women because they knew I loved them.' (Lennon 249)

In early 1975, amid a family situation complicated in the extreme, Mailer met Norris. She became his sixth and final wife (Lennon 484). In the early years, he attempted to be faithful to Norris—or so he claimed (Lennon 626). Mailer recommended that she read Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, with its fairly explicit sexuality (Lennon 488). But Mailer's sexual life would prove far more chaotic and painful than Lawrence's idyllic family saga.

A crisis was imminent. "Norris was not to learn the extent of his infidelities until he had completed *Harlot's Ghost* in 1991" (Lennon 626). Mailer's double life was certainly operative as he created his novel of the CIA, also—by metonymy—a novel of the ambiguities of America. In her 2010 memoir, Norris wrote,

He said his double life started when he began researching that book. And I suppose it could even be true. The timing was about right. All the clandestine talking on pay phones, making secret

plans, hiding and sneaking around, were perfect spy maneuvers. He said he needed to live that kind of double life to know what his characters were going through. (It was an imaginative excuse. I do give him credit for that). (Norris Church Mailer 322)

Two decades previously, Norris was far less forgiving. In the fall of 1991, after *Harlot's Ghost* was completed, she confronted Norman about his serial infidelity. He “faced the third great crisis of his life” (Lennon 651). His sexual odyssey had reached a dramatic turning point: Norman knew he must change. The *denouement* had arrived. The crisis lasted over a year, and “for a time they separated” (Lennon 652). Norris realized what she had got into, “Well, I bought a ticket to the circus. I don’t know why I was surprised to see elephants” (Norris Church Mailer. Epigraph). Kittredge might not be a window into a “woman’s soul,” but she may be a window into Mailer’s fantasies at the time.

Harlot's Ghost was the occasion for the dramatic change in Mailer (Lennon 651), but the ultimate cause was Norris herself—her love for Norman and her refusal to share him. His long sexual odyssey was coming to an end. So, we must ask, why did Mailer “need” all these affairs? Part of the answer seems to be Mailer’s ample ego and impressive intelligence.²⁴

His genius was also his folly. He thought himself right in every thought, word, and action. Norris, however much she loved him, was not going to let him get away with his foolishness. I do believe they loved each other until the very end, but they tore at the flesh of their relationship. . . . Norman had too large an ego to look into the mirror and accept his reflection. He needed to be adored; he needed to be lustfully adventurous with careless bravado. The very traits that made her fall madly in love with him, made him alarmingly, ferociously, untamable. (Interview with Aurora Huston, Lennon 663)

Mailer wanted to understand women, but his ego was in the way. So, *via* multiple wives and lovers, through his relationship with Norris and the children, did he truly understand a “woman’s soul?” Maybe, maybe not, but the arguments will continue with passion. In the April 2008 Carnegie Hall Memorial, Tina Brown gave her verdict, “But the truth is that he loved us and

understood us even as he drove us nuts” (21). Her words may well reflect the sentiments of many women—wives, lovers, and daughters.

6. MARILYN—THE “SWEET ANGEL OF SEX”

Why was Marilyn Monroe a continuing obsession for Mailer? The subject of his *Marilyn: A Biography* (1973) and his strange *Of Women and Their Elegance* (1980), we meet her again in the posthumous *Marilyn Monroe* (2012). We seem to encounter her in Rojack’s Cherry: “She looked at different instants like a dozen lovely blondes, and now and again a little like the little boy next door” (*An American Dream* 97). Was it her remoteness, her inaccessibility—for they never met? Was it the desire to uncover the complexity of Marilyn that was often unrecognized, as Maggie McKinley suggests,

This symbiotic relationship between Mailer’s text and Stern’s photographs also has much to do with each man’s mission to find the essence of Marilyn, and their respective abilities to capture the complexity and nuance of character that often went overlooked during her lifetime. (408)

Was it her iconic nature for men of the post-war era—for she was “every man’s love affair with America” (*Marilyn* 15)? But Marilyn was iconic for both men and women, of course, and for different reasons. In answering, let me focus on three factors.

First, it seems clear that much of Marilyn’s significance is connected to the changing American Dream—a subject integral to Mailer’s life work. Constance Holmes has well written,

She has lived on beyond death as only a few persons do. Her life has thus become emblematic of the post-modern American Dream, its potential successes and very real pitfalls, and her allegedly troubled life and more troublesome death illuminates the tortuous road down which Americans felt shoved from modern complacency into postmodern chaos, a situation that continues today. (5)

If we replace “American Dream” with some British cultural equivalent, then the words could refer also to Diana, Princess of Wales (1961–1997)—a par-

allel taken up at Diana's funeral by Elton John in his threnody, "A Candle in the Wind."²⁵ Susan Hubert comments,

Both women have become national icons and were associated with the most prominent family in their respective countries. Their celebrity status also enabled them to become touchstones for the numerous women who identified with them. Certainly, Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana have the potential to become subversive icons. (135)

Who better than Mailer to write of Marilyn as a "subversive icon"? Of course, he writes from a strongly male perspective. But who better "to speak about Marilyn than an artist exquisitely aware of his own masculine self?" (Holmes 13). Who indeed?

Second, Mailer apparently found parallels in Marilyn's unusual psyche to his own complicated character. A key passage is this one:

[L]et us assume that the conditions of an orphanage are suited to creating too wan a psyche and too glamorous a one. Since the orphan's presence in the world is obliged to turn drab, the life of fantasy, in compensation, can become extreme. We are all steeped in the notion that lonely withdrawn people have a life of large inner fantasy. What may be ignored is the tendency to become locked into a lifelong rapture with one's fantasy, to become a narcissist. (*Marilyn* 37)

Lennon comments, "Laid bare here is what Mailer believed to be the main-spring of Monroe's psychology, and with some qualifications, his own as well" (469). Norman Mailer was no orphan, but he was no stranger to narcissism, the "lifelong rapture with one's fantasy" (*Marilyn* 37).

Third, for Mailer—despite the promises of the "angel of sex"—Marilyn was unattainable. This is a vantage point that may return us to Kittredge in *Harlot's Ghost*. If Kittredge was for Harry one of many "unattainable objects of affection" (Rosenthal 257), then maybe Marilyn was for Mailer also such an "unattainable" object. Since Marilyn was the "angel of sex" (*Marilyn* 15)—the Holy Grail of a lifelong sexual quest—then we may speculate that the many wives and serial affairs were mundane approximations to that quest.

Fifty years beyond her death, Marilyn remains *the* American goddess.²⁶ For Norman, Marilyn is “emblematic of the post-modern American Dream” (Holmes 5). If that be true, Mailer’s obsession is understandable, as is his poignant farewell, “Goodbye Norma Jean. Au revoir Marilyn” (*Marilyn* 248).

CONCLUSIONS

In Lawrence, women are “frequently the central consciousness” (Gilbert 45). Lawrence develops a point of view that is *incarnated* in Ursula. Mailer, on the other hand, struggles to find a similar perspective. Kittredge is not that central consciousness: in Norma Jean, he gets somewhat closer, perhaps very close. But, overall, Mailer’s achievement in writing of a “women’s soul” is not as credible as Lawrence’s. Why might that be the case?

Did Mailer’s vaunted ego—his narcissism—get in the way of finding that vantage point? It did not help, certainly, nor the fact that Mailer “was a serial philanderer” (Lennon 82). As Huston said, “His genius was also his folly” (Lennon 663). But Norman—despite his failures in this realm—recognized that in D. H. Lawrence “the literary miracle occurs” (*The Prisoner of Sex* 152). The Englishman *could* write of a “woman’s soul.” Their gender pilgrimages were similar but not identical. In addition, perhaps Mailer was right about Lawrence’s conflicted identity. Maybe, in Lawrence’s limited, sickly physical body, he really did have the soul of “a beautiful, imperious, and passionate woman” (*The Prisoner of Sex* 152). With greater awareness today of the fluidity of gender, we may better understand Mailer’s speculation.

Lawrence wrote, “The flame of sex singes your absolute, and cruelly scorches your ego” (“The Novel” 173). Mailer said that sex is “the presence of grace and the introduction of the stranger into oneself” (*The Prisoner of Sex* 150). Lawrence and Mailer searched for that “presence of grace”—to be found with a woman, in the mystery of sexuality, in the very fabric of the Universe. Their quest drove them to write convincingly of a woman’s soul, creating credible women characters, and persuading us—at least, much of the time—that they understood women. For us also, may it be so.

NOTES

1. “This election isn’t a battle between the sexes. But it is a battle between the parties, each hoping to win the votes of women without losing the votes of men. It’s also marked by the sweeping changes to American politics caused by women’s entry into public life.” (Lepore).
2. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Mailer Conference, Provincetown, MA, in

October, 2015. I am grateful to J. Michael Lennon for helpful suggestions, to Jeanne S. Vince for her skill in finding materials, to Connie B. Rynder for encouragement and historical assistance, and to Constance E. Holmes for help on the Marilyn section.

3. Norman's father, Barney Mailer, was born in January 1891, whereas his mother Fan Schneider was probably born in December 1891 (Lennon 12). Lawrence was born on September 11, 1885 in Eastwood, Notts—mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Eastwic* (Moore, *Life and Works*, 19–23).
4. WHERE IS NOTE 4??
5. "In Henry James's era, [Mailer] would have expired of frustration. In 1941, when he read the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley*, the Depression was ending, life was opening up, and the Victorian ark of sexual repression was sinking" (Lennon 33).
6. Lawrence published for less than two decades, from *The White Peacock* (1911) to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). Mailer's career spans six decades, from *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) to *The Castle in the Forest* (2007).
7. "At least Lawrence preached the importance of sexuality and taught sexual tenderness . . . We need his paganism tempered by puritanism. We need his perpetual reminder that all literature is subversive. And, whatever life is, we need the eloquence of his allegiance to it" (Burgess 273).
8. "Einstein's 1905 article on special relativity, 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,' became the best-known physics paper of the twentieth century, and his dismantling of absolute time is its crowning feature . . . the irresolvable break between modern physics and all earlier framings of time and space" (Galison 14).
9. Lawrence and Mailer are accused of misogyny. There is evidence for the charge, but a defense is warranted. Yes, they were children of their time. No, at their best, they rose above that time.
10. "Then, on June 29, 1914, in Sarajevo, the shot was fired which in a single second shattered the world of security and creative reason in which we had been educated, grown up and been at home—shattered it like a hollow vessel of clay" (Zweig 213).
11. "Lawrence provides a more immediate Modernist response to the war: not a triumph over history through the construction of the world in language, which Eliot and Joyce came to represent in the Twenties; rather . . . acceptance of defeat" (Krockel 88).
12. The scene was beautifully portrayed in Ken Russell's 1969 film, *Women in Love*, quite a faithful interpretation of the novel.
13. Many of the English Modernists were outsiders: Ford had German roots, Conrad was a Polish mariner, Joyce was Irish, Eliot was American-born, Woolf was a woman, and Auden was gay.
14. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the scandal is not that Constance took a lover but that he was not of her class. When Sir Clifford realizes that Connie's lover was his own gamekeeper, he was "beside himself with rage, as she knew he would be" (296). Sin against class is the greater sin.
15. "Eliot did all that his immense prestige and authority could do to make the current stupidities about Lawrence look respectable" (Leavis 22).
16. I do not underestimate the innovations of Ford, Conrad, Eliot, Woolf, Joyce and others. Yet, de-

- spite the passionate advocacy of F. R. Leavis, and the authoritative Cambridge edition of his works, Lawrence's contribution is still not recognized.
17. T. S. Eliot can offer, "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." *Complete Poems*, 4). I would argue that nowhere in Eliot's poetry do we encounter a "woman's soul."
 18. "With Harlot, we move a step further into the unbounded and fictional. James Jesus Angleton, "Mother" in CIA legend, was obviously the original model for Hugh Montague, but since very little was known publicly about Angleton . . . I decided to create my own intricate piece of work, the wholly fictional Hugh Montague, and, of course, his equally fictional wife, Kittredge" (Author's Note. *Harlot's Ghost*, 1287).
 19. John le Carré dealt with questions of identity and deception in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974) and *A Perfect Spy* (1986). In his biography of le Carré, Adam Sisman writes, "In retrospect, he would feel that he had been schooled into becoming a spy, learning the enemy's language, wearing his clothes, aping his opinions and pretending to share his prejudices. Like Graham Green, he learned to live a secret life . . ." (34).
 20. "But beyond the rather facile irony of a childish rhyme attaching to a deadly serious "game" of spying and counterspying, there lies a whole intricately woven set of relationships between adults and children, between innocence and disillusionment, between loyalty and betrayal that gives the novel's title a deeper resonance" (King 65).
 21. "Because Harry is at heart afraid of sex and intimacy as a result of childhood trauma, he finds solace in hopeless love" (Rosenthal 257).
 22. In August 2014, *Newsweek* reported that an unnamed woman was "the second female in a row to become deputy chief of the National Clandestine Service, the home of the spies" (Stein).
 23. On the other hand, Norman and Norris had a strong friendship with Dick and Doris Kearns Goodwin. Doris reports, "All these women he had affairs with still care. I think the answer is, perhaps serially, the fact that he loved them. You can't fake that" (Lennon 735).
 24. Mailer's family "regularly referred to him as a genius from the time he took the Stanford-Binet IQ exam in third grade . . . Norman Mailer had an IQ of 170, the highest ever recorded at P.S. 161" (Lennon 20).
 25. Elton John and Bernie Taupin wrote "A Candle in the Wind" (1973) as a tribute to Marilyn Monroe. In 1997, they rewrote the song as a tribute to Princess Diana for her funeral. The song is the second most popular single in history.
 26. Even in an age of Madonna and Beyoncé, Marilyn is the goddess. Many contemporary film or music stars seem to reflect "her incandescent image that was and has become one of the most reproduced images of all time" (Holmes 5).

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