

D. H. LAWRENCE AND MARRIAGE:
MAPPING THE
“LOGIC OF THE SOUL”

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*D. H. Lawrence and the Marriage Matrix: Intertextual
Adventures in Conflict, Renewal, and Transcendence.*

By Peter Balbert

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THIS VOLUME IS AN IMPORTANT ADDITION to the extensive literature on D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930). Over thirty years ago, Balbert explored the significant literary relationship between Lawrence and Norman Mailer, so this latest volume will certainly be of interest to Mailer scholars. Lennon has written, “it is clear that [Mailer] identifies with Lawrence as much as Hemingway, and owes him a deeper debt.” Since the Index lists well over seventy references to Mailer, the depth of that debt certainly appears corroborated. Earlier versions of five chapters were published between 2006 and 2015 and four chapters between 1990 and 2002, but Balbert has augmented his work, taking account of recent events and scholarship. He reveals a thorough knowledge of Lawrence studies, with interesting discussions of Hemingway and Mailer.

Eight of Lawrence’s works are analyzed in detail—in order of publication—*The Lost Girl*, *The Captain’s Doll*, *The Fox*, *The Ladybird*, *St. Mawr*, “The Princess,” *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. These were all written in the last decade of Lawrence’s life, from 1920 to 1928. He cites Lawrence’s essays and letters, for they “remain crucial in any integrated

consideration of his fiction and life.” Balbert’s treatment of the novellas and tales—as well as Lawrence’s final novel—is welcome. Sixty years ago, F. R. Leavis argued that the tales “constitute a body of creative work of such an order as would of itself put Lawrence among the great writers.” Discovering Lawrence for myself in 1970 in graduate school, I would agree. Mailer *aficionados* might turn first to chapter eight—published in an earlier form in *The Mailer Review* of 2015—where Balbert discusses *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and Mailer’s *The Deer Park*. But there are many other insights into Lawrence’s life and work, and of Lawrence’s influence on Mailer.

The book reproduces six paintings of Lawrence, plus one by Georgia O’Keefe, *The Lawrence Tree*. One of Lawrence’s paintings, *The Kiowa Ranch, New Mexico* is reproduced in full color as a centerfold (after p. 172). This is one of the very few landscape paintings of Lawrence, for he called the English talent for landscape painting a “form of escape for them from the actual human body they so hate and fear.” Each of the paintings is analyzed in the text, often with reference to Lawrence’s writing or his *sitz-in-leben* at the time, adding to what Balbert calls his “intertextual adventures.” These illustrations, with a well-produced Index and a comprehensive, up-to-date Bibliography, make this book on many levels a useful resource.

Collections of published essays—at their best—can illustrate the thematic passions that motivate a scholar over the years. This is certainly true here: Balbert is seen as a Lawrentian in the tradition of Leavis yet in dialogue with recent scholarship. Committed to careful exegesis of “those venerable, essential three elements—plot, character, and theme,” Balbert is unapologetic about his approach.

My basic methodology employs close reading, rhetorical analysis, and historical context, with a distinct emphasis on image clusters and thematic patterns that are both intrinsic to the respective work and corroborate the essential metaphors and doctrines that unify the chapters in this book. I am also recognizably drawn to psychobiographical inference and psychoanalytical theory to extend the reach of my interpretations and their possible bearing on Lawrence’s art, friendships, and marriage.

In what ways is marriage the focus of Balbert’s book? His concern is both *familial* and *thematic*. The *familial* interest is that Lawrence’s works “re-

peatedly shed light on the lingering evidence of his own neo-oedipal connection to the powerful matriarchal figure of Lydia Lawrence.” We see this illustrated particularly—but not exclusively—in his early novel, *Sons and Lovers*, and in this volume in *St. Mawr*. The *thematic* interest is seen in the continuing struggle that men and women find themselves in, striving for rebirth and renewal—for entry into “the unknown” and “the beyond.” That “unknown” place of rebirth is suggested—but in no way guaranteed—by marriage.

What of the phrase “logic of the soul”? In his Introduction, Balbert cites Tom Brangwen and Lydia, the first generation of *The Rainbow* (1915). Tom, seemingly out of character for a stolid English yeoman, decides to propose to the Polish lady, Lydia. Tom appears driven less by rational consideration and more by “logic of the soul.” In succeeding generations—and in much of Lawrence’s later work—we witness men and women struggling with this “logic of the soul.” With Lawrence’s emphasis on “blood” over “mind,” the struggle might seem reminiscent of Jack London’s “call of the wild.” But there is a post-Freudian, post-Einsteinian complexity to Lawrence not seen in London. This “logic of the soul” has echoes in Lawrence’s subsequent writing. So how does this logic connect with the motif of marriage? For Balbert it seems clear.

Marriage thus functions, in effect, as both the obsessive subject and the thematic center of Lawrence’s writings, shaping the plots and tensions of his novels and stories as well as reflecting the visionary imperative of the “passionate struggle into conscious being” that his characters attempt to achieve.

But is marriage—however defined—*really* the “thematic center of Lawrence’s writings as Balbert claims? How would we “map” his claim onto the larger chart of Lawrence studies? Most of us who read Lawrence find a complexity and elusiveness in his writing that may defy such a “thematic center.” The same is true of Mailer, influenced by this English teller of tales. Thus many of us adopt an *eclectic* approach to the text, choosing different themes and strategies as appropriate. Lawrence—to me—cries out for such an eclectic approach. The three authors of *The Cambridge Biography of D. H. Lawrence* recognize this reality.

We believe that our one work by three writers, each allowing his particular material rather than any overview to dictate his form, will produce the necessary tension between a continuous and a continuously changing Lawrence, in a way than no synoptic view could achieve.

There is continuity in Lawrence, as Leavis and Harry T. Moore recognized early on. But there is evidence for “a continuously changing Lawrence,” as later scholars have shown. This is not a criticism of Balbert: focus on one theme does not invalidate others. In the last four decades, Lawrence studies have been revolutionized by the superb Cambridge Edition of his works (CUP 1981–), his letters (CUP 1979–), The Cambridge Biography (CUP, 1991, 1996, 1998), and Warren Roberts’ Bibliography (CUP, 3rd ed. 2001). Balbert is fully aware of these developments: he pays tribute, for instance, to the “probing and scrupulous work” found in the Cambridge Biography.

In ten meticulously written chapters, Peter Balbert has produced a very useful study on Lawrence’s life and work—focusing on marriage, conflict, renewal, and transcendence. His work has already driven this reader at least back to Lawrence’s magisterial writings. This volume should take its rightful place on the map of Lawrence studies, a critical map that—like its subject—is continuously changing.

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