

“HER PROBLEMS WERE EVERYONE’S
PROBLEMS”: SELF AND GENDER
IN *THE DEER PARK*

H U J U N R E N

BEFORE ITS PUBLICATION IN 1955, *The Deer Park* had been refused by seven publishers in ten weeks for no other reason than its “six not very explicit lines about the sex of an old producer and a call girl” (Mailer, Perigee 1991. 330). After its publication, it received more criticism than praise, and “the most common objection to the book was its sexual explicitness” (Lennon 6) because “in the early 1950s no description of sexuality, however evasive, was readily accepted” (Mills 145). In spite of responses from publishers and critics, Mailer refused to make any change of the original lines about “the sex of an old producer and a call girl” and the novel came out as it is now, with the sexuality of his characters to play “the more significant role” in the story (Mills 143). The issue of sexuality in *The Deer Park* has drawn much attention from critics. Nigel Leigh argues that “in *The Deer Park* sexuality is both foregrounded and incorporated into Mailer’s political epistemology” (Leigh 77) and “Mailer investigates closely the sex lives of Sergius, Eitel, Elena, Faye and Lulu Meyers in a search of a discourse of pleasure” (Leigh 78). Robert Merrill holds that the novel is “only incidentally a satire on Hollywood or an outlet for Mailer’s philosophical predilections; at heart it is the story of a rather tragic love affair” (Merrill 45). Norman Podhoretz points out that “it is on the sexual affairs of his characters that Mr. Mailer concentrates in *The Deer Park*” (Lucid 78).

Why does Mailer concentrate on the sexuality of the characters in *The Deer Park*? Many critics have noticed that in *The Deer Park*, Mailer’s major concern moves from “the problem of the world” to “the problem of the self,”

or, from ideology to the individual or self (see Lucid 82–83; Leeds 110; Leigh 55–56; 62–63; and Glenday 79–81). As a result, he is highly concerned with the rebellious imperatives of the self, among which “none is more exigent than sex” (Lucid 123). A number of critics have directed their attention towards and made close investigations of the nature and meaning of the sexuality of the characters in *The Deer Park*, and, consequently, a variety of conclusions have been drawn. To Jennifer Bailey, the sexuality of the characters in *The Deer Park* is of great importance to themselves because it is “potentially redemptive” (28). Nigel Leigh also believes that the sexuality of the characters in *The Deer Park* is of great significance because their sexual activities can decide whether they will be able to grow or decline (Leigh 78). Norman Podhoretz notes the relationship between the sexuality of the characters and themselves in *The Deer Park*, arguing that the world in the novel is populated with those “who have no true interest in anything but self” and for whom “sex has become a testing ground of the self” (Lucid 78). Like Podhoretz, Diana Trilling also considers the relationship between sex and self. She observes that in *The Deer Park* Mailer distinguishes two different kinds of sexuality, one “appears to be free but is really an enslavement,” as displayed by the movie colony in Desert D’Or, and the other “expresses a new, radical principle of selfhood,” as valued by Hipsterism (Lucid 125–126). Unlike the critics above mentioned, Jean Radford argues that in *The Deer Park* the sexuality of the characters functions as “an index of other things” and “at the more general level it is used to symbolize the moral state of the nation” (Radford 133).

When investigating the nature and meaning of the sexuality of the characters in *The Deer Park*, many critics direct their attention towards the love affairs between Eitel and Elena and Sergius and Lulu. To many critics, the relationship between Eitel and Elena is absolutely productive and constructive. For example, Gabriel Miller argues that, due to his relationship with Elena, Eitel can manage to recover “his sense of self” and “his sexual potency” and therefore is able to return to “work on an ambitious script,” thereby, to “reclaim his integrity as an artist” (Bloom, *Mailer* <2003> 75). However, unlike the relationship between Eitel and Elena, the relationship between Sergius and Lulu is not so productive and constructive because one sees the other as nothing but a sexual object and their sexuality is very much like “sport” and “war” in which the man tries every means to test and prove

his “manhood” and the woman becomes his “opponent” and “enemy” he “must fight and conquer” (Radford 135).

Not only have many critics noticed the difference between the nature and meaning of the sexuality of Eitel and Elena and that of Sergius and Lulu, they have also observed the difference between Elena and Lulu. To Philip Bufithis, although Elena is “a discarded mistress” and “an unimpressive actress with an ungainly social manners,” she “is yet heroic in her embattled desire to be self-reliant and take her own measure free of men’s estimation of her” and therefore she always “clings to the hope of self-knowledge” and “retains her individualism” (Bufithis 46). Jean Radford believes that Elena is the most important of Mailer’s women characters because she exists “not merely as a secondary human being who is an index of others’ moral possibilities, but who has herself a moral nature with distinctive ideas and possibilities for self-development and growth” (Radford 136). Howard Harper makes a comparison between Elena and Lulu, arguing that “Elena is more generous, more perceptive, more honest, more sensitive than Lulu” because Lulu values “career” more than “any human considerations” (Harper 111). Likewise, Jessica Gerson takes a positive attitude towards Elena, ranking her among those “benign, redemptive and creative women” who “repeatedly offer their men redemptive love” (Bloom, *Mailer* <1986> 172).

Although many critics have commented upon the relationship between sex and self and the difference between Elena and Lulu when talking about the sexuality of the characters in *The Deer Park*, few critics have seen the love affairs and marriages of the characters in the novel as part of their pursuit of selfhood and happiness, nor have they noticed the puzzlements that Elena and Lulu confront after marriage. In fact, the sexuality of the characters in their love affairs and marriages is always linked with their pursuit of selfhood and happiness. It is always indicative of whether the partners involved are content with their lives or not, and whether they can satisfactorily do with their own lives or not. It is both a preserver and destroyer of happy love and marriage. It is an index both of love and hate. It involves not only warmth and tenderness but also coldness and indifference and it is founded on the ground of honesty and loyalty but, sometimes, it also grows out of deception and betrayal. Further, it is both redemptive and hurting and it makes one partner gain and the other partner lose. It is supposed to be love-bound and marriage-bound but sometimes it has little to do with love and marriage. It seems to facilitate selfhood outside love and marriage

but it also seems to imprison selfhood inside love and marriage. So, it cannot be read as merely a sexual activity; instead, it should be read and understood in association with its performers' pursuit of selfhood and happiness and should not be read without taking gender into consideration. Only in this way can we really understand the nature and meaning of the sexuality of the characters in the novel and the puzzlements of Elena and Lulu after marriage.

In *The Deer Park*, Mailer seems to concern himself more with the relationship between self and gender than with the love affairs or sexuality of one character or another; in other words, what he is deeply concerned with in the novel are the problems closely related to self and gender, such as: Whether living alone or together with someone else, married or single, what should one do with his/her life? Should one be honest with himself/herself or deceptive of himself/herself? Should one be obedient to another to lose his/her pride and dignity or defiant of another to keep his/her pride and dignity? Should one live for himself/herself or for others? What does happiness mean to men and women? Does the life of a wife mean that she should maintain a house, love her husband and children, be on good terms with family members, and learn to grow so as to make herself match well with her husband or people around her? Are love and marriage enough to make a woman really happy? What does life mean to a woman? Does it mean to find a good husband, have children, be a good wife and mother and on good terms with family members? To be herself or serve others? Can being a lady make a woman a really happy wife? Can being a gentleman make a man a really happy husband? What can make a man a happy husband and a woman a happy wife? In the novel, Mailer tries to give answers to these questions by closely investigating the love affairs and marriages of his characters. It should be noticed that Mailer's investigation of the love affairs and marriages of the characters in the novel reflect his concern not only with the problem of selfhood but also with the gender issues of his time. In *The Deer Park*, gender differences in male and female pursuits of selfhood and happiness is explicitly manifested in the affairs and marriages of the characters, but it has not drawn much attention from critics. Many critics have directed their attention towards Charley Eitel, Sergius O'Shaugnessy and Marion O'Faye as the major characters in the novel, as clearly shown in Norman Podhoretz's remark that "Sergius and Marion are the natural heroes of the world of *The Deer Park*" (Lucid 80) or Jean Radford's argument that "there are in fact

three heroes in the novel: Eitel the ‘potential artist’ and professional film director, Marion Faye the nihilistic pimp and pusher to the film world, and Sergius O’Shaughnessy, the would-be writer and narrator of the novel” (Radford 20). No critic has paid much attention to Elena or Lulu or Dorothea as major characters in the novel. Further, many critics tend to read and understand the significance of the love affair between Eitel and Elena from a male perspective. Although Jean Radford claims that Elena “has herself a moral nature with distinctive ideas and possibilities for self-development and growth” (Radford 136), she fails to see that Elena’s possibilities for self-development and growth are not the same as or equal to Charley Eitel’s, Sergius O’Shaughnessy’s, or Marion O’Faye’s. Although Elena can pursue her selfhood in her love affairs, she cannot transcend her marriage life to pursue her true self as can Eitel. Further, we can say that Lulu cannot have a happy life so long as she does not know what a woman should do with her own life after marriage.

Now, it seems in order to make a close investigation of the major characters and their self-pursuit in terms of love affair and marriage. Unlike earlier critics who see Eitel, Sergius and Marion as major characters in the novel, I would add Elena, Lulu, and Dorothea to the group of major characters, and unlike those critics who focus their attention mainly on the major male characters, such as Eitel, Sergius and Marion, I would like to direct my attention towards the major female characters in the novel, such as Dorothea, Elena and Lulu, whose life experiences demonstrate different alternatives of women in their pursuit of selfhood and happiness.

Dorothea is a showgirl, a night-club singer, a call girl, a gossip columnist, a celebrity, and a failure. Her father is a drunkard, dies that way, and her mother remarries. She begins to work when she is twelve, collecting rent from tenants and taking care of household duties. She is seventeen when she has her first love affair with a man named O’Faye, who makes her considerably unhappy because “she was crazy about him,” but “he liked a different girl every night” and never wants to meet her desire “to settle down, to have children” and, therefore, when she gets pregnant, he does not hesitate to choose to leave her (10–11). She does not gain much from this affair; instead, she suffers a lot from it. We do not know how much pain she experiences, but we can be sure that she does suffer to no small extent. However, her fate always seems to be connected with that man. When she turns nineteen, she becomes pregnant by a passing European prince and, after he leaves, she is left

to take care of everything on her own. With no one to help her, she seems to have no choice but to turn to O'Faye to help her out of trouble because "three months went by, four months went by, it was too much late" (11) to do anything about her forthcoming child. Fortunately, O'Faye is willing to save her because he "sympathized with her predicament" (11). Although "he would never marry a girl who carried his own child," he "considered it right to help a friend out of her trouble" (11). So, to her great expectation and satisfaction, "they quickly married, and as quickly divorced, and her child had a name" (11). Clearly, Dorothea's quick marriage with O'Faye is not grounded on the love of one for the other; it is essentially a loveless one. It seems to help Dorothea gain, but this gain, if it really is one, is founded on her miserable experience with the irresponsible European prince who gets her into trouble. She later marries a man, of whom she says, "I can't remember him as well as guys I've had for a one-night stand" (6). She then has a romance with an Air Force pilot who, unfortunately, is killed in a flight and she is, in a sense, a tragic woman. She has more than one affair and, more than once, she loses more than gains. The only affair from which she seems to have gained something is the one that she has with Martin Pelley when she settles down in Desert D'Or and "their romance began on the sure ground of his incapacity" (11). That is to say, instead of being at the mercy of others, as she used to be, now Dorothea is able to decide her own life, but her ability to make decisions of her own is grounded on the incapacity of the man she chooses as her partner. Although she begins her life as a victim of men, she grows as a woman who can make men yield to her; as the narrator remarks of her, "Dorothea had lasted. If her night-club days were finished, if her big affairs were part of the past, she was still in fine shape. She had her house, she had her court, she had money in the bank; men still sent airplanes for her" (7). If we take a backward look at Dorothea's life experience with men, we find that she loses her selfhood, but she manages to regain it by becoming a woman who seems to be able to dominate men rather than be dominated by them.

If Dorothea's life is one of misery and happiness, loss and gain, Elena shares much with her, but is quite different from her, as well. She was born into an unhappy family. Her father is "a bully" and so is her mother. Neither of them treats her really well. The mother coddles Elena but scolds her as well, "made much of her and ignored her, given her ambitions and chased them away" (104). The father does not like Elena because "she was the

youngest and she had come much too late" (104). Although she has a big family consisting of brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins, and grandparents, she does not feel that it is a happy one because "fist fights started" whenever there is a family party. In addition, the father is "a dandy" and "could not be alone with a woman without trying to make love to her," and the mother is "a flirt," always greedy and jealous (104). Born into such a family, Elena suffers significantly and experiences more misery than any other girl her age. When she is a child, more often than not, she "would cry silently while the mother and father yelled insults at one another" and therefore she has to spend her childhood "listening to their jealous quarrels" (104–105). She has her first love affair when she is in her teens, with Collie Munshin. She lives with him for three years but fails to develop her relationship with him into marriage. She loves him but receives no love in return. In her eyes, Collie is "a hypocrite" because he claims himself to be "a good liberal" who does not believe in a double standard but rather in the equality between man and woman, white and black, and the rich and the poor, but he looks down upon Elena for no other reason than that "she's obviously from a poor background" (49). Unlike what he claims himself to be, Collie has "always been full of prejudices about women" and "wanted girls with some class and distinction to them" (49). It is no wonder that three years of living with Elena is not long enough for him to develop a bit of love for her. Although he believes that "Elena is a person who hates everything that is small in herself" and is "consumed by the passion to become a bigger person than she is" and therefore is "the sort of girl who would love a husband and kids" (50), he sees her as just "a beautiful, warm, simple child" (48); that is to say, he never sees her as his equal. Being innocent, Elena spends three years being cheated on by Collie. Although she is Collie's mistress, she has never been treated as such by him. To Collie, Elena is not a "beautiful, warm, simple" young woman who has given herself wholly to him but a possession he can exchange with others when he becomes fatigued with the relationship, which is the reason why Collie transfers Elena to Charley Eitel. Leaving Collie and coming to Eitel, Elena seems to have freed herself from imprisonment, just as the narrator says, "she reminded me of an animal, ready for flight" (71).

Indeed, living with Eitel, Elena feels quite different than when she is with Collie. Eitel is a man of over forty. He has "a big reputation as a film director" but is "better known in other ways" because he experiences more than

one marriage and is believed to be “the cause of more than one divorce” (24). He has had three failed marriages and more than one love affair before he meets Elena. His first wife “worked in a bookstore to support him” (26), but as his own career grows, he begins to forget what she has done and sacrificed for him because “he wanted a woman who was more attractive, more intelligent, more his equal” and even “wanted more than one woman” (27). Quarrels between them become more and more routine and, as a result, they end up divorced. His second wife is an actress from the social register. From her, he “picked up what he wanted, and paid for it of course” (28). Like his first wife, his second wife ends her relationship with him in a divorce. After divorce, Eitel is commissioned into the Army in Europe and, when he comes back from the war, he becomes extremely notorious because “there was a year or two when he was supposed to have slept with half the good-looking women in the capital, and it was a rare week which did not have his name in one gossip column or another” (28). His third wife is a woman named Lulu Meyers. She is beautiful and young and therefore “he hardly believed she needed him” (29). Knowing that his marriage with her “could never last” (31), he soon falls into an affair with a Romanian actress, which lasts just one year. Although he has never been faithful to any woman that he has ever been with, he believes that he is truly loyal to his Romanian woman, as he states:

I’ve never been the kind of man who can be faithful with my regularity. I’ve always been the sort of decent chappie who hops from one woman to another in the run of an evening because that’s the only prescription which allows me to be fond of both ladies, but I was faithful in my own way to the Rumanian. She would have liked to see me every night for she hated to be alone and I would have liked never to see her again, and so we settled for two nights a week. It didn’t matter if I were in the middle of a romance or between girls, whether I had a date that night or not—on Thursday night and Friday night I went to her apartment to sleep. (30)

Although Eitel believes that he has been loyal to his Romanian woman in his own way, his very loyalty suggests that he is by no means loyal at all. If Colie claims himself to be a man who does not believe in double standard, Eitel

is obviously one who does believe in double standard, as Sergius the narrator remarks of him, "One of his qualities was the ability to talk about himself with considerable masculinity of mind" (26). Living with such a man "with considerable masculinity of mind," Elena, however, does not subordinate herself as a woman to Eitel. She always attempts to pursue her selfhood, protect her pride, gain respect from Eitel, and maintain her individuality.

Although Eitel is a man "with considerable masculinity of mind," his masculine mindset seems to be powerless in front of Elena. He begins to change with his love affair with Elena. To him, Elena has something that other women always lack, just as he believes, "not too many women really knew how to make love, and very few indeed loved to make love" (89), but "Elena was doubly and indubitably a find" (90). He learns something about Elena from the way she makes love, for he "always felt that the way a woman made love was as good a guide to understanding her character as any other way" (90). Believing that "to be a good lover, one should be incapable of falling in love" (90), Eitel "usually wanted nothing more than to quit a woman once they were done" (91). However, when it comes to Elena, he no longer believes what he used to believe because "he not only wished to sleep the night with Elena but to hold her in his arms" (91). Elena makes Eitel realize that "he had never been with anyone who understood him so well" (96) and therefore he believes that Elena is "the best woman" he has ever had (97). Consequently, he believes that his affair with Elena "could return his energy, flesh his courage, and make him the man he had once believed himself to be" (96). He also believes that he and Elena each "could make something of the other" (96). After the affair, "he felt full of tenderness for Elena" and "through the day he toyed with the thought that she should come to live with him" (96). But unlike what Eitel expects, Elena does not want to live with him because she does not want to lose her freedom and selfhood she has just achieved, as she tells him, "You can do what you want, and I'll do what I want" (98). When Eitel becomes furious with her for her affair with Marion Faye, Elena refuses to surrender to his criticism; instead, she is very defiant, saying that "I'll go if you want me to go" and that "I think we'd better quit now, you and me" (101). Feeling that Eitel has treated her as "a game," Elena says defiantly to him, "When a woman's unfaithful, she's more attractive to a man" (101). Elena does not believe that Eitel loves her, but when she finds that he really does love her, she says with final abandon, "Nobody ever treated me the way you do. I love you more than I ever loved anyone" (102).

However, when living with Eitel, Elena seems to have lost her selfhood completely once again, as the narrator states, “in the first few weeks of living together, Elena’s eyes never left Eitel’s face; her mood was the clue to his temper; if she was gay it meant he was happy; if Eitel was moody, it left her morose. No one else existed for her” (104). That, however, does not mean that she is quite sure of Eitel’s feeling towards her. On the contrary, she is always doubtful. Once she says to Eitel, “You think I’m not good enough for you . . . You tell me I don’t love you because you don’t love me. It’s all right. I’ll leave” (108). After Eitel confirms his love for her, she becomes calm and says, “Oh, Charley, when you make love to me, everything is all right again. Is it really the same with you?” (147). Another time, she says to him calmly, “I could be happy with somebody else . . . I’m going to leave you some day, Charley, I mean it” (152). Still another time, she even says to Eitel, much like an order, “Love me, really love me, and maybe I can do what you want” (160). Eitel comes to feel somewhat fed up with Elena and appears to be pleased when she tells him that Marion wants her to live with him because he knows if someone else cares for her, “his own responsibility was less” (163). Although he believes that Elena is “the most honest woman I’ve ever known” (163), Eitel finds that “the time had come to decide how he would break up with her” (178).

Eitel wants to break up with Elena because he does not see her as his equal. He sees himself as a second-rate man and Elena as a fifth-rate woman and he does not believe it is logical for a second-rate man to seek out a fifth-rate woman because a second-rate man should seek out a second-rate woman (179). And yet, he is not able to make himself desert his principle of caste. Although “he had come to resent the attraction of their love-making,” he never really wants to separate himself from Elena, and therefore, rather than resent her, more often than not, “he enjoyed her as much as ever, and in his sleep, he would sometimes be aware that he was holding her and whispering love-words to her ear” (179). On the other hand, he seems to be troubled by a dilemma because his love for Elena seems to have prevented him from pursuing the freedom of his own. He knows that “the unspoken purpose of freedom was to find love, yet when love was found one could only desire freedom again” (180). Now that he has found love in Elena, it is natural that he has a strong desire for “an affair with a woman for whom he cared nothing, an affair simply exciting, exciting as the pages of a pornographic text where one could read in safety and not grudge every emotion

the woman felt for another man," but his desire can never be satisfied because "he was locked in Elena's love" (180), and it seems that he will never be able to unlock that lock because the longer they live together, the more doubtful Elena will become of Eitel's love for her. Her very doubtfulness suggests that she loves and values him so much that she is very fearful of losing him because she is very fearful of being alone and lonely, but then, she does not want to lose herself completely to him, as she once says to Eitel, "You're a good-time Charley. You only like me when I'm in a good mood [...] When I say nice things, then you love me . . . You're so superior. But you don't know what goes on in my mind" (210). Obviously, Eitel does not know what goes on in Elena's mind, so, sometime later, she tells him that she wants to leave him to become a nun because "a nun is never alone" and "nuns always have company" (210). Eitel takes it as his fault that Elena should have such an idea because she chooses to live with him and fully loves him, but he gives her "nothing but loneliness" and therefore it is he who "ruined everything he touched" (210).

Despite Eitel's confession that "he ruined everything he touched," Elena does not believe that he is really honest. When he tells her, "You must know that I care about you. I can't stand the thought of hurting you. I mean, I want you always to be happy" (225), she does not believe what he says. When Eitel seriously says to her, "I want us to be married," Elena just simply replies, "What I thought is that we could go on like this" (225). When he once again says to her, "You have to marry me," she tells him once again, "When you don't want me, I'll go. But I don't want to talk about it any more" (226). Elena's uncompromising refusal to cooperate and comply with Eitel suggests that she minds not only his love for her but also his respect for her. She wants to love and be loved deeply by Eitel, but she does not want to be controlled and manipulated fully by him. On the other hand, Eitel does not want to be controlled and directed by Elena. Although "he loved her as he had never loved anyone," Eitel is afraid of his love for her because "if he stayed with her, he would be obliged to travel in *her* directions" (226) (*Italics original*). Although "he loved her as he had never loved anyone," Eitel does not want himself to be locked by his love for Elena. He needs love, but he desires freedom even more. His love for Elena seems to be quite abnormal because "it was only after quarrels and crises that he could feel love for Elena the way he desired" (259). However much he loves her, "he hated her" because "it was impossible not to remember how she had given herself to others" (259).

Although he says love words to her more than once, he does not truly love her, just as the narrator says, “they had been tender to each other, they had forgiven one another, and yet he did not love her, she did not love him, no one ever love anyone” (260). Caught between to love and love not, and between love and hate, Eitel wants to finish his affair with Elena because he feels that “neither he nor she had been able to make the happiness they should have made” (262). When he decides to tell Elena his decision to end their relationship, he finds that she has already been prepared for it, as she says, “You want me to go away. All right, I will” (262). She even tells Eitel, “Maybe I’ll become a prostitute. Don’t worry. I’m not trying to make you feel sorry. You think I’m a prostitute anyway, so how could you feel sorry? In fact you always thought of me as a prostitute, but you don’t know what I think of you. You think I can’t live without you. Maybe I know better” (264). Elena’s words clearly show that she sees herself as an independent woman rather than a woman who would like to depend on men for a living. That is the reason why she does not hesitate to choose to leave Eitel after she quarrels with him. It might never occur to Eitel that Elena can really leave him. After Elena leaves, Eitel “sat down and began to wait for her telephone call” because he believes that “she would phone,” but no telephone call came to him after “an hour went by, and then the afternoon, and much of the night,” and he can do nothing but “sighed to himself, not knowing if he were relieved that he was free, or if he were more miserable than he had ever been” (264).

After leaving Eitel, Elena comes to Marion O’Faye, but her life with him turns out not to be so happy as she has expected. So, not long afterwards, she begins to regret for her leaving Eitel for Marion, and due to that, she writes Eitel a long letter, in which she confides to him:

I hate the kind of thing that happens to women where they go out with a man maybe two or three times and immediately they’re forced to start thinking about marriage. That’s how my mother got married and a lot of my sisters and what a drudgery sort of life they have, everybody’s so afraid to live. I am, too, and it’s silly. Once I remember I had a girl friend and she had a steady boy friend and I used to fall into a thing with the two of them on a Saturday night [. . .] the three of us liked each other like good friends and I almost never felt lowdown about it [. . .] the girl liked me so much and nobody was asking anybody else to solve

their whole life for them. But that's what you were asking me and what I was asking you and *I resented it as much as you did.* (275)
(Italics original)

Elena's letter to Eitel, from which the above quotation comes, is intended to express her introspective guilt for Eitel. Covering more than seven and a half pages, it is really a long letter, but what this long letter actually represents is by no means a pure confession of Elena's guilt for Eitel but a clear demonstration of her view of love and marriage and of how a woman should live her life as well. From the above quotation, we can clearly see that Elena is a woman who is deeply concerned with issues highly relevant to her life in particular and the lives of men and women in general, such as love and marriage. To her, love and marriage should not lay restraints upon those who are in love or marriage. She obviously believes that love and marriage are something that should be taken seriously before one falls in love with somebody or gets married and, therefore, it is wrong for a woman to fall in love with some man hastily and even hurry to get married to him. She pities her mother and sisters for the way they get married, but, unfortunately, she comes to follow their suit, hastily giving herself to Marion, a notorious pimp. Although she quarrels and fights with Eitel, Elena knows that Eitel has never seen her as a prostitute, as Marion always does. In Marion's eyes, Elena is "the kind of girl you could wipe your hands on" (163). In the letter she writes to Eitel after she has left him, Elena remarks of Marion, "I keep asking him to make me a call-girl and he says no, he says he wants to marry me and then I can become a call-girl. I suppose he wants to be a champion pimp" (277). This shows that, unlike Eitel, who asks Elena to marry him because he really loves her and wants to have her as his wife, Marion asks Elena to marry him for no other reason than turning her into a prostitute because he has never really loved her. He has never been free from nightmares since Elena comes to live with him because he is not able to rid himself of "the idea that she was his nun and he would transmute her into a witch" (288). Accordingly, in the few weeks they live together, Elena "passed from gaiety to high excitement to illness to depression and back to the liquor again" (290). Although "she felt free with him" (290), Elena is not able to develop "a decent healthy mature relationship" (50) with Marion. Unlike Eitel who might appreciate Elena's dependence on his promise, Marion "could even grieve for her since she did not realize how much she depended on his promise" (292).

When she swears that she will leave him “in a day or two” (298), Marion has no objection because that’s exactly what he really expects her to do. We might feel sorry for Elena because she never knows why Marion does not love her and she never understands the way he treats her. Even at the last moment of her being with him, she does not forget to ask him, “Why didn’t you like me a little? Why didn’t you know you could have loved me?” (300)

It might be wrong to blame Marion for the car accident that happens when he drives Elena to the airport, but it is good in that the accident puts him under the police guard and Elena back to Eitel. Her meeting with Eitel at the hospital after the car accident is really a very moving one because it causes both of them to change fundamentally. Eitel makes up his mind to take care of Elena and Elena decides to marry Eitel. Not only does she decide to marry Eitel, she decides to change herself as well, as she tells him, “Marry me, oh, Charley, please marry me. This time I’ll learn. I promise I will” (303). After Elena leaves the hospital, Eitel meets her desire to marry him because he believes “if he did not marry her he could never forget that he had once made her happy and now she had nothing but her hospital bed” (303). It seems that Eitel marries Elena out of compassion and responsibility, but the marriage changes Elena to no small extent. She comes to learn to love her husband and children and can manage to be on good terms with her family servants. It seems that she gets herself out of trouble and has a happy life because she has successfully developed “a decent healthy mature relationship” (50) with Eitel, but the fact is that she does not feel really happy, for she gradually finds that she still has some problems she does not know how to solve because she finds that, whatever she does, she always ends up doing what Eitel wants her to do or expects her to do, as she tells him:

We have the baby, and we’ll probably have another baby, and I have good relations with the servants and I do love the dancing lessons, and Charley, I love you, I can tell because I still get sacred at the thought of losing you, but Charley, listen to me, I don’t know if you understand how much I love Vickie, I keep worrying that I won’t be a good enough mother to him, but is that enough? Is Vickie enough? I mean where do I go? I don’t want to complain, but what am I going to do with my life? (324)

To Elena's problem, Eitel does respond, but his response is just a few comforting words because he does not really know how to solve it. He tries his best to comfort her by saying that she has grown so much that there will be no need for him to worry about her any more, and whatever she does, she is surely going to be better and better. But Eitel knows that however he tries to comfort Elena, he is not able to satisfy her because "she had come now into that domain where her problems were everybody's problems" (325). Eitel is not able to solve Elena's problems because he does not really know what one should ever do with his/her own life. If a husband can go to the comfort of his family that always does what he wants after a day of business outside home and go outside to do what he wants after a night of comfort at home, where can a wife go after a busy day of doing housework and taking care of her husband and children inside home? Eitel does not really know how to solve Elena's problems because he realizes that her problems are somewhat, and indeed to a large extent, also his problems. He knows that unless she knows what she can do with her own life, she "would grow away from him" (325) because she will not "be forced to stay out of kindness and loyalty and boredom" (325). Elena's problems suggest that although she can manage to have "a decent healthy mature relationship" (50) with her husband after marriage, she is not able to have her selfhood when she is a wife and mother. It seems impossible for her to have both at the same time, and, therefore, she has to choose one and abandon the other; that is to say, to have her selfhood, as she does when she lives with Eitel and then with Marion as lovers, she can only choose not to have a "happy" marriage and family. That is a contradiction she is not able to solve. She does not like the kind of relationship between her and Eitel and then between her and Marion as lovers, nor is she satisfied with her relationship with Eitel as wife and husband. She is puzzled, and her puzzlement is, to some extent, the puzzlement of every woman because Lulu Meyers is also puzzled with a similar puzzlement.

Lulu is an actress. She first gets married to Eitel. Their marriage is, as Eitel describes, "the meeting on zero and zero" (31), and therefore, it soon comes to an end. She then meets Sergius and falls in love with him. To Sergius, Lulu is quite different from any girl he has known, just as he remarks, "I had never known a girl like Lulu, nor had I ever been in such a romance" (113) because she appears incomprehensibly mysterious and always changes so quickly that he is not sure whether they are "in love or about to break up," whether

they will “make love or fight, do both or do nothing at all” (113). Besides, she is too much self-centered. Sometimes, she wants Sergius to leave her alone, and other times, she will not let him quit her for a moment. He has no choice but “to follow every impulse” of hers (114). However different and self-centered Lulu is, Sergius does not feel unhappy when being together with her, just as he says, “We were great lovers . . . I was superb. She was superb . . . We played our games. I was the photographer and she was the model; she was the movie star and I was the bellhop; she did the queen, I was slave. We even met even to even” (120). It seems that they are in a fully harmonious relationship, but beneath it lies great disharmony. When Lulu suggests that they get married, the thought of marriage makes Sergius “badly depressed” (124) because he believes that Lulu’s self-centeredness will turn him into “Mr. Meyers, a sort of fancy longshoreman scared of his wife, always busy mixing drinks for Lulu and the guests” (124). He wants to be Mr. Sergius rather than Mr. Meyers. He dislikes talking about marriage because it means “death of enjoyment” for him. He does not want to marry Lulu because they are having more and more quarrels than harmony between them, just as he says, “Lulu and I had come to the point where we fought more often than not, and the fights had taken on some bitterness. There were times when I was sure we had to break up, and I would look forward with a sort of self-satisfied melancholy to the time when I would be free” (124). Each of them “looked forward to the separation” (125), but, when separated, they have a strong desire to be together and an equally strong desire for love from each other, just as Sergius says, “Once she was gone, I could not get myself together . . . While she was gone, we were always on the phone. I called her up to tell her I loved her, she called me back half an hour later and we had the same conversation again. So, like the old gypsies who make a sign a hundred times a day, we swore we loved each other” (125).

The separation, however, has very much changed Sergius. He begins to realize that there will be no love without weakness and that he should have loved Lulu and married her. However, somewhat to his surprise, when he proposes marriage with her, she refuses his proposal. Although their love-making makes Lulu “feel like a woman for the first time” (203) and makes them really love each other, just as Sergius says, “I loved her and I think she loved me” (203), Lulu does not let herself turn into Mrs. Sergius; instead, she leaves Sergius and gets married to Tony Tanner to continue her pursuit of selfhood and happiness.

In a sense, Lulu's marriage with Tanner is the result of her rebellion against Herman Teppis, her superior, under whose leadership she works as an actress, because he wants and even demands her to marry Teddy Pope, a homosexual she does not love at all. Getting married to Tanner is Lulu's own choice. It is an indication of her pursuit of selfhood and happiness, but it turns out to be a wrong choice. Although she says her marriage with Tanner is based on her understanding of him, it turns out that she does not really understand him. Although she believes she will be happy in her defiance of Herman Teppis' will, Lulu's marriage to Tanner does not go according to plan. She comes to realize her error, because she feels that Tanner is not the proper man to be her husband. She regrets that she has been married to him. Probably due to her regret, during her marriage with Tanner, Lulu has a love affair with Eitel, who, she believes, is her "big love" (321). It seems that Lulu is capable of choosing her own love and marriage and retaining her selfhood; she, however, does not really know why she is not able to be really happy after she is married, and, therefore, is not what she really wants to be.

Looking back at the love and marriage experiences of Dorothea, Elena and Lulu, three major female characters in *The Deer Park*, we find that they illustrate three alternatives of women in their pursuit of selfhood and happiness in love and marriage, but none of them seems to be an ideal persona. Dorothea chooses to cohabit with Martin Pelly, a man who is much inferior to her, and thereby keeps her selfhood in the end; she loses her selfhood but comes to regain it. Elena chooses to get married to the man she really loves, bears children and lives as a good wife and mother; she keeps her selfhood but then loses it. Lulu chooses to get married to the man she does not really love in defiance of the authority imposed upon her and lives an unhappy life in a childless marriage; she keeps seeking her selfhood but fails to achieve it. Their experiences lead us to wonder: What should a woman do if she wants to have both her selfhood and happiness and "a decent healthy mature relationship" (50) with a man, whether lover or husband, at the same time? What could make an ideal relationship between a man and a woman? Should they live, when they live together, like soul mates, or brother and sister, or husband and wife, or lovers? These are the problems, that the novel suggests, and they are the very problems that Elena confronts and does not know how to solve. Elena's problems are "everybody's problems."

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