

# D.H. Lawrence and the Marriage Matrix



# D.H. Lawrence and the Marriage Matrix:

*Intertextual Adventures  
in Conflict, Renewal,  
and Transcendence*

By

Peter Balbert

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In blessed memory of Bert Balbert (1911–1978), Marjorie Balbert (1911–2008), William Bollinger (1927–2013), and Tracey Lingo (1960–2013)

To my wife, Lynne, and the growing resonance of our own marriage matrix: daughters Rebecca, Rachel, Reika, Risa, and Renna; sons-in-law Jeffrey, Justin, Dillon, and Joshua; grandchildren Emily, Isaac, and Hannah.

Marriage is the great puzzle of our day. It is our sphinx-riddle.  
Solve it, or be torn to bits, is the decree.

—D.H. Lawrence, “On Being a Man”

then I shall know that my life is moving still  
with the dark earth, and drenched  
with the deep oblivion of earth’s lapse and renewal.

—D.H. Lawrence, “Shadows”

True criticism recognizes itself as a form of memoir.

—Harold Bloom, *The Daemon Knows*

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on canvas 31x40 in. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1981.23. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut. Photography Credit: Allen Phillips / Wadsworth Atheneum.

My warm appreciation to the Estate of Norman Mailer for a willingness to permit me to quote from his published work and from published and unpublished letters from Mailer to me. In this regard, I am grateful to Michael Lennon, Mailer's biographer and archivist, and to Susan Mailer, for guidance in this permission process. Copyright © Letters of February 1, 1998 and January 17, 1985 by Norman Mailer, currently collected in *Selected Letters*, Copyright © 2014 The Estate of Norman Mailer, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.

The talented secretarial staff in the English Department at Trinity University consistently has offered me energetic and continued support to put together this complex manuscript on the computer; I especially want to express my gratitude here to Sam Jensen for typing the entire book, and to Sarai Santos-Valle for formatting the work for publication. Reliable additional help was provided by Jesse Martinez and the late Caroline Bonilla. A thank you also to the Office Manager, Ruby Contreras. Finally, let me register my abundant appreciation for the meticulous and judicious proof-reading by Peter Simon; I remain grateful for the incisive professionalism he displayed throughout his work on the manuscript. It is also with pleasure that I acknowledge the consistently capable and well-informed staff at Cambridge Scholars for their efficient guidance and implementation through each step in the publication process: Samuel Baker (contractual); (Victoria Carruthers (editorial); Amanda Millar (typesetting); Courtney Blades and Sophie Edminson (design).

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I must also acknowledge a debt to my brightly and focused students through the years who enrolled in my intense D.H. Lawrence seminar, English-4426. They productively pushed me to clarify and examine my own perspective on his life and art, while they provocatively developed and defended their own exciting and sometimes skeptical "takes" on his genius.

I have also learned much through the years from engaged feedback by colleagues in the D.H. Lawrence Society, as they have responded in helpful ways to early incarnations of my work as it appeared in journals and in presentations by me at International Conferences in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

Finally, a special acknowledgment is herewith given to the late James Gindin of the University of Michigan, who (as Chapter Nine explains) first motivated me (as did the talented poet and teacher, Donald Hall) to study literature, and to the late Harry T. Moore and the late Mark Spilka—both formative influences on my interest in D.H. Lawrence.

## INTRODUCTION

This book discusses eight works of fiction by D.H. Lawrence under the rubric of a dominant and consistent motif in his work that I label “the marriage matrix”. The use here of “matrix” relies on the encompassing use of the term as “that within which, or within and from which something originates, takes form, or develops” (*Webster’s* 835). The gestational resonance of such definition is not surprising on two related levels in any consideration of Lawrence’s life and art: first, his fiction and essays repeatedly shed light on the lingering evidence of his own neo-oedipal connection to the powerful matriarchal figure of Lydia Lawrence; second—and even more pervasively—men and women throughout his work conspicuously strive for organic birth, a struggle that is often initiated by their willing entry into marital union, and is often concluded by an achieved maturity and renewal that link them, through their marriage, to what Lawrence variously calls “the unknown” or “the beyond”. Marriage thus functions, in effect, as both the obsessive subject and the thematic center of Lawrence’s writing, shaping the plots and tensions of his novels and stories as well as reflecting the visionary imperative of the “passionate struggle into conscious being” (Foreword 486) that his characters attempt to achieve. As this volume’s subtitle suggests, marriage also serves as the dramatic intersection for issues of conflict, renewal, and transcendence that regularly inform the crises of his fiction, and also preoccupy him—as man, husband, and artist—during his well-documented and strenuous marriage to Frieda.

I use “renewal” here (see Chapter Ten) in its transformative sense of “to make new spiritually”, to “restore to freshness” (*Webster’s* 990)—a phrase that precisely conveys Lawrence’s mandate for personal growth embodied in his fiction. But the mere achievement of marriage in these works in itself offers no solution or equanimity. The various depictions of unstable marital union, of conflicted engagement, and of manipulative courtship often reflect the emotional deficiencies in the respective partner, lover, or suitor; thus, the matrix consistently highlights transitional periods of immaturity, depression, and codependency—patterns that can lead not to renewal and transcendence, but to atrophy and destructive behavior. Indeed, the fundamental issues at odds within this nexus of themes is best stated by Mark Spilka’s incisive formulation more than sixty years ago:

“So the chief moral criterion for love in Lawrence’s world, or for *any* emotional experience, is this: does it affirm or deny, renew or destroy, the sacred life within us. For it must be made emphatically clear that Lawrence saw all human engagements, sexual or otherwise, in terms of their effect upon the soul’s vitality” (22).

Such a rich matrix of sub-topics highlights the strikingly organic feature of Lawrence’s work, reflecting an authorial linkage across genres that encompasses the thematics, subjects, and emotional urgencies of his fictional and nonfictional prose. This underlying unity in his poetic intuition and philosophic thought remains an unusual opportunity for critical study; it provides an artistic cohesion with accessible and valuable resources for additional speculation and well-grounded argument. It is in this context that intertextual investigation of Lawrence’s voluminous writing supplies interpretive dividends, and especially when the additional material is contemporary with the fiction under discussion. Among the many works by Lawrence I employ to further analyze relevant patterns in selected novels, novellas, and stories are *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, “Introduction to These Paintings”, “The Novel”, “Pan in America”, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, and a wide range of other essays by him, as well as his prolific collection of letters and the invaluable resource material provided by the Cambridge UP biography. These volumes of cathartic correspondence with friends, agents, and editors are justly recognized as among the most insightful and unselfconscious depictions by a major writer of his own intimate feelings and conflicts that we have in literature. They remain crucial in any integrated consideration of his fiction and life.

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. Surely such an approach is not uncommon in Lawrence studies, but what may distinguish my perspective is a form of exegesis that has sadly become unfashionable: a straight-line elucidation in each fictional work of Lawrence’s superb craft built around his calibrated development of those venerable, essential three elements—plot, character, and theme. One looks in vain today for much criticism that permits the Lawrencian text to demonstrate its surprising ingenuity and its careful artifice, and I attempt to redress some of that imbalance in the following chapters. My primary interest focuses on

illuminating the excellence of the fiction, and I stand agreeably guilty of being an advocate, in the Leavisite tradition, for the unparalleled nature of Lawrence's achievement. Let me name my species of criticism as synergistic analysis, an eclectic approach that attempts to productively interface sequential plot development with impinging biography, relevant intertextuality, and authorial doctrine—and all in the interest of demonstrating, in that characteristic Lawrencian phrase, the “livingness” of the respective fiction. It will be evident that my close reading is often very close, occasionally resorting—in the cinematic sense—to a virtual stop-action technique to demonstrate the delicate emotional transitions and/or landscape tableaux that inform Lawrence's creation of a scene. It is important to note that he manifests significant talent as a painter and theoretician of that art, and his unorthodox skill appears as an extension of the kinetic power of scenes in his fiction. Thus several of his paintings reproduced in this volume reflect a sense of harnessed movement suspended between intense moments of live action and in a landscape panorama or a still-life that seems numinously alive with the quality Lawrence calls “applyness”.

In this spirit of full disclosure amid the academy's internecine conflicts over a preferred hermeneutics, I must confess here to the same skepticism articulated by John Ellis on what he calls the “race-gender-class program that criticism should not be concerned primarily with the content of a literary work—its unique stamp, the individual meaning that it makes unlike any other work, the qualities that make readers return to it again and again” (34). In this regard, I hope my speculations on the sexual life of Lawrence and Frieda, on the complex friendships with Cynthia Asquith, J. Middleton Murry, and Katherine Mansfield, on the theoretic research of James Frazer, Sigmund and Anna Freud, James W. Pryse, and Peter Ouspensky, and on the panoply of the marriage matrix—that all this web of relevant reference remains secondary in importance to my commitment to the magic of each Lawrence fiction. This study is primarily focused on a select group of works all completed in Lawrence's last decade during an especially prolific period. The arrangement of chapters follows their chronological order of composition from 1920 to 1928. In my reading of their significance, each work supplies compelling theme and variation within its plot and imagery on seminal aspects of the marriage matrix and related issues of renewal and transcendence, all elements that become more prominent and meaningful through the use of Lawrence's relevant and abundant intertextual material. Although I have augmented chapters since their earlier publication, I have resisted any temptation to radically compromise the original versions of my interpretations with any overly

intrusive ligature through all the essays that might make the matrix more prominent than the “unique stamp”, in Ellis’s cautionary terms, of the individual fiction. In short, the chapters should be able to stand by themselves if excerpted from this volume. In *Out of Sheer Rage*, Geoff Dyer recounts his obsessive and often humorous attempt to write a book about D.H. Lawrence as a “homage to the writer who had made me want to become a writer” (101). Early in the research stages of the project, he expresses his anger at the deadening “hallmark of academic criticism”, with its often mechanical focus on arcane literary theory and its related penchant for alleged objectivity and pretentious lack of enthusiasm. Dyer has no doubt read Lawrence on Poe, as he describes the *corpus* of what that “hallmark” entails: “writing like that kills everything it touches... Walk around a university campus and there is an almost palpable smell of death about the place because hundreds of academics are busy killing everything they touch” (101). It is certainly my not intention to commit the same felony in the following pages.

The word “adventure” is used in the subtitle to reflect a central concept that is inherent in Lawrence’s notion of marriage and maturity. Once again, the formal dictionary definition proves instructive here, with the word derived from the French “*advenire*, to arrive”, and its current usage defined as “an undertaking usually involving danger and unknown risk” (*Webster’s* 17). A Lawrencian character who matures sufficiently will “arrive” at the institution of marriage ready to undertake the inevitable arguments, ego battles, and reconciliations that become intrinsic to any couple’s risky but transformative venture into the transcendent unknown. Recall that when Ursula Brangwen in *The Rainbow* (part of a cyclical work once titled by Lawrence as *The Wedding Ring*) initially realizes Skrebensky’s inadequacy as a marriage partner, her decision is prompted by the realization that “not on any side did he lead into the unknown” (439). But Lawrence’s doctrinal beliefs do not limit the versatility of his craft as an imaginative artist who can tell a great story. The variety of courtships and conflicts in these eight works reflects Lawrence’s skill at reanimating the marriage matrix by reconfiguring and adjusting the plot-lines and visionary imagery to fit the mood and mandate of the work in question. It is in this context that an unnoted yet impressive aspect of Lawrence’s skill resides in the way his obsessional themes—especially the marriage matrix—are absorbed seamlessly into the varied plots and the contrasting circumstances of his characters. Indeed, it may only be in retrospect that the marital motifs became recognized as the consistent and integrative element in so much of his fiction.



The range of such reconfiguration is impressive in itself. In *The Lost Girl*, an unmarried and virginal Midlands woman receives a perverse and life-changing sexual baptism from an uneducated, sensual boy-man whom she marries and then accompanies to his primitive native village in Italy while she struggles to renew herself within this isolated, beautiful, and savage mountain landscape. In *The Captain's Doll*, a retired army officer, is, after the Great War, roused from depression and an unhappy marriage by an intense and embattled affair with a spirited younger woman, as he tries to merge his own personal renewal with the potential marital demands and feisty independence of this mistress after the mysterious and sudden death of his wife. In *The Fox*, an awkwardly callow but persistent young man marries a bisexual older woman after he virtually wills the death of her female partner and then must cope—without confidence or experience—with the sexual expectations and male authority he must fulfill with his wife. In *The Ladybird*, an aristocratic, beautiful, and tepidly married British woman is slowly seduced by an enemy soldier after the war, a grotesquely charismatic officer who perversely renews himself through his gradual seduction of her as he recuperates from his serious wounds while she progressively falls under his spell during her visits to him in hospital. In *St. Mawr*, a middle-aged woman in a fractured marriage leaves her epicene husband in England to undertake a strenuous life in the mountains above Taos, New Mexico—a radical action she takes as her renewal-awareness of the inscrutable “spirit of place” that now connects her directly to the eternal rhythms of the transcendent beyond. In “The Princess”, an embittered but infatuated man proposes marriage to a willful but fragile girl-woman whom he brutally rapes when she refuses his proposal and ridicules his manhood after consensual sex with him—a tragic drama of “nonrenewal” that is played out amid a mountain landscape of fierce grandeur. In *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, the over-protected, insightful, and vivacious daughter of a cuckolded and vindictive minister wisely rejects the conventional marriage proposal of a bland local suitor, becomes attracted to an erotic and self-possessed gipsy, ultimately sleeps with his arm around her without sex and awakens as a renewed woman liberated from the constricted life imposed on her by her family and village.

The last three chapters—within the section entitled “Some Origins from the 1990s”—both span and exemplify my three roles during that decade as, respectively, scholar, teacher, and administrator. They provide additional essays that encompass and anticipate the range of themes stipulated in the title of this book, and years before the development of its design: the first, from the perspective of Lawrence’s influence on a major

contemporary writer; the second, as part of the framing context today of entrenched resistance in the university to notions of transcendence; and the third as a more academic (but presciently relevant) statement on the implications of “renewal” for faculty who must engage the imperative of a consistent record of published research. In retrospect, it seems to me that all three essays—with their roots in the 1990s—suggest in different ways the conceptual origins of this study, and thus I include them as the early incarnations of relevant themes engaged more fully and precisely in the preceding chapters. In a previous book of mine, *D.H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination*, that predated early versions of the three “origins” chapters, I discussed the empathy and acumen of Norman Mailer’s *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971) concerning the narrative technique of Lawrence’s fiction, the existential dimensions of Lawrence’s views on love, sex, and marriage, and the relevance of Lawrence’s novelistic craft and permeative doctrine both for Lawrence’s marriage to Frieda and the formative, intense relationship to his mother. In Chapter Eight I thus take the connection between these two prophetic writers one step further by focusing on a major novel by each of them—Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and Mailer’s *The Deer Park*. On the surface, this last novel by Lawrence would seem a natural “fit” within the stipulated themes of this study. In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* an emotionally scarred and silently charismatic woodskeeper initiates an intense sexual relationship with the titled wife of his paralyzed but cold and manipulative employer: as the affair gradually develops into real love, the couple courageously cling to the possibility of their renewal and marriage within the turbulent and uncertain months ahead. But in addition to a pattern of potential rebirth for Connie and Mellors—well-documented by critics through the years—there remains also this compelling issue of general influence and precise comparison involving Lawrence and Mailer and two major works published about a quarter-century apart.

Both novels encountered significant forms of resistance to their publication: the abrogation of Mailer’s initial publishing contract because of purported impropriety in a scene in the novel, and the legal prohibition of any commercial publication of Lawrence’s novel for several decades because of alleged obscenity. Both novels concern the tensions, commitments, and uncertainties of couples who enact their courtship and passion within plots that emphasize themes evident throughout this volume: infidelity, sexual courage, impotence, and—this above all—a transcendent faith in what Lawrence calls “the unknown” and Mailer describes as the risky arena of “the perilous choice”. I conclude the essay by considering the added evidence of Lawrence’s impact on Mailer that

emerges from some playful but suggestive disinformation published by Mailer to test the alertness of his reading public and, no doubt, to agitate the authority of Lawrence's commentators. He explains this purposeful charade in an intriguing and confessional letter to me, and I quote his revealing remarks to further demonstrate relevant affinities between the two writers and their ideological inclinations. Earlier versions of this chapter have been published in an academic journal, in Harold Bloom's collection of essays on Mailer, and in a yearly journal of Mailer studies. I have revised the essay to make it more relevant to the themes in this book and for the biographical material that has emerged since Mailer's death. Mailer's profound admiration for Lawrence's work also emerges in my chapter on *The Virgin and the Gipsy*: the notion of influence receives added confirmation through an interesting and hitherto unpublished letter to me by Mailer on a relevant theme in that novella that fascinates him.

Chapters Nine and Ten—virtually identical to their initial delivery as presentations in Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, respectively—take on the ambiance of something like a multi-tiered time warp: their preoccupations about the 1990s remain especially relevant today, and in their prescriptive and polemical tone, may suggest, happily or not, future directions within the profession of literary studies. Chapter Nine reproduces without alteration the text of my controversial address in 1996 at the Convention of the Modern Language Association in Washington, D.C. In this presentation, I unapologetically criticized the academy's entrenched aversion to the abstract notion of transcendence in literature and life, and I bemoaned its increasing inhospitability to critical methodologies that employ an empathetic and close textual analysis as a primary mode of interpretation. In the light of the heated responses—both pro and con—that broke out in the audience after my remarks, it was evident that I had touched a raw nerve about several volatile and interrelated topics. I include my comments here because they still conveniently embody—more than twenty years later—a summary explanation of my approach to Lawrence's work, as well as a rumination on the trendy discomfort today with comparable interpretive perspectives. A cathartic letter by Norman Mailer to me about this speech broadens the depressing implications of my concerns. It is noteworthy that both an epigraph to my speech in Washington D.C. and an excerpt from a Lawrence novel in the same presentation, precisely anticipate themes (and even a quoted passage) from this current study before it became my work-in-progress in the following years. Those remarks from the mid-1990s are replete with citations from *Partisan Review* during the last years of its brave and cutting-age tenure as a journal always in the forefront of well-informed and delightfully

polemical responses to the bleak terrain of political correctness in the academy. How we miss the inimitable authority of its corrective and cautionary voice today—although aspects of its preoccupations are excellently engaged by the quarterly of the National Association of Scholars, *Academic Questions*.

Finally, Chapter Ten further documents—with a prescient relevance I could not have anticipated—the extent to which notions of growth, change, and renewal, so integral to the essential doctrines of Lawrence and Mailer—find a place within the formative period of my sixteen-year tenure as Chair of the English Department at Trinity University. Initially delivered as a presentation in 1991 at the International Conference of the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP), in Atlanta, Georgia, and later published in *Innovative Higher Education* (1991), the essay attempts to link faculty responsibility for quality publication with the pragmatic working of an academic department; such integrated issues are further related both to archetypal cases of faculty non-productivity and to relevant etymological forms through literary history of the word “renewal”. Except for some statistical updating in the footnotes, I include this essay with minimal revision.

John Searle writes incisively about an increasingly elusive imperative of literary study, and about the vanishing mandate of a once bedrock notion in higher education:

One of the aims of a liberal education is to liberate our students from the contingencies of their backgrounds. We invite the students into the membership of a much larger intellectual community...one might call [it] an invitation to transcendence. The professor asks his or her students to read books that are designed to challenge any complacencies that the students may have brought to the university when they first arrived there (697).

This “invitation” to study D.H. Lawrence in the university carries with it a special “challenge” to teachers who attempt to illuminate his complex art and alien world of visionary metaphor, doctrinal intrusion, polarized emotion, and reiterated belief in the quest for the unknown. Students often, and understandably, remain perplexed today about the mystic *literalness* (“He really means it?” they ask) in Lawrence’s assertions about the potential link between marriage and eternity—a connection that operates for him as urgent ideal and echoing obsession in all his writing. Certainly, Lawrence’s claims about the transformative aspects of nurturant, non-manipulative sexual intimacy remain out of step with a contemporary culture that promotes hook-up sex and the plastic excitements of cyber

encounters and on-line dating. The realization of the transcendent by a select number of Lawrence's characters functions as an integral pattern of perception that reappears with subtle variation on a basic theme: they perceive the Lawrencian unknown through their awareness and appreciation of the inscrutable power that informs a natural landscape, and/or through their sense of the infinite that is part of a committed, preferably marital relationship between a man and a woman who progress beyond delimiting inhibition and willful need for power and control.

The following chapters attempt to demonstrate the elusive nature of that realization in Lawrence's fiction. But early in his career there is a moment that both defines this ideal and anticipates its centrality in all the writing to come. Recall that poignant and poetic scene in *The Rainbow* when a jovial and mildly inebriated Tom Brangwen presides briefly at the reception after the wedding of his daughter, Anna: with an earthy yet sincere simplicity he describes the marital path to transcendence that Lawrence will rephrase frequently in his work but never renounce throughout his nympholeptic art and his problematic but enduring relation to Frieda. Here, Tom's colloquial and benedictive words embody the heart and soul of the marriage matrix:

“There's very little else, on earth, but marriage. You can talk about making money, or saving souls. You can save your own soul seven times over, and you may have a mint of money, but your soul goes gnawin', gnawin', gnawin', and it says there's something it must have. In heaven there is no marriage. But on earth there *is* marriage, else heaven drops out, and there's no bottom to it” (128–9).

“Your soul goes gnawin’”—and we are reminded of Tom's abrupt decision years earlier to propose to Lydia after their brief acquaintance, prompted only by his “logic of the soul” (40) as he prepares to leave for her home. For Lawrence, the soul is no sentimental metaphor but the indomitable domain of instinct, and the motivational “something” here is inscrutable and palpable at the same time. Such a ringing confidence by Tom in this soulful version of a heavenly confirmation *on earth* presents unimaginative students and logocentric-phobic critics with the major hurdle of suspending their conditioned disbelief to fully appreciate the dispensations of Lawrence's visionary art.

Allan Bloom provides some further explanation for the inherent skepticism of contemporary students—all inheritors of the freedom and openness granted from the sexual revolution of the 1960s, and all witnesses to the current exponential increase in divorce. Naturally, they

remain perplexed about any alleged link between marriage and transcendence:

Many live together, almost without expectation of marriage. It is just a convenient arrangement...To strangers from another planet, what would be the most striking thing is that sexual passion no longer includes the illusion of eternity (107).

Yet to enter Lawrence's fiction with full receptivity to its underlying assumptions, students must recognize the dimensions of its foreign landscape: for him, the radical nature of his belief involves no "illusion". On this seminal issue of encountering the profound otherness of a writer's work, John Ellis—affirming a wise insistence by George Hunter—argues wisely that it is the basic requirement for critics to reflect "an acute responsiveness to a great variety of texts", and he continues with an essential guideline that should apply not only to critics, but to all enthusiasts of literature: "Receptiveness is indeed the key: in effect, a good critic has to be a good listener...acutely responsive to the particular agenda and emphasis of each one" (Ellis 46, Hunter 83). As this study pursues its synergistic mode of interpretation, I try to follow the essential sense embodied in Ellis's directive. But I am aware that D.H. Lawrence remains famously correct to trust only the tale and to be leery of all such well-intentioned protestations by commentators, including my own.

# I.

## **SOME VERSIONS OF THE MATRIX: CONFIGURATIONS AND VARIATIONS**

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE DARK SECRET AND THE COCCYGEAL CONTINUUM, 1918-1920: FROM OEDIPUS TO DEBASEMENT TO RENEWAL IN *THE LOST GIRL*

A certain amount of this behavior does in fact characterize the love of civilized man.

—Sigmund Freud

All I know is: this is bad, and ought not to be allowed.

—Katherine Mansfield

I loathe the ideal with an ever-increasing volume of detestation—*all* ideal.

—D. H. Lawrence

But Love has pitched his mansion in the place of excrement.

—William Butler Yeats

### I

D. H. Lawrence's oft-quoted and nakedly confessional letter to Katherine Mansfield in December 1918 about his continuing susceptibility to the "devouring mother" syndrome must rank among the most self-revealing declarations in literary history by one writer to another (*Letters iii* 302). Yet neither Lawrence's psychological insight nor his risky candor is surprising given the characteristic texture of his work: a consistent and accessible integration of biography and visionary art that remains central to his achievement as man and artist. Those intimate words to a talented and troubled female colleague confirm the critical acumen in Lawrence of a "negative capability" that rivals John Keats and Henry James in its depth of perception and its undisguised revelation of inner demons. The letter, of course, also epitomizes his close and frequently volatile relationship with Mansfield—the neurotic and tubercular wife of his unstable friend-enemy, J. Middleton Murry. Lawrence's comments to her provide a poignant



description of his own struggle for sexual satisfaction and manly confidence amid both the strain of his earlier and well-chronicled attachment to his mother, and the current tensions of his marriage to another powerful and often intransigent woman. He recognizes here a form of mournful symmetry that he glibly describes to his correspondent with recently popular Freudian phrases—"a kind of incest" in "this Magna Mater" pattern—and he brazenly includes Mansfield and Murry within the purview of this complex codependency, maintaining that this pathology "seems to me what Jack does to you, and what repels and fascinates you" (*Letters iii* 302).

Despite his significant disagreement with the research of the early psychoanalysts, Lawrence understands that both sexes can suffer from variations of this incestuous pattern; he also insists, in such works during this period as *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and "Democracy", that men and women must retain the innate, organic capacity to emerge from a "mechanical principle" into a fulfilling sexual maturity (*PU* 14). While his optimism stands in stark contrast to the litany of symptomology and pathology he excoriates in the classifications of bedrock Freudian theory, Lawrence acknowledges to Mansfield that there is "much truth" within the arc of his own psychosexual development as a young man in the "mother-incest" idea; he openly indicts Frieda in this same letter as a "devouring mother" figure who persists in denying him the freedom "to take this precedence" in their relationship (*Letters iii* 302). Lawrence then unequivocally states his guiding belief that "men must go ahead absolutely in front of their women, without turning around to ask for permission or approval from their women" (*Letters iii* 302). He unapologetically regards this male primacy as crucial to the essential narrative and ultimate longevity of any marriage. The battle for its achievement—with appropriately as many wins as losses—makes up the livid narrative of so much of his fiction and his embattled life. In this heated context of the gender wars, Lawrence's further comments remain remarkable for his willingness to unselfconsciously define the most personal implications of any rupture in a woman's willingness to "yield some sort of precedence" to a man (*Letters iii* 302). Given the stated complaint about Frieda, his even more intimate accompanying words willingly invite Mansfield to ponder the problematics of his own marital bedroom: "it is awfully hard, once the sex relation has gone this way, to recover. If we don't recover, we die" (*Letters iii* 302). Surely Lawrence must sense—amid such sensitive details about the state of his mind, body, and marriage—that Mansfield's ultimate loyalty will be not to him but to the unreliable and dangerous Murry. Yet in late 1918, Lawrence's own accumulated frustrations,

combined with his genuine empathy for Mansfield's physical and emotional plight, have prompted this cathartic and unnuanced letter.

His purposeful and presumptuous use of "we" to her is by no means casual or generic. It suggests Lawrence's awareness that Mansfield's fraught connection to an often choleric and narcissistic husband resembles the anxieties inherent in his own troubled relation to Frieda. In effect, Lawrence exempts none of the four principals in these two embattled marriages from his scorn, for neither has found a way to alter the persistent rhythm of maladjustment so caustically described in the letter. What has precipitated this adumbration and self-accusation exactly at the end of the war, as he now vents some bitter private truth while the world breathes again after four years of suffocating death and destruction? Lawrence's frank complaints about his wife and about his own inability "to recover" are understandable in the context of impinging issues earlier in the fall of 1918 relevant to the immediate circumstances of his life and creative work. His repeated conflicts with Frieda over what he regards as her excessive preoccupation with her children and with the postwar condition of her German family—all this discontent reaches a climax with her decision not to accompany him to London, precipitating what Kinkead-Weekes pertinently describes as "their first deliberate separation since she had demanded a London flat in 1915" (482).

While clearly upset over Frieda's lengthy absence, Lawrence surprises himself with an especially productive use of the imposed independence: in an intense several weeks of new projects and major revisions, he completes a radical restructuring of *The Fox*, finishes "John Thomas", and writes several essays on "Education of the People".<sup>1</sup> This lengthy version of the novella is notable for the emotional difficulties it dramatizes that contribute to Henry Grenfel's unwillingness and/or inability to undertake the masculine lead that Lawrence mandated in the letter to Mansfield.

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1. "Education of the People", completed in the same month (December 1918) that Lawrence writes the revealing letter to Mansfield, functions as a sustained doctrinal assault on many aspects of modern society, focusing on the leveling-down and mechanized quality inherent in the English state school system, family unit, political leadership, and social organization. These integrated polemical pieces also contain hyperbolic expressions of similar sentiments conveyed to Mansfield about the devouring mother: "There should be a league for the prevention of maternal love, as there is a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals" (*EP* 121). With its additional descriptions of the imperatives of male primacy, and its rhapsodic emphasis on instinctual self-awareness as a path to transcendence, this series of essays, in effect, recapitulates in embattled prose several of the themes I examine in *The Lost Girl*.

Although Henry establishes an effective single-mindedness in his successful courtship of March, his initiative and his eagerness are awkwardly compromised by pervasive insecurity about the looming prospect of sexual intercourse with her. He manifests an immature preference for a romantic connection to the older woman that appears more like an adolescent and voyeuristic projection of Lawrence's hated "kind of incest" (*Letters iii* 302) than an adult and phallic passion for a female object of desire. The final conversation between March and Henry indicates that he is perplexed about defining the direction of their marriage, and March seems ambivalent about offering him the Lawrencian "sort of precedence" in their future life together. Like the wounded author who created him, Henry may find it "awfully hard, once the sex relation has gone this way, to recover" from whatever experiences have deprived him of the confidence and energy required for male assertion. In many ways, the uncertain conclusion of *The Fox*, with its fearful and irresolute young man, anticipates—as I will later demonstrate—the final scene in *The Lost Girl*, but with one compelling difference: in the latter novel, an empowered and determined wife tries to invigorate her depressed and frightened husband as he leaves for war.

In that same seminal letter to Mansfield—who increasingly serves in this period as a sounding-board for his turbulent feelings and literary theories—he reveals that his emphasis on the embattled dialectic of his married life is now complemented by nothing less than a reprioritizing of the goals in his writing: he grandiloquently defines his objective as the need to push the boundaries of consciousness across the limits of narrative convention: "If one is to do fiction now, one must cross the threshold of the human psyche" (*Letters iii* 302). From Lawrence's doctrinal perspective, this radical intersection will extend beyond any customary novelistic preoccupation with the dictates of mind and the platitudes of idealized emotion. This new ambition will reflect an attempt to portray in fiction the deeper realms of instinctual desire, and will even further extend the politic boundaries by engaging issues of anal sex and purgative domination. His next major work of fiction after this declarative letter to Mansfield, *The Lost Girl*, illustrates the significance of breaching the psychic threshold in terms that are brazenly psychosexual as well as intimately physiological—comprising, in effect, a significant radicalization of material relevant for the development of the two major characters and for the emotional state of Lawrence through the winter and spring after the war ends in November 1918. Kinkead-Weekes is incisive in his summary of Lawrence as writer and man in this resonant period. He persuasively describes a direct linkage between the difficulties in Lawrence's marriage and the announced

objectives of Lawrence's art evident in the patterns of revision that he imposed on earlier versions of his work: "There is no doubt that the dispute with and separation from Frieda refocused very sharply the equilibrium between man and woman which *Women in Love* and *Look!* had celebrated and forced him to rethink the importance of maleness in ways which would also have political implications" (483). Before I engage with some of the thematic and biographical issues revealed in Lawrence's composition of *The Lost Girl* in the first half of 1920, important events in 1919 have a distinct bearing on that novel. Once again, the issues involve Mansfield and Murry.

## II

Early in 1919, Lawrence is pleased when Murry suddenly invites him to submit essays to *The Athenaeum*. After this mercurial editor fails to respond to the follow-up query about suggestions of topics to consider for the journal, Lawrence's long-simmering distrust of his friend's character and motivation becomes more heated. Only recently recovered from a near fatal case of the flu, and deeply unhappy with Frieda's impatient and allegedly unsupportive treatment of him during his lengthy illness, the reestablished connection to Mansfield permits Lawrence to complain again to her about his wife. His anger distinctly recalls the emasculated tone and substance of the letter about "a kind of incest" the previous year; however, he now sounds more recognizably not like a lover-husband but as a disconsolate son threatening to run away because of unjustified punishment by his mother. The tone remains immature and unpleasant: "For it is true, I have been bullied by her long enough. I really could leave her now, without a pang, I believe. The time comes, to make an end, one way or another" (*Letters* iii 337). In 1921, Lawrence will experiment in *Aaron's Rod* with the consequences of such abrupt abandonment, and this conclusive action never comes close to fruition in his legal union with Frieda. Yet the bottom-line preoccupation with his rocky marriage and vulnerable malehood is strikingly prominent from 1918 thru 1920. Whether in the letters he writes to Mansfield or in the stated revised emphases undertaken in his fiction, the stakes that involve notions of "the devouring woman" motif are perhaps more urgent to him during these months than when he famously engaged these concerns more directly as a young and healthy man writing *Sons and Lovers* nearly a decade earlier. Lawrence's struggle for confident independence and literary achievement—as Norman Mailer so eloquently speculated in 1971—is linked inexorably to the state of his organic health and his sexual performance, as

well as to the well-chronicled hothouse of oedipal complexity that encompassed his formative family life.<sup>2</sup>

His ego and judgment take a major hit when Murry rejects all but one of his essays, and this oddly unanticipated action leads to a period of Lawrence's serious estrangement from him and Mansfield. He then makes an adamant decision (soon to be broken!) to never submit any future work for publication to him. By late June of 1919, the now affable Murry decides to join Lawrence and Frieda near the Hermitage; he mentions nothing to them about the rejected submissions as he dutifully searches in the area for appropriate long-term lodgings for his increasingly ill wife. With notions of male authority a more prominent theme in his art and life, Lawrence then meets the smart, unconventional, and engagingly sensuous Rosalind Thornycroft Baynes, who is separated from her husband and heading toward divorce. Lawrence's developing attraction to her in the months ahead—an infatuation evident in many letters and in periodic encounters with her and her accompanying children—will culminate in a brief, passionate, and (for both of them) memorable affair in the summer of 1920; their romance is reflected obliquely in some of Lawrence's finest poetry, and more directly and more recently in a private account written by Baynes (née Thornycroft) and published by her daughter.<sup>3</sup> But this consummated liaison, perhaps the only persuasively corroborated instance of infidelity on Lawrence's part, remains more than a year ahead. In this intense summer of 1919 Lawrence and Frieda continue the contested patterns of their volatile marriage. Revealingly, Lawrence offers no

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2. See Mailer's rumination in *The Prisoner of Sex* (134–160) on Lawrence's fiction and its resonant, often poignant connection both to his marriage to Frieda and to the lingering effects of his intense relation to his mother. I analyze Mailer's treatment of Lawrence more fully in *D. H. Lawrence and the Phallic Imagination*.

3. This fascinating, privately published volume, *Time Which Spaces Us Apart*, provides a well-written and persuasive account of Rosalind's family as it emerges from the relative placidity of the Edwardian era into the fragmented culture of post-war England. More precisely, it captures the zest, disappointments, and independence of Rosalind's life through the cycle of her deteriorating marriage, friendships, affairs, and later years of family and profession. The slowly-developing relationship with Lawrence, and the gentle but frank conversation with him that immediately preceded their initial sexual intimacy, are chronicled in Baynes's notebook with admirable tact and reticence, concluding with that memorably understated line, "And so to bed" (79). Some of Lawrence's finest poetry in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* offers oblique insight into the erotic context of their affair and its understandably bittersweet effect on each of them when they parted.

objection to Frieda's emphatic desire for a separate room, for "both of them felt they needed independence" (Kinkead-Weekes 517).

In the fall of 1919, Lawrence refuses to accompany Frieda to Germany, and during this separation he again works diligently and effectively, completing small but important final revisions of *Women in Love* as well as composing an illuminating Foreword to that major work. Among the most provocative changes in the work are several images and gestures in the Saracen's Head scene between Ursula and Birkin that clearly connect Lawrence's developing ideas on malehood with his recent reading of J.M. Pryse's theories about the function of a distinct pattern of nerve centers called *chakras* that exist in the human body. Pryse's work popularizes the potential for a stimulative cosmic energy described in ancient Hindu physio-neurology that is called *Kundalini*. He builds on this set of beliefs to develop an even more codified range of neural receptors in this sensory system. The most essential *chakra* is located at the intersection of the buttocks and lower spine—that "darkly independent mystery" of Birkin that Ursula virtually adulates as a living totem of her lover's power and authority: "Unconsciously, with her sensitive finger-tips, she was tracing the back of his thighs, following some mysterious life-flow there... It was here she discovered him one of the Sons of God such as were in the beginning of the world" (*Women in Love* 313).<sup>4</sup>

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4. Miles's solid essay gives a clarifying summary of Lawrence's use of Pryse's Hindu doctrines and their relevance to controversial scenes of sexual passion in *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Although he avoids all discussion of *The Lost Girl*, he provides an intelligent guide to a range of responses by critics to problematic issues of sexual arousal and phallic penetration in those two novels. In a more elaborate, wide-ranging, and debate-styled response to perspectives on anal eroticism in Lawrence's fiction by G. Wilson Knight, Frank Kermode, Colin Clark and George Ford, Mark Spilka also does not consider *The Lost Girl* in his illuminating defense of Lawrence's "normative" appropriation of the anal erogenous zone by lovers in several of his major novels. In one provocative departure from a critical consensus, Spilka writes—in opposition to Lawrence's belief and to many of his commentators—that "anal mysteries are not deeper than phallic: they simply originate earlier in infantile development when we first experience bodily shame and self-doubt" (*Renewing the Normative* 106). Spilka's sweeping notion fails to address the liberating aspect of this "mystery" for Alvina and Ciccio at key moments in their affair. Even Daleski's essay on "encoding" *The Lost Girl* is not concerned with the coded indications of the coccygeal nexus; he limits his analysis to a focus on Lawrence's conflicted depiction of female orgasmic power. Such a topic remains relevant in that novel—but its meaning cannot be addressed without consideration of the anal sex that Ciccio initiates. Similarly, while Widmer engages the general issue of sodomy in Lawrence's