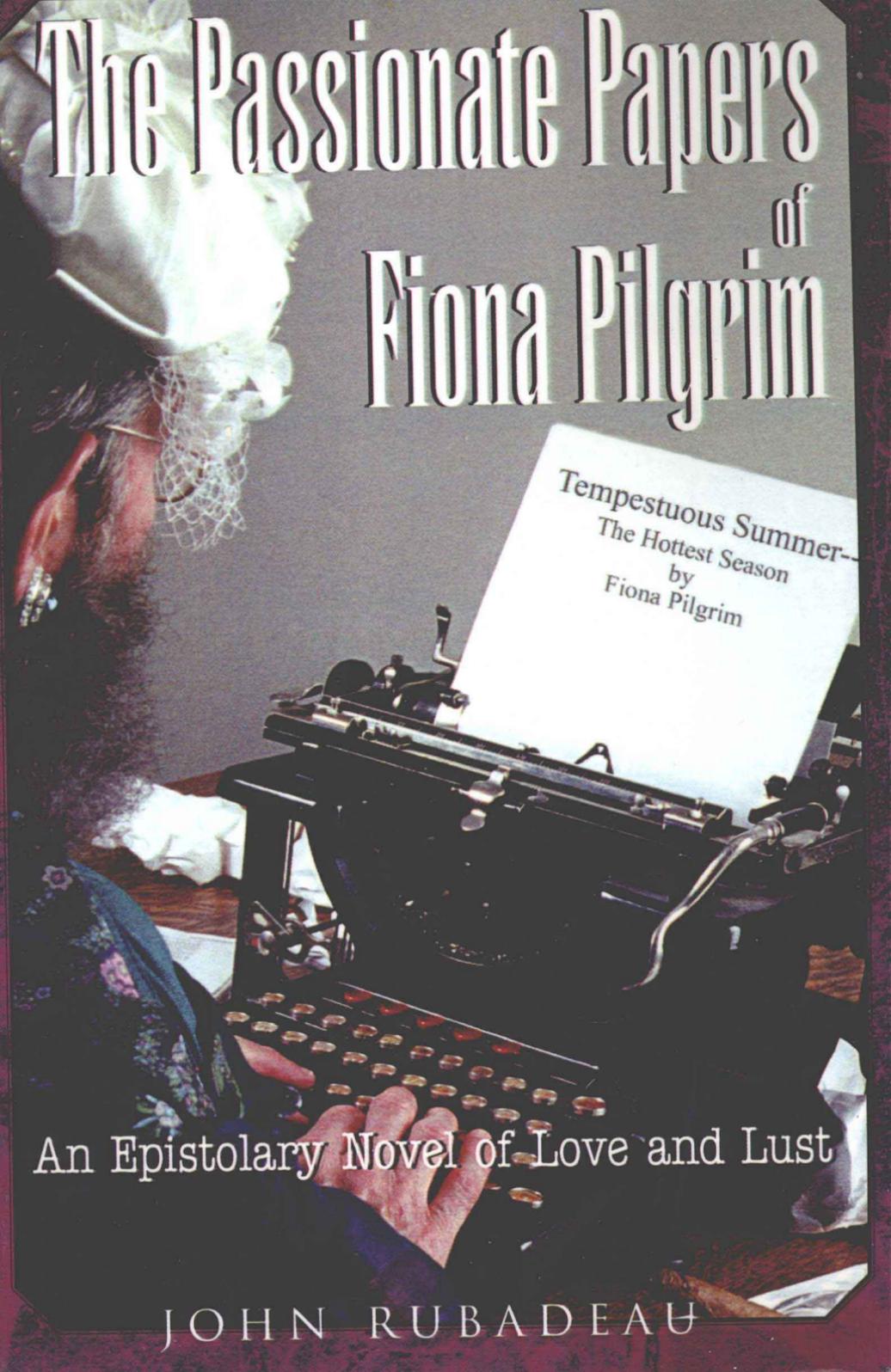
A woman wearing a white lace mask and a dark, patterned dress is seated at a vintage typewriter. She is typing on the keyboard. A sheet of paper is inserted into the typewriter, displaying the title and author of a book. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The Passionate Papers of Fiona Pilgrim

Tempestuous Summer--
The Hottest Season
by
Fiona Pilgrim

An Epistolary Novel of Love and Lust

JOHN RUBADEAU

A woman wearing a white lace mask and a dark, patterned dress is shown from the side, typing on a vintage typewriter. The typewriter is black with a sheet of paper inserted. The paper has the title and author's name printed on it. The background is a dark, textured surface.

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Joe Leonard has problems. His writing has cost him his marriage; his job selling insurance is costing him his sanity. Looking for a sinecure to support his literary efforts, Joe decides to write romance novels. To better his chances of getting published, he, under the pseudonym Fiona Pilgrim, writes to June Featherstone, the doyenne of romance novelists, to enlist her support and guidance. Through an exchange of letters, June mentors Fiona. By the concluding chapter of Fiona's novel, *Tempestuous Summer—The Hottest Season*, the two correspondents have grown to admire and respect each other. Friendship has blossomed. However, unless he expeditiously does away with Fiona, Joe will soon be exposed as the fraud he is, and his chances for publication—but more importantly his chances for love—will be forever lost. Joe Leonard has problems.

John Rubadeau teaches at the University of Michigan.

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*An Epistolary Novel
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For

M. H. Kruchten

A dear friend who, with such good-humored grace and such lively wit,
played June Featherstone to my Fiona Pilgrim

and

N. S. Milam

But especially for

L. I. Leon

and

R. D. Pace

and

P. M. Prahin

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English Department
Barker Center, Harvard College
12 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
December 01, 2001

To the reader:

I was asked, several years ago, to contribute an article to a festschrift celebrating a colleague's fiftieth year of teaching at this institution. In search of a fitting topic for such a tribute, I began by consulting that corpus of scholarship which had—over the passing years—particularly attracted my attention. While rummaging through several boxes containing essays that I had read and had valued for their literary merit, copies of dissertations that I had directed, and various sorts of scholarly articles that had piqued my research interests, I stumbled upon the most interesting find.

Amongst the boxes of literary memorabilia was one containing a sheaf of letters written (and received) almost two decades ago by my old college roommate and lifelong friend, Joseph E. Leonard. Joe had, for reasons known only to him, sent these letters to me for safekeeping; his ultimate design in placing them in my care went to the grave with him.

I have contacted Joe Leonard's heirs, and they have willingly given me permission to publish their late father's correspondence. The letters appear in their unedited form, and I have ordered them chronologically. My only original contribution to the text is the epigraph from Boccaccio, a passage which, in view of the subject matter treated in this epistolary exchange, I consider to be particularly felicitous.

No further commentary seems necessary save to observe that I took much greater pleasure in compiling this collection of my old friend's letters than I did in researching and writing the essay I eventually contributed to the festschrift.

Sincerely yours,



Gordon K. Douglas
Professor Emeritus

Therefore I mean to atone for the wrong done by Fortune, who is ever most miserly of comfort where there is least strength, as we may see in the case of delicate women. As an aid and comfort to women in love (for the needle, the distaff and the winder should suffice the others), I intend to relate one hundred tales In these tales will be seen the gay and sad adventures of lovers The ladies who read them may find delight in the pleasant things therein displayed; and they may also obtain useful advice, since they may learn what things to avoid and what to seek. Nor can all this happen without some soothing of the melancholy.

from the foreword to
The Decameron
of Giovanni Boccaccio

May 1, 1982
2801 Hoosier Rd.
Centreville, IN 45480
U. S. A.

Ms. June Featherstone
Harlequin House
Silhouette Lane
Fensucked-on-Strand
Ely, Cambridgeshire
England

Dear Ms. Featherstone:

Honestly, I just don't know how to begin this letter. I feel like a nervous young coed about to discuss a poorly written essay with her English professor. I feel like an aspiring pianist rehearsing for a recital she is about to give for the legendary Horowitz himself. I feel like a puny sapling struggling to grow in the shade of a giant tree: I am the tiny acorn; you, the great oak. I consider you to be the greatest living author of romance fiction, my absolutely favorite genre. From the onset, I want you to know that I have read—many times over—every novel you have published. I think you are a marvelous writer!

I'm sure you must get thousands of adulatory letters similar to mine each year from your admirers all around the globe. Yet I'm crossing my fingers and hoping against hope that, by some quirk of fate, you'll somehow read my letter to its conclusion and be moved enough by its contents to come to my aid. (Before continuing, let me interject that, in addition to having read with so much pleasure every word you've ever penned, your writings have continually been a major source of inspiration to me.) You see, Ms. Featherstone, I am much like that young pianist, nervously fingering the keyboard while making ready to audition for Horowitz. I am an aspiring writer who seeks the tutorial help and expert advice

which can only be had by studying under a giant oak such as yourself.

It is for this very reason—to place myself under your nurturing tutelage; to grow, as it were, under the spreading boughs of your authorial foliage—that I write this letter. Of course, I'm not so naive as to expect you to read, or much less respond to, my letter. I suspect that, due to the heavy volume of correspondence you must daily receive from your legions of readers around the globe, my request will fall on deaf ears. Nonetheless, if by some miracle you've read my letter to this point, let me get to the heart of the matter which has prompted me to write to you today.

Ms. Featherstone, I shan't mince my words. Allow me to speak frankly. You are no stranger to me. Having read all of your books—beginning with *Sultry Heart* (1958), your highly acclaimed first novel, and ending with *Quickening Pulse* (1982), your most recent and, in my opinion, your finest work to date—I feel as though we've become old friends through the succeeding years; I actually feel as though I know you personally. I do not wish to impose on our friendship, but might you, as a favor from one friend to another, allow me to send you some selected passages from a work-in-progress? Would you agree to look them over and make any comments or suggestions that you deem might be helpful? Failing that, could you at least take time out from your busy schedule to tell me how one “breaks” into the field which you—unopposed and unchallenged—so masterfully command? What *is* the best method to use when approaching an editor or a publisher with my manuscript? Oh, if you would ever respond positively, I should be forever grateful and eternally in your debt.

Well there! I've done it! I never thought I could summon up enough courage to approach someone of your stature and beg for this sort of help. I apologize for the impudent (Should I have perhaps written “imprudent” here?) nature of my request. But, Ms. Featherstone, I am so desperate!

I want you to understand that I am a serious writer, interested in her craft. Although I've never yet submitted anything for publi-

cation, I have allowed my husband to read my manuscript, and he has judged it to be “. . . gripping and moving.” And he’s very well read.

I shared several selected passages of the novel I’m presently writing (tentatively titled *Tempestuous Summer—The Hottest Season*) with Mildred Milloy, my bridge partner and the moderator of our branch library’s weekly book-discussion club. Millie critiqued the segments I had given her and commented that they struck her as being, “. . . divine and heart-rending.”

Furthermore, my high-school English teacher once told my mother at a PTA meeting that I had “a gift” for writing. So I’m pretty sure I can write pretty well, and I consider my literary efforts—although assuredly crude in comparison with your refined prose—evidence of my earnest commitment to strive to attain the same niche in the world of books that you have chiseled out for yourself.

A word or two about my novel, just in case you are willing to take on an apprentice and permit her to learn her trade by working under the guidance of a master craftswoman such as yourself. My novel, *Tempestuous Summer—The Hottest Season*, is about a desperate search for true and abiding love in an exotic setting and about how a young woman finally finds the happiness she is seeking when she becomes meaningfully involved with an extraordinarily wealthy man. He may be an OPEC oil sheik, but I haven’t yet decided on that. However, I have resolved to make him enormously rich and swarthy, but certainly nothing more than Mediterranean swarthy, if you know what I mean. They meet during the summer—hence, the title. And their relationship up until the dénouement is quite stormy—hence, another part of the title. It is quite a sad story. I myself cried buckets when I reread the rough draft, and that should mean it’s good, don’t you think?

Well, I’ve certainly overstayed my welcome at Harlequin House and taken much too much of your time. I apologize. Forgive me, but, at the same time, don’t forget me. I must run now, for Peter Paul, my hubby, will shortly finish work and return home, famished

and complaining of hunger pains. The boys, Paul and Peter—twins, age eight and mirror images of their father—will soon burst into the kitchen, home from their Cub Scout meeting and ravenous and ready to eat. I'm a den mother, but we have, thank God, rotating meetings. This week, the little rascals are meeting at another den mother's home.

Thus, I can steal a few moments to drop you these many lines. However, I'll soon have to bring this letter to a close, for Priscilla, age twelve, our pudgy princess and a darling (mother's little helper!) will pop her head in the door any minute, pouting because dinner is not yet on the table and over a half an hour has passed since she engorged her after-school snack. Having always been petite and having never been more than a size six, I can't imagine how a daughter of mine could eat so much. I swear the child has an insatiable tapeworm.

I simply must bring this letter to a conclusion and get dinner made and the table set. (A woman's work is never done!) I must lay down my pen, pick up my spatula in its stead, and prepare something to eat. Please—from the bottom of my heart, Ms. Featherstone—oh, please answer my query. I shall be eternally grateful to you.

Can you—will you—oh, do give me some direct aid. Or, at least, steer me in the proper direction and recommend an editor, a publisher, or an agent for me to contact. I await your reply. And even, Ms. Featherstone, if I never hear one single word from you, I want you to know that I've already dedicated *Tempestuous Summer—The Hottest Season* to you.

Humbly and very sincerely yours and forever in your debt if you will but grant me my dearest wish,

Fiona Pilgrim

Fiona Pilgrim