Introduction

In the Presence of Audience

The Self in Diaries and Fiction

“Women have to be cautious in any century... husbands may expect diary privileges” (Blodgett 1988, 57). The male “privilege” of reading, judging, and perhaps even amending diary entries makes women vulnerable to their control, makes them “cautious” of exposure, and makes them talented in both writing and concealing themselves and their lives in text. Whereas men often write diaries of their public lives, and often for publication, women historically wrote from the personal sphere of their lives, making all the more risky their depictions of themselves on the domestic front. In both American and British culture, even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, dominant culture holds that the husband wields not only domestic and economic power but inhabits the center of his wife’s social and sexual life. Any woman’s refutation of those suppositions, especially in a diary, which traditionally, though not accurately, has been deemed both private and true, places the writer in the precarious position. “What could a poor fellow do with a wife who kept a journal but kill her?” (Buller in Simons 1990, 18).

With husbands and lovers as audiences, it can hardly be news to women readers and writers that the diary obscures much. My early interest in this study was to examine diaries of women writers whose husbands did indeed read their diaries to find the effects of such scrutiny on their process, their style, their textual production of self in the diary. What in their more public fictions seemed sublimated in the so-called private text? To choose the diaries to explore, I read many wonderful modernist British diarists, seeking women writers who shared similar cultural and literary contexts but who also exhibited various diary-writing strategies and fictional explorations. Most important, I looked for diarists who knew that their husbands had access to their diaries and read them at least occasionally.

To examine the important issue of audience effect on diary texts, I analyze diaries written by three exceptional women writers living in Britain
at the turn of the twentieth century: Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Violet Hunt. All three of these women were published, respected writers, and all three wrote diaries that their husbands read. In my probing, however, I found that audience presence was not simple. Because I necessarily researched diary texts written by published writers, I found that their fame in the literary circles of modernist Britain brought them additional audiences—and they knew it. Each woman at some point in the diary worries that her journal will find a public place in years to come, instincts borne out by eventual publication. To illuminate the difficulties women writers face in relation to male readers at home and in publishing houses, I chose Doris Lessing's fictional *The Golden Notebook* to provide the conclusion for this study of women's diaries. Her use of diary fiction structurally and thematically deflects her own authorial presence through Anna Wulf, a diarist narrator, powerfully exposing what a woman confronts when she seeks to write about herself and her experience in ways that threaten her masculine audiences. Closing so dramatically, I hope Lessing's experimental dispersal of diaries and selves will emphasize the powerful leverage an audience has on autobiographical writing, diaries in particular, and the difficulty of drawing “strict demarcations between autobiography and fiction” (Hetata 2003, 125).

**Audience and Publication Details**

The risks of exposure were real for these writers, as the husband/editor ensured the publication of these “private” diaries. Indeed, Woolf, Mansfield, and Hunt all had their diaries published, edited, and amended by their husbands, “destined to play in autobiography the Cinderella to the literary prince, the heroine to the editorial hero” (Personal Narrative Group 1989, 37). With regard to these three women, only Hunt’s 1917 diary was published by someone other than her mate, though his name as coauthor ensured its publication. Woolf’s and Mansfield’s diaries were published posthumously, and Hunt’s *The Desirable Alien* was written at her “husband’s” request with publication in mind. Thus, men exercising editorial control partially shaped the women’s accounts, especially at the initial publication. By writing a fiction about diaries, Lessing sublimates her own voice in favor of Anna Wulf’s, therefore dispersing her authorship in narrators and fictionalizing the dilemma and the consequences of writing a diary sought out by male readers and editors. Lessing thus far has avoided a husband/editor’s shaping and defining her diary texts, planning to have her own diaries published posthumously.
Death makes diaries available to more public audiences, unless diarists choose publication in their lifetime. Only Hunt agreed to the 1913 publication of her travel diary with Ford Madox Ford, her disputed husband but definite lover. Woolf’s diary was first published thirteen years after her death in 1954, edited by Leonard Woolf and called *A Writer’s Diary*. The five-volume *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Anne Olivier Bell, is considered complete and is the text I primarily used. Woolf’s early diaries, edited and published in 1990 by Mitchell E. Leaska under the title *A Passionate Apprentice*, were also useful. Katherine Mansfield’s diary, called *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, much expurgated, was first published by her husband, John Middleton Murry, in 1927, just four years after she died. In 1954 Murry offered what he called the “definitive edition” of *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*. The huge mass of papers that comprised Mansfield’s private writings had not until recently been published in their entirety, but I was able to analyze both Murry’s *Journal* and Margaret Scott’s *Complete Notebooks*. My study of Violet Hunt’s diaries depends primarily on two very different texts: *The Desirable Alien at Home in Germany*, a travel diary “coauthored” and edited by Ford Madox Ford, and *The Return of the Good Soldier: Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt’s 1917 Diary*, edited by Robert and Marie Secor and published in 1983. The latter, even though Ford receives authorial credits, is entirely Hunt’s diary, written in the waning days of their relationship. Each husband edited and wrote as his lifework. Editing their wife’s work, even her “personal” work, seemed a given.

With readers in mind, Woolf, Mansfield, and Hunt create diaries that simultaneously erase and multifoliate selves, that evoke shifting images of the world as the persona herself shifts and recedes, vanishes and reappears. The writers break what Woolf calls the “moulds” of autobiography and fiction and enable readers to find, but not confine, the deviser of the diary. These women aim to protect themselves and have their say: “The ‘protests were not silent. Many were subtle, many tentative . . . there was a price to pay” (Schenck 1989, 211). Each writer cleverly negotiates the terms of her own self-text. Because the women write adeptly, their manipulation of language contrives to personate their conventional roles as women, yet to speak “between the acts,” as Woolf would have it.

The diary text then acts as a site for the writer’s tension, rebellion, and remaking of self. Though the writer carefully constructs the self on the page, she gives herself power through the act of writing. As “‘that shrewdly innocent breed, those secret exhibitionists’” (Godwin in Simons 1990, 2), diary writers bare and cloak themselves in diary text. With an audience certain on the domestic front and potential on the literary front, these diarists use their talents to rhetorically shape self-identities in
literary production. All four diarists—including Anna Wulf—write texts that conform to traditional expectations of diaries, yet all four writers—five if we include Lessing—also write fictions within the diaries: practice fictions, fictionalized autobiographical stories, literary characterizations, and prosaic musings.

The proliferation of genre within the diary, as well as the contested literary definitions of the diary, necessitate some theoretical grounding as to the traditions and more current thinking about this subset of autobiographical writing. After laying the groundwork for the presence of audience as a paramount concern, I introduce the diarists within these theoretical contexts. I close the introduction by brief suggestions as to the ways of reading diaries to uncover the strategies diarists use. In the Presence of Audience then properly begins, letting the diarists have their say, create themselves textually, and elude the dominion of others who seek to define them.

Traditional Conventions of the Diary Genre

By looking first at the traditional literary understanding of diaries, more mythical than borne out by experience, then at actual writers’ rearrangement of conventions, we see the diary not as a factual document but as “liquid literature” (Marcus 1988, 118).

Autobiography traditionally was seen as a masculine genre designed to record the public lives of important men. From St. Augustine’s and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s classical and historical definitions of autobiography as “confession” to Georges Gusdorf’s more recent work defining autobiography as self-narrative, critics tend to divide diaries into categories of “private” for women and “public” for men. The literary public historically saw a man’s diary as more historical than psychological, a subgenre, important only as a precursor to the published work or a factual record of a man’s public experience. Women’s diaries, “private, domestic, and psychological, were thought to conform to the . . . banal elements” (Raoul 1989, 58–61) of a woman’s life. Thus, “girls” in their adolescence were encouraged to keep “nonproductive” diaries as an accomplishment, something like needlepoint, that did not take away from their femininity but could embellish their routine domestic duties. This traditional denigration of the diary as a genre of men’s rough drafts or young girls’ unsophisticated craft limited the study of diaries as literary or social texts and promoted traditional myths about diaries.

Although no two critics perceive the diary genre in precisely the same way, traditional definitions support notions of writers with authentic fixed identities writing diaries in private with no sense of audience, who never-
theless write with a sense of historical realism. William Matthews’s 1977 article on diaries notes their critical neglect and attempts to define them as a “daily record,” “normally formal and regular in style” though lacking in “pattern and design” and “personal . . . in that it envisages no external audience” (286–91). In 1999 Edward Seidensticker insists that the diary is “self-centered writing . . . different from both autobiography and memoir. . . . By virtue of being a record of daily events it is obviously more detailed. Much of it is by nature trivial . . .” (47). He, like many endeavoring to theorize the diary, operate under assumptions more personal than critical. Current and astute theorist Lawrence Rosenwald also defines the diary too narrowly, but his definition does serve to acknowledge the generic assumptions traditionally made about diaries, the form of “personal” writing that “in form . . . is a chronological ordered sequence of dated entries addressed to an unspecified audience” (Podnieks 2000, 29).

Critics understandably face problems of definition because of the sheer diversity of kinds of diaries—their varying degrees of privacy, fictionality, and reflexivity. Formulaic definitions do not stand up well when applied to specific diaries. But in an effort to bring autobiography, and by extension diaries, to some degree of respect as a literary genre, critics define forms, terms, and writing circumstances, however erroneous. Elizabeth Podnieks says, “The issue of genre authenticity is linked to the question of whether the self can ever be known and whether it can be rendered accurately, if at all, in words (5).

Current Trends in Theorizing Diaries

Of course, claims of authenticity and the knowable “self” seem outrageous to those of us well versed in poststructuralist theories. A full historical mapping of the way the “self” and “text” have both undergone scrutiny and dispersion is outside the focus of this introduction. It is important to note, however, that what Eakin calls “possessive individualism” has increasingly shifted in favor of more relational, cultural, and communal constructions. Early diary critics such as Elizabeth Bruss suggested that diary texts acted as “mirrors” of experience, but in seeking to formulate “constitutive rules” for a diary to “count” as literature (1976, 8) destabilized the self by emphasizing its variable and creative possibility. Bruss attacks the “faulty or naive assumptions” that compromise autobiographical understanding; she emphasizes the way the diary’s language distorts self-images as the writer reimagines the self on the page. The diary writer’s multiple readings of herself, fixed and unfixed, fill the diary pages; she tweaks images of the self as she imagines the shadow reader riffling the diary’s pages. Thus, although
Bruss conflates writer and self, it is performative, constructing a form with aesthetic possibility, not an iconographic image of the writer.

Endeavoring to work through the paradox of autobiography as “self-expression,” a site where identity and narrative too often function as whole, Barry Olshen proposes that critics distinguish between subject as “center of awareness,” “persona” as that “entirely constituted by discourse,” and the difficult term “self,” which is “connected to both the subject and the text” (1995, 8–9). Theoretically astute, Olshen’s careful definitions rely on shared assumptions about autobiography and the self. Given the critical debate, these shared assumptions are all but impossible. The self as lived experience in specific contexts continues to flourish, even for the wary scholar who mistrusts “[t]he ideas of truth and judgment, [which] are, perhaps, more radical, enduring, and valuable than late-twentieth-century postmodern theory has credited them with being” (Parke 1996, 91).

The debate surrounding autobiographical criticism of all types is political—related to self and cultural definition, to class, race, and gender—the ontological state of being. Noting the issues surrounding “both the form and content of diaries,” Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff enter “those debates by highlighting a genre that challenges boundaries and enhances transdisciplinary thinking” (1996, 1–2). Diary criticism suggests that many women from medieval days to our own twenty-first century write diaries that interrogate self and culture and “break all the rules” (Walters 1987, 90).

Theorizing Audience

The diary labors under the continuing assumption—even among sophisticated readers—that it is primarily private, a claim about which I am skeptical. Even in “private” autobiography, the question of narrative cannot be separated from the question of audience. But many theorists only reluctantly acknowledge the profound effect of audiences, potential or real, on diary writers. Bernard Duyfhuizen continues to assert that diaries are “assumed to be private texts written only for the writer’s eyes” (1986, 175) but acknowledges that diaries are “culturally coded” (ibid.). Theorists increasingly note the existence of diary readers but more generally point to the writer’s “conformity to the dominant ideology” (Davis 1987, 8), on one hand, and her topics “muted, masked, or ignored” (Chevigny 1983, 77), on the other. Yet the diary writer’s conformity (or not) may dictate that she “mask” the contradictions in so-called private text. Gradually critics of autobiography have, though sometimes reluctantly, acknowledged the audience of so-called personal writing. But so often the audience imagined is ambiguous and general.
Judy Simons argues that women often imagined audiences but still wrote to “unburden themselves . . . informed by seclusion and their response to it” (1990, 6–8). Except in her analysis of Fanny Burney’s work, Simons assumes an audience only vaguely imagined. Blodgett notes in her *Centuries of Female Days* that many diaries were made available to readers but directs her own study, paradoxically, to those she assumes were truly private (1988). Both Simons and Blodgett include Mansfield and Woolf in their excellent studies of diaries, but make the similar assumption that Mansfield and Woolf wrote in privacy to produce art in diary form.

Acknowledging very real audiences of many diary writers, Lynn Z. Bloom interrogates the “popular perception” that “privacy” is implicit in the genre. Bloom writes: “Indeed, it is the audience hovering at the edge of the page that for the sophisticated diarist facilitates the work’s ultimate focus” (Bunkers and Huff 1996, 23). Bloom emphasizes the diary’s becoming a “public document” saying “once a writer, like an actor, is audience oriented, such considerations as telling a good story, getting the sounds and the rhythm right, supplying sufficient detail for another’s understanding, can never be excluded” (25). In this instance Bloom turns the perception of the audience into a positive force necessary to change personal chroniclers into writers. The aesthetic qualities of the diaries under study certainly point to that function.

Many critics of the autobiographical see art as incidental to the personal. Georges Gusdorf, for example, sees autobiography as a “a work of personal justification” (1980, 115) but assumes a masculine writer in his studies. Nancy Miller notes that for women autobiographers “justification” is an added trap. A woman who writes about her unorthodox life doubly violates “masculine turf” (1980, 263). Thus, the limitations a writer imposes on her text and the fictions she inserts may be a direct result of the need to be cautious in relationships with another who maintains an authoritative stance. In essence, any woman writing against the grain of social conformity writes a hazardous political diary. Political diaries can be dynamite, presumably because the text makes the aberrant writer vulnerable to exposure. And what wife can doubt that marriage is one political staging ground in the battle between the sexes?

**Husband**

I do not see husbands as the enemy, certainly. In the diaries under consideration, only Lessing’s fictional husbands and lovers act like looming spies and dominating controllers. But husbands nearly always hold more power than the wives would willingly concede, and this is certainly the
case for Woolf, Mansfield, and Hunt. Not least, the pressure of the marriage and the husband does not come from the husband’s impositions but from the wife’s internalized desire to be a more ideal wife than is actually possible. Still, it would be foolhardy to deny the real risk of a husband’s reading diaries for evidence of his wife’s true and personal life.

To a husband (or father) who reads a diary, an entry detailing the smallest indiscretion may seem unorthodox and radical, a violation that warrants censure or punishment. This reading makes diaries dangerous documents indeed. A woman writer, who for a myriad of reasons may seek approval from the men in her own domestic and literary sphere, writes in peril when she writes a diary. As Bloom persuasively argues, “When such readers [as husbands] lurk at the writer’s elbow, welcome or not, there is no way to rule out self-censorship” (1996, 24). Each diarist writes experience and performance in the context of deeply ingrained cultural impositions of the proper role and behavior for women. More directly, tension escalates when someone else who ironically assumes that diaries are private and self-revealing reads the diary to discover the “truth” of the writer’s experience. Diaries are rarely safe from intrusion. Most diary writers learn to be cautious.

Mansfield, Woolf, and Hunt (even in her 1917 diary) all admit sharing parts of their diaries with the men in their lives; in each case, the ever present “husband” who had “diary privileges” was enough audience to caution them to a careful construction of their diary configurations of identity. Lessing’s Anna Wulf dramatizes this struggle. In becoming aware of an audience who reads—or might read—her text, each woman confronts limitations by using writing strategies to deflect the reader’s gaze, to “drop a safety curtain over ones [sic] private scene” (Woolf 1984, 323), yet to write creatively of resistance.

The invisible enemy in the diaries of Hunt, Mansfield, and Woolf is not really man but man’s disapproval, which inevitably results in loss for women. These women fear exposure because of the consequences, both imagined and real, of revelation. As Lessing points out in her later fiction, what women experience in patriarchy is confined neither to one literary or historical period, nor to one country. Women, automatically outside the symbolic order, are vulnerable to the power of masculine erotics and economics. The outside place of women inflects their texts: “What is expected of this individual, as manifested in this self-narration, for him or her to ‘count as’ a person?” (Eakin 2001, 117).

Women of talent especially find they must maneuver carefully to achieve in a world of men quick to judge, quick to take offense. If they are writers who privilege their writing over feminine roles of nurture and
conciliation, their very articulation becomes a trespass on masculine privilege and control. But in heterosexual or bisexual women, the pressure of culture is intensified by their own desire. The strength of those largely unequal cultural ties becomes the pressure of audience when those men are readers, or potential readers, of the diary that is inevitably but inaccurately perceived as the “true” text of self-identity.

This pressure from male audiences who wield various kinds of power urges women writers to shape fictional selves that conform to dichotomous cultural expectations. Diary writers, as autobiographical subjects, find themselves “on multiple stages simultaneously” (Smith 1995, 110), caught in an ideological double bind, as it were, to maintain modes of social and moral conformity as well as to speak out and assert themselves. In this interplay between a woman’s particular perspective on truth and her imaginative interpreting of material (i.e., her design), woman diarists both defend themselves against the possible censorious displeasure of her reader or readers and also create personae she wishes to present to the world and to herself.11

Literary Coterie:
Competitive Presence Who Looks for Female Weakness

Because of the importance of audience on discursive practice, I examine within the studies themselves the shaping presences of husband/audience/editor and the literary world of men who write “the avalanche of books” about women (Woolf 1929, 28) in the “red light of emotion and not in the white light of truth” (33). In response to these critical audiences, each diarist writes, but each within a different set of social conditions that determine the varied audiences in her purview. As educated women they must have been aware of Rousseau’s call to “girls” to ask themselves “How will your discourse be received?” (1979, 11) Certainly they shied away from sharing their diaries with people other than their husbands. Modernist literary rivals traded diaries, asked for sections of diaries, and the like. Mansfield, for example, told Woolf she would send her part of her diary, and when she didn’t, Woolf asked her again. Woolf apparently read portions of E. M. Forster’s diary on a regular basis and regularly read portions from diaries of others in her world. Woolf was reticent about sharing her own diary with friends, however, and Mansfield resisted, too, never sending Woolf her diary. Nevertheless, the care these diary writers take intimates their awareness of diary “discourse” as “received” texts. “The importance of the audience, real or implied, conscious or unconscious, of what is usually thought of as a private genre cannot be overstated. . . . Friend,
lover, mother, God, a future self—whatever the role of audience assumes for the writer—that presence becomes a powerful ‘thou’ to the ‘I’ of the diarist” (Culley 1998, 218).

Internal dramas arise from the ethical propriety to write “authentically” while all the time knowing that as women they operate within institutional, cultural, and discursive categories. As literary women they occupy positions as both the writer and the subject, narrator and character of the diary. In each case the writer feels the stakes of self-revelation are high, thus they compose proliferations and evasions, maneuvering and creating the performance of self, “[t]he woman, protective, secretive, places the needs of others before her own, accustomed to her mysteries which man has feared; and the creator, no longer able to contain her discoveries . . . people so ardently pursued,” negotiating the “battle” between the “impulse to give and the impulse to hide” (Nin 1983, 381). In the process the diarist constructs “a one-woman show” (Miller 1988, 261).

Annette Kolodny argues that Virginia Woolf, for example, “anticipated the male reader’s disposition to write off what he could not understand” (1985, 155); this anticipation of skewed male reading may have encouraged the subtexts within the diaries. These subtexts surface more clearly in fiction, within the more public scenes that dominate the diary entries.

Because of the importance of Hunt, Mansfield, and Woolf as literary figures, the stature of their husband/editors, and the availability of their published diaries, I am able to look for the threads of audience pressure and intrusion in these diaries. I compare the stories told there to the stories of their lives published in biographies, memoirs, and their other literary works. Although the group under study is small and select, the influence of audience on their diaries suggests that women—or men under someone’s power—take great care with depictions of the self. Those that don’t should exercise caution. Who wants trouble? Who wants to be controlled? Better deflect the taboo, the unauthorized, to fiction.

The Place of Fiction and Biography

The writerly design of Woolf’s diary prompts questions as to whether Woolf’s diary is not entirely fiction disguised as autobiography, something we might ask of Mansfield and Hunt as well. The mixing of fiction and autobiography illuminates the imaginative perception of selves, what Lessing’s Anna calls “one’s self direct . . . one’s self projected” (Lessing 1973, 571). Inevitably, with readers in mind, projection and direction of selves combine, fancifully.
Because these writers alter the diary form, projecting the self to accommodate their potential audience intrusions, readers of diaries must look beyond the diary itself to edify the life of the diarist. In Woolf’s case and in Mansfield’s and Hunt’s, we can widen our search for a full textual rendering, if not the “truth,” of their lives. This broadened search must include published writings juxtaposed to the diary in order to locate the marks of erasure and censure, the fictional posturings, the imaginative renderings. For example, adjoining Woolf’s autobiographical renderings in the diary to her published fiction, essays, and memoirs permits readers to discover the gaps in the diary text, the misleading cues of Woolf’s speech in the diary compared to the subtle but articulate voice elsewhere. By using Woolf’s other works to gloss the diary, we discover the emotionally charged rendering of “dark recesses” that Woolf writes in “fiction, making up my scenes again—however discreetly” (1982, 145). Woolf writes in her diary: “I wonder . . . whether I too, deal openly in autobiography and call it fiction?” (1978, 7) She asks the question rhetorically, knowing her proclivity to “break every mould & find a fresh form of being, that is of expression, for everything I feel & think” (1978, 233). This search for form and expression of feeling and thought brings Woolf, Mansfield, and Hunt together in a shared cultural literacy and literature.

In each body of works, diaries included, these writers negotiate the artist’s elaborative and imaginative portraits of personality within specific historical and cultural contexts. Their quests for expression as “modernist” writers and their reticence and inhibition as women in early-twentieth-century culture create pressure within their text. Each woman thus negotiates art and experience in imaginative fictions, gaps, masks, and sites of “reservation” (Woolf 1982, 178). This art of mediation is adjusted in ways that suit her own literary practices and her own perception of how she wishes her readers to view her. The gaze of her audience intensifies her awareness of “cultural context” as she strives for agency in difficult social and literary contexts. Both Woolf and Mansfield at times observe a fragmenting self and use the diary to build an illusory wholeness. Less radical, Hunt subverts the writer’s conflict through a carefully constructed persona in carefully devised narratives or “stories.”

Virginia Woolf

I begin the book by investigating the diaries and fictions of Virginia Woolf, who performs in her diaries not as actress but as stage manager—directing spectators to images of her world, to characters she creates. She positions herself within the managed stage, always trying for an external
focus. A picture of Woolf emerges as a woman searching for the perfect articulation of a reality both aesthetic and real, in the full knowledge that any such rendering will be wanting. Woolf notes that “the only exciting life is the imaginary one” (1980, 181). She eloquently describes her world in artful images, recounting and fictionalizing simultaneously, perhaps willfully dispersing a representation of herself in the process.

Woolf represses much of a Virginia she disparages, choosing to negate as well as to “remake” the self. She glosses over the pain of her childlessness, for example, and the terror of her madness, which she calls “these curious intervals in life” (1980, 214), shying away from her own images of self and the multiple contradictions of character. In her diary she asks: “But how queer to have so many selves—how bewildering!” (1982, 329). Woolf knew she created plural selves in a diary spanning so many years, but Leonard created one presentation of Virginia in his one-volume edition, *The Writer’s Diary*; in the many diary books themselves, Virginia composes a series of carefully chosen self-portraits of many selves, one of whom is narrator of the diary.

When Woolf says, “I like masks. I like the disorientation they give my feelings . . .” (1982, 139), she acknowledges her proclivity to hide, to disperse herself into the “impersonality” she sought throughout the diary. Leonard’s role of husband/reader and “nurse” (Ozick 1990) may have encouraged Virginia’s strategies of hiding and dispersing the narrative “I.” Leonard encouraged Virginia to keep a diary early in their marriage, when recurring bouts of madness beset her. Virginia documents and seems to approve of Leonard’s “diary privileges,” but his sometimes oppressive presence accounts for many of the silences within the diary. As she aged she exhibited a heightened sensitivity to writing a diary that others would possibly scrutinize. Her increased fame widened the scope of audience interest in the diary she kept for more than twenty-five years. Yet in all those years of diary writing Woolf admits she employs “reserves & subterfuges” (1982, 277). “For Woolf, human nature is a hidden nature . . . human nature figures itself female—misread, misused, taken for granted . . .” (Benstock 1988, 11). Woolf writes knowing, as do other diarists, that a reproachful reader painfully cuts off thought and disclosure. Woolf’s particular audience included a concerned but controlling husband and potentially the scornful literary scions of the age. When as early as 1920 she writes, “I can’t help suspecting that both Mr & Mrs Woolf slowly increase in fame” (1978, 80), she hints at a future audience that may increase to include a reading public. Shortly before her death in 1941, for example, Woolf writes a series of rather superficial descriptions of unimportant events, then says, “A psychologist would see that the
above was written with someone, & a dog, in the room” (1984, 351). Even though she learns to write “around” an audience, she feels the weight of the burden of an audience quick to criticize.

A question difficult to answer, of course, is how much repression and inhibition in a woman’s diary is conscious and how much is an unconscious product of her upbringing? Leslie Stephen, Virginia’s father, read and judged all she wrote as a child and adolescent, prompting Virginia to write anything remotely personal in the diary under a pseudonym of “Miss Jan.” Lyn Lifshin notes: “Those who had diaries violated when they were children...tended to express few personal feelings in the diaries they keep now, let alone sharing them” (1982, 17).13 Indeed, even as an adult Woolf questions: “[H]ow far it is permitted to go here in indiscretion?” (1978, 77).

Early experiences with her father’s supervision did not actively inhibit the act of writing the diary, but rather taught her techniques to have her say while protecting herself too. Certainly her willingness to share her diary with Leonard in the early days of their marriage seems straightforward, Virginia having learned to use language and story in her service. Thus her diary, written over a span of twenty-five years with various audiences in mind, endeavors to give form to that which she perceives at the expense of self-depiction.

Woolf’s artfulness in both style and content cleverly and engagingly deflects attention away from herself and onto the artifact of the diary itself. Many critics see Woolf’s diaries as primarily an experiment in writing.14 Podnieks notes, however, that “for Woolf there was little distinction in her conception and execution of the myriad of genres she employed, including the diary, memoir, biography, essay and fiction. . . . Woolf emerges from her diary as one who, in the spirit of modernisms, made her life and work ‘new’” (2000, 98).

The great critical acclaim accorded Woolf’s diary is due primarily to her images, her portraits of others, and her witty depictions of the antics of Bloomsbury. “It was the canvas on which she painted her self-portrait of an artist” (Podnieks 2000, 99). Of course, just as the diary transcends simple personal renderings, Woolf’s diary transcends simple “rehearsal” and artistic portrait. Woolf’s ability to impart a fictional quality to the diary’s reality, to use language to construct and deconstruct meaning simultaneously overturns traditional readings of the self as authentic and unified. We can therefore see Woolf’s construction of the diary as a site for an artful structuring of both autobiographical and fictional selves.
Katherine Mansfield

Unlike Woolf’s controlled and aloof performance of self, Katherine Mansfield’s performance runs the gamut in her diary: She’s a mimic, ingenue, prima donna, tragedian, and comedian. She turns personal flamboyance and malaise into theatrics; she channels experience and emotion into fictions, sometimes losing herself in the process. She says: “I positively feel, in my hideous modern way, that I can’t get into touch with my mind. . . . I can’t ‘get through’” (1954, 133). Mansfield’s separation from a secure sense of self comes about from a sense of exile and a subsequent eagerness to please at the expense of self. A strongly rebellious and cunning personality, she refuses to conform to cultural dictates but insists on the appearance of conformity. This insistence further complicates Mansfield’s sense of the woman she is. She relies on performance to gain audience approval using her exhibitionism to mask the insecure woman circulating within the text.

Consisting of pages replete with partial fictions, scattered fictional autobiographies, poems, and drafts of letters, Mansfield’s chaotic mass of papers seems a reckless obfuscation of the woman who writes the entries. Far more than Woolf or Hunt, Mansfield makes use of textual fragmentation and unstable generic discourse to obscure the self and critique culture. Yet all of Mansfield’s manipulation and self-negotiation take place in full view of her audience. Mansfield early grasped the importance of the diary text as controlled self-exposure and opened her diary to several lovers. Ultimately, her lover/husband Murry became her primary audience, and his presence contributed to her rather artfully performed shadow play within the journal.

Rather than repress the staged self as Woolf and Hunt do, Mansfield mimics male expectation, and her posing leads to an expressed anxiety about her identity. She, like many women before her, “ventriloquates’ male ideologies of gender while allowing alternative discourses of ‘experience’ to erupt at the margins of meaning” (Nussbaum 1988, 149). The spaces Mansfield’s personae inhabit most comfortably are those of writer and wife. Her greatest sense of achievement comes as a writer, yet she guiltily measures that achievement against what she perceives as a failure to care properly for her husband, Murry. However, her many fictions within the text strongly depict women’s confrontations with the cultural expectation of marriage. Her insistent writings and reconstructions of herself as the women and the men in her fictions point to her resistance to containment, her desire to be more, to exert more power. She feels outside the culture she inhabits, but she feels she must beguile her colonizers, and she does.
The roles Mansfield chooses to play in her life and in her diary demand a degree of self-censorship in her journal. She writes in February 1922: “I am a sham. I am also an egoist of the deepest dye—such a one that it was very difficult to confess to it in case this book should be found” (294). Mansfield vacillates within the diary about the degree of audience intrusion she allows. She sends diary entries to Murry, writes him letters within the diaries, gathers parts together for publication, and writes to “plant cuttings of futurity” (179). She still insists, however, that her notebooks are “really private” (255). Her heightened sense of self-drama leads inevitably to her public sense of the journal; she adopts the role of actress to hide her performances. But hide she does, noting in June 1919, “Often I reproach myself for my ‘private’ life—which . . . would astonish even those nearest to me” (165). Certainly she ignores much of this “private” life in the journal, conforming rhetorically to cultural expectation as far as she is able; precisely because Mansfield sees her journal as public in some sense, she creates fictions to confront the culture that wishes to limit her. She chooses to censor and masquerade rather than to rebel openly. The price of difference is too high for Mansfield.

Mansfield's experiments in self-production couple with Murry's editorial censorship to manifest a textual Mansfield who conforms to the social codes for women of her world, a conformity that her published fiction, her letters, and her biographers overturn. In reading Murry's edition of his wife's Journal, it might seem that Murry, even more narrowly than Leonard Woolf, sought to present his wife in texts of strict social conformity. Murry's choices for publication present a tightly focused Mansfield, one closely conforming to the brilliant writer, the idealized woman of Edwardian England, beset by illness but little else. But Mansfield textually creates such poses, shaping herself. Murry chooses representative diary entries in what is now fully published in fifty-three volumes. But he does not edit her sense of herself, and critics who earlier implied that he did “were cruelly unfair to him,” or so says Scott, the editor of the complete manuscripts (2002, xvii).

In my study I find it was indeed Mansfield who practiced those censorships, fictions, and elaborations in her diary aimed at producing a conventional rendering of a woman surrounded by controversy and change. Mansfield searched for innovative ways to insert less conventional selves within the diary without exposing herself to censure, disrupting her text in innovative fragments and unpublished fictions and poems to confront the very culture, and sometimes the man, she was intent on seducing.

This need to simultaneously seduce and undermine her male audience points to Mansfield’s acquiescence to an identity that, as for many women,
depends on her relationship to men. Though we see a profound bisexual presence in early diaries, she succumbs to the heterosexual cultural “overvaluation of Love” (Horney 1967, 209). She says, “I live upon old made-up dreams; but they do not deceive . . .” (70). In her diary Mansfield writes her dreams, and to some extent they do deceive. Even in her “private” journal Mansfield twists in the wind between self and male perception.

Violet Hunt

Though Mansfield seems overwhelmed by the “ideal” of love rather than an actual obsession with a man, Violet Hunt’s narrative tells the story of a woman who willingly displaces her sense of self in her life and her text to reinforce the masculine dominance of her lover/husband Ford Madox Ford. Whereas Woolf represses sexual suggestiveness in her diary and Mansfield sentimentalizes “love,” Hunt seems to lose an elemental part of herself in creating a textual persona Ford can dominate. The Violet in the text acts out the role of young wife under the tutelage of a stronger, more vital, man. “Love, along with domesticity and beauty, creat[e] the traditional boundaries that mold and define women” (DuPlessis 1985, 126). Hunt in many ways seeks to break through the “traditional boundaries” confining women. But in 1911, when she writes Desirable Alien with Ford, Hunt boxes herself in by obsessively loving Ford; as her later 1917 diary shows, she nearly eradicated her sense of selfhood in her desire for marriage. Their travel diary serves as an ideal text for Hunt’s uneasy self-displacement in her life with Ford. She creates a persona of a rather naive storyteller, pleasing Ford and other audiences, yet penetrating the plot with a subtext of doubt and alterity using the external details of nature, history, and anecdote to do so. Using her artistry as a writer in this diary, Hunt exposes the ambivalent role of a woman who supports and subverts prevailing mythologies about love and romance and marriage.

Hunt closely follows the conventions of both Victorian travel diaries and modernist impressionism in Alien, acting on Ford’s suggestion that she record their travels in Germany. Travel diaries differ considerably from traditional generic definitions of diaries; consequently Hunt’s early diary varies significantly in form from Woolf’s organized, carefully chronological diary and Mansfield’s chaotic and sporadic diary. Still, like the two of them, Hunt uses her travel narrative to structure her experience enigmatically, to write impressions with various audiences in mind and yet have her say as well. She makes use of the conventions of narrative to create a text of the ideal that collides with actual experience. Travelers wrote Victorian travel diaries—for specified audiences; with publication in
mind; as a metaphor of exterior and interior voyages; as juxtapositions of experience and emotion. Given the odd circumstances of Hunt and Ford's travel in Germany, Hunt follows the Victorian honeymoon travel diary conventions as well. "Expectations of transformation for both men and women were played out against, and worked through, in terms of specific geographical sites . . . " (Michie 2001, 232). Hunt's diary endeavors to satisfy these generic expectations, enjoying her playful role as "wife," while subtly exploring the darker aspects of the journey.

Much of the charm of Hunt's text arises from her "surrender" to experience while maintaining an appropriate independent stance tempered by her husband. Hunt's persona bows in a double surrender to a foreign culture and to a patronizing husband, while Hunt herself adeptly controls the conventions of the text to assert a feminist apostasy. In Alien she maintains a dual allegiance, writing to woo Ford and to mount her own subtle insurrection. She succeeds in writing within these conventions a humorously engaging text of idyllic marriage and adventure in a foreign land, with subtexts that critique both English and German patriarchies. Even as she charms her readers, her ironic, playful persona violates the panegyric overlay of the journal. Deflecting criticism, she speaks through a comic, resistant, and disobedient persona that seemingly allows correction by a higher, Germanic and masculine authority.

By creating a persona who both is and is not Hunt, much as Mansfield creates many personae who are and are not Mansfield, both women challenge "the assumption that honesty lies in personal revelation" (Gilmore 2001, 24); rather, their integrity as writers demands that they become more, or larger, than life. Negotiating the course of multiple audiences, Hunt tells her own story within a text of contradictions, gaps, and uneasy juxtapositions. As a unified narrative, Alien is quite different from the form and content of Woolf's and Mansfield's diaries. Alien, however, conforms to audience expectations of a travel diary, yet, in ways similar to the texts of Woolf and Mansfield, Hunt's text fictionalizes experience. When Edward Garnett says of Ford that "[f]acts never worry Joseph Leopold much!" Hunt responds, perhaps to her own writing method, as much as to Garnett's criticism, "And why should they? [Facts] were made for slaves not for gipsies; for policemen, not for authors. Truth and fiction are all one—part of the cosmos . . . (Hunt 1926, 209). Writing in a modernist aesthetic, aware of similar literary and personal audiences, Hunt, Mansfield, and Woolf use "facts" to serve the fiction of their diaries, writing not self-texts so much as their "cosmos."

In writing her 1917 diary, however, with the promise of love gone, Hunt exhibits the "typical traits" of "repressed power and actual powerlessness . . . the bitterness of a person prevented from full fruition"
Hunt’s two diaries, so different from each other in content, form, tone, and perception of audience, both constitute textual reproductions of a woman’s complicity in social expectations. The latter diary documents the sometimes disastrous consequences of that complicity. In Alien, Hunt romances her readers to idealize a relationship and a journey. In a transitional text, a historical/autobiographical fiction coauthored by Ford and called Zeppelin Nights, Hunt further idealizes her Ford persona but also records the beginning of the end of their affair. Even though Zeppelin Nights is in no sense a diary, it becomes useful in tracing the progression of Hunt’s depiction of her relationship with Ford and in introducing the tone of desperation that surfaces so monstrously in her 1917 diary. Because the 1917 diary differs dramatically from all the other diaries in this study, it functions to show a diary written with little interest in placating a husband or appealing to audiences.

Hunt’s 1917 diary replicates in excruciating detail a text written at the expense of self, where fictions within the self-text no longer enliven, placate, or communicate. The power of the text comes from the depictions of fantasy, not pleasurable daydreams, but the “classic female fantasy—a jilted woman dreams of her lover’s return” (Coward 1984, 204). Classic, too, are the fantasies of love turning to those of revenge. The harsh light of reality illumines the emptiness of these fantasies as Hunt vacillates between writing entries entirely for herself and writing excerpts to show Ford in order to woo him again or to punish him for his refusal. She writes to uncover man’s inhumanity to woman, to justify her own ills. Like Mansfield, Hunt fluctuates between desire and hatred for the man who fades from her life. Unlike Mansfield, who sometimes uses her journal to shame Murry for his neglect, Hunt has lost Ford as an audience; he cares little for her or her writing. The stark, blunt “monodrama” of the 1917 diary exhibits the loss of a lover, the loss of her audience.

Doris Lessing and Anna Wulf and Ella

I close this book with Lessing’s metadiary, The Golden Notebook, because it amalgamates the plethora of techniques that constitute diary discourse and then explodes them all. The structure of Lessing’s novel denies the reader’s quest for “the real,” questions the myth of privacy, and insists on a commonality of experience over individual experience. These themes emphasize the force of cultural imposition on women, not woman. Lessing sees individual experience as inevitably representative of culturally forced roles. In Lessing’s subversions and obfuscations we find Mansfield’s proliferating fictions that disallow reductive readings of per-
sonality, what Lessing calls “naming.” In the yellow notebook we see
Anna’s rewriting in a fictional story her struggle as a writer and a sexual
being; her blue notebook or “diary” evades such topics. Lessing thus tex-
tually plays out Woolf’s practice of writing fiction to mediate autobiogra-
phy. Lessing structures her novel to include autobiographical fragments,
diary entries, fictions within fictions, and dream litanies—all in note-
books that overlap and compete in a reader’s search for authentic identity
and truth, forever withheld. And in Anna’s libidinous complicity with
men, with her desperation for their approval despite efforts to subvert
them, we see Mansfield and Hunt.

Importantly for this study, Lessing/Anna/Ella’s texts exhibit a height-
ened sense of audience, of women editing their own experience, and of
textual fluctuations women design to conceal and reveal. Lessing themat-
ically and structurally confronts women’s fear of exposure and depicts
their courage in writing texts conventionally read as revelations of their
unmediated consciousness, “a vertical thrust from consciousness down
into the unconscious” (Olney 1980b, 239). Lessing discloses the process
of writing as inevitably mediating between experience and audience,
between caution and revelation. The “I” fractures under Lessing’s textual
negotiations, refusing any notions of a wholly contained self. Her book
interrogates the voyeuristic temptations of readers eager to limit meaning
and confine the author. As Anna’s narrative illustrates, inevitable tensions
surface between cultural taboos and literary tact, between composing and
exposing, and between otherness and complicity within culture. Lessing,
as do the three diary writers within this study, finally lets the narrators
speak their voices in contradiction, in fictions, in many-layered narra-
tives—forcing the audience to abandon the search for the authentic
woman and exhorting them to view the performance.

Reading Strategically

Andrew Hassam writes that the publication of a diary changes its status
from private text into literature.15 We readers, however, enjoy “the feeling
of the voyeur, peeping around pages as if they were curtains, searching out
the secret thought and life recorded on the private page” (Duyfhuizen
1986, 175). This reading of diaries “as if the illusion that it is possible to
communicate with an essential self through writing were not an illusion”
(Hassam 1987, 442) limits the reading of a diary to a search for an authen-
tic self that cannot be represented textually. To avoid our own hastening to
judge and to give integrity to our own place as audience intent on the
voyeuristic pleasure of personal text, we must try to be adept readers: hear
the chorus of contradictory voices and see the kaleidoscopic images twist in the fictions, anecdotes, characterizations, poems, and other narratives within the diaries. These voices and images make art and perform the self in myriad ways, both before and behind the curtain of self-censure.

To avoid the control of others—rhetorically and otherwise—these diary writers write in counterpoint, each maintaining an integrity as a writer, as an artist, as a woman living in particular contexts. Whereas the men in this study read—and published—their wives' and lovers' texts in ways specific to their time and place and their relationship with the writer, I read these women's diaries as a woman reading other women's life experiences, ever mindful of the influence of actual flesh-and-blood male readers with diary "privileges" who also exercised editorial control over some of the editions. While we keep in mind that these diarists were important in their own right, inhabited a body, and lived life as a woman writing in particular cultural contexts, a feminist reading suggests that it is the "representative aspects of the author's experience rather than her unique individuality which are important" (Felski 1989, 94). Negotiating theories of self and representation in reading diary texts is tricky, but necessary.

Thus I suggest that as readers we can examine the diaries with critical, knowing eyes. Helen Buss insists that "a reading ethic that involves reader responsibility as well as reader pleasure, a sense of reciprocal activity of text and reader, a respect for the writer's subjectivity—in other words, an ethic of love—is essential" (1996, 88). In reading ethically, we diminish rigidly engendered, culturally assigned meanings of what it is to be a person—man or woman—inhabiting the space of difference. Despite the textual discontinuity and fictionality written into diaries, particularly when anticipating a reader, the writer makes a self in text. The reader participates in this process.

The diary, then, invites the contemporary reader to investigate its narrative of self-discovery, its dynamic interaction of woman and her world, and its experiments in fact and fiction. Those who read diaries to perceive the dark, carnivalesque selves missing from other forms of autobiography face inevitable disappointment. "Once she knows you are listening" (Temple 1987, 44), she subtly shifts the diary from private to public text. When the listeners are husbands and rival writers, the writers perform in earnest. But within the performance, when the writers are conscious of the limitations of language, the drama of living can be enacted textually, splendidly, even in the presence of audience.