In the Presence of Audience

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Chapter 1

Virginia Woolf’s Diary:

“Whom do I tell when I tell a blank page?”

Virginia Woolf calls her audience “the pack—reviewers, friends, enemies—” (1984, 141), and they influence all her writing, all her life. Woolf keenly senses audience criticism and approval and works to free herself from their “poison and excitement” (1984, 141), even in her diary. Woolf kept a diary nearly her entire adult life, writing to experience her own sense of self and to experiment with her view of reality, but, as she says, “I can get that at moments; but the exposed moments are terrifying” (1984, 63). Writing increasingly exposed her to those avid for information; thus her worry increased. In May 1938, for example, Woolf, awaiting the publication of *Three Guineas*, writes in her diary: “I’m uneasy at taking this role in the public eye—afraid of autobiography in public” (1984, 141). Woolf’s highly conscious rhetorical strategies enable her to write “in some queer individuality” (1978, 168), yet to repress and cover over those parts most vulnerable to criticism. Since she did not regard her diary as necessarily private, she utilized the experiments and manipulative techniques she used in her other works—to have her say and protect herself as well.

By looking at Woolf’s audiences and her responses to them, readers see the ways she perceives herself in response to cultural and literary judgments. She produces a self comprised of multiple self-proliferations, foregrounding others to depict a choral protagonist, repressing and deflecting to fiction discussions of her sexuality, madness, and feminist politics. When her self-conception fervently opposes cultural definitions of femininity, she feels imperiled but not daunted. She works through the perils in text and prevails. Beginning with her adolescent diaries and ending with those written shortly before her death, Woolf in varying degrees declines candid autobiographical renderings that make her vulnerable. As she says, “Confronted with the terrible spectre of themselves, the bravest are inclined to run away or shade their eyes” (Woolf 1986, 165–66).
Woolf's Diary Habit: “Early” Intrusions

A self-conscious and sensitive Virginia Stephen wrote her early diaries in response to a floundering self-esteem, a way to make order and “art” (1990, 139). But she was wary of her father's reading of them. Leslie Stephen actively perused his children's writings, took great pride in them, and then imposed his own authoritative responses on them. Woolf both loved and feared and wanted to please him. But she also felt a need to assert herself in writing. Because of the internal and external pressures on her life-writing, in 1897 she creates “Miss Jan,” a “fictive mouthpiece to explore sensation” (DeSalvo 1989, 235). Using Miss Jan as narrator, seventeen-year-old Virginia addresses her own responses and feelings at one remove, distancing herself from the words she feared could bring reprisals from others. To Miss Jan's musings she adds only rather academic essays, no overt self-analyses. Clearly she feels drawn to the self-portraiture inherent in diary writing, but anxiety about what she might expose haunts her as well.

Off and on for the next forty-four years of her life, long after she had left the strict confines of Leslie Stephen's household, Virginia Stephen Woolf continued the diary habit, writing to engage in self-definition and construction. Even as an adult, though she had long ago abandoned “Miss Jan,” she often uses strategies in writing to avoid the “terrible spectre” of self as well as the censure and control of other audiences. Woolf perseveres, “terrified of passive acquiescence” (1984, 329), courageously examining and creating herself, putting her “life blood into writing” (1984, 120). Her diaries record in remarkable detail her relationships, her creative experiments, and the daily routines that make a life. They provide more than mere glimpses into the woman she was and all that her life entailed. But the diaries do not tell all; they cover over as much as they reveal of the conflicts and complexities within the writer who composes them, and no wonder.

Woolf's later audiences, chiefly Leonard Woolf and the coterie of literary Bloomsbury, carried with them the masculine power of censure and control that Leslie Stephen earlier wielded so well. Woolf’s diaries permit later readers to see a woman who feared both what others thought of her and her own melancholy spirit. A woman under scrutiny, she writes as late as 1937, “I looked at my eyes in the glass once & saw them positively terrified” (1984, 63). The mirror's reflection overpowers the subtlety of the felt self, producing a stark image. Woolf avoids the direct gaze of self in her effort to control the intensity of her imagination and emotion; with
others watching, she depicts a self that flickers and alters to assuage cultural and social pressures. Yet even as impersonally and carefully as Woolf seeks to write herself into the diary, she “set a flame to the effort & the grind of the day” (1984, 106). Woolf’s diaries magically depict a life—but not the whole life, perhaps not even the “real” life, but the truth as she saw it emerges in the outline through careful reading.

Woolf’s Audience: A Husband’s Gaze

The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volumes One through Five, begins in 1915 and ends in 1941 with her death. When the adult Virginia begins her post-adolescent diary in 1915, she has been married nearly three years. She writes for six short weeks before she lets it lapse. Taking it up again in 1917, she writes for a few months until she “plunge[d] into madness” (Bell 1977, 3). Doctors forbade her to write during much of this episode, “and then she was rationed, as it was thought to excite her” (Bell 1977, 3). Following this trying period Leonard made a great effort to organize a serene and patterned life for Virginia and himself. This included his encouraging, even insisting, on her diary writing, an activity Virginia enjoys. It quickly becomes a habit that “suited the comfortable bright hour after tea,” one that could lead later to “several good books . . . & here’s the bricks for a fine one” (1978, 24).

Taking it up again at Leonard’s behest, her diary project changes perceptibly; “& by the way . . . L . . . has promised to add his page” (1978, 55). Woolf’s diary, always open to her husband, includes two entries written by Leonard that year to affirm the diary’s status. He writes: “I rashly said that I would occasionally write a page here & now V. calls on me to redeem my word” (1977, 74). He teases her in the same entry for talking “incessantly” (1977, 74). Rarely rash and consistently hypercareful, Leonard’s partaking in his wife’s diary probably relates to his fear of her mental illness, which brings with it the consequent necessity of his watchful care. Certainly his coauthorship is more mythic than real, as after 1917 he never writes in it again. But from that point to the day of her death, Leonard has access to her diaries, and his oftentimes declining interest revives in times of crisis. “Leonard made Virginia’s illness one of life’s works . . . he studied her he says, ‘with the greatest intensity’” (Lee 1977, 174), even to the extent of his recording her menstrual periods (Spater and Parsons 1977, 69). Leonard’s “‘rule’ over her life, including regulating her bedtime and her social engagements” (DeSalvo 1989, 10), probably saved Woolf’s life, but it also pushed and pulled the shape of their marriage in ways neither could control.3 That Leonard still, if only
occasionally, reads Virginia’s diary throughout their lives together becomes clear in a February 1927 entry: “L. taking up a volume the other day said Lord save him if I died first & he had to read through these” (1980, 125). Leonard’s presence as audience certainly is not lost on Virginia. His certain interest in reading it is yet another way to “watch” Virginia for signs of madness, fatigue, or depression. Leonard’s vigilance is part of his project to protect Virginia from herself, and he thinks her diary will enable him to succeed in that project.

Her diary audience of self and caring but watchful husband demands a healthy, functional, optimistic Virginia on each diary page. She desperately wants to rid herself of the crippling mental despair that threatens her well-being, and she wants to put her husband’s mind at ease. She therefore nearly always strives for a positive presentation, even when her life becomes marred by the “heartbreaking sensation that the page isn’t there” (1977, 139). She writes, “I hear L. in the passage & simulate, for myself as well as for him, great cheerfulness” (1980, 110). Although in this instance she clearly doesn’t expect Leonard to read her confession of simulated cheerfulness, the diary often records the spousal necessity of maintaining a philosophy of optimism and health. “To suppress one self & run freely out in joy, or laughter with impersonal joys & laughter—such is the perfectly infallible & simple prescription” (1982, 135).

As her health improves, Virginia habitually writes in the diaries, and as the years pass, she writes more expansively about many issues, less fearful of Leonard’s discovery of the “uncertain fabric I am” (1982, 132). Perceiving the diary as a genre as malleable and alive to possibility as fiction, her subject matter is varied, witty, and analytical. She probes her world, her fantasies, and her experience with equal scrutiny; the diary’s form invites change and spontaneity, an important part of her textual expression of conflicting identities. Importantly, she uses it as a site to elaborate on her profession of writing, embedding within her diaries a textual richness: portraits, stories, reviews, outlines, plans, rhetorical experiments, dialogue, dramas, theatrics, imaginings, domestic scenes, and political journalism. As Elizabeth Podnieks writes, “Woolf used her private diary to deliver certain ‘truths’ about herself in what either she wrote or withheld—which she intended others to discover or decode at some later date, and this was her ‘slant’ (2000, 105). Nevertheless, a diary conceived with the idea that it records life, especially a shared life, rather than a private life of the mind, necessarily omits much. Woolf won’t be caught out as a stable subject susceptible to opposition. She reflects: “Always write as if a cynical eye, doubting were on me” (1982, 357). In this respect Leonard’s audience function encourages the quality of the prose.
Virginia placed considerable importance on Leonard's opinions of her writing. In 1913, for example, she writes to friend Katherine "Ka" Cox on publishing *The Voyage Out*: "Isn't it wonderful? It's all Leonard's doing" (Lee 1997, 321). Shortly after this she "became deranged and was ill again for most of the year. She would not see Leonard for eight weeks" (Lee 325). Woolf's eagerness to share her diary with Leonard when she took it up again in 1917 springs from her desire to win his trust and to solidify a marriage made precarious by her breakdowns. She feels strongly about Leonard's goodness, believing that his response to her constrains her excesses and gives form to her character. His opinion matters, always. After giving Leonard her manuscript of *The Waves*, for example, she "confesses" that she "shall be nervous to hear what L. says when he comes out...carrying the MS & sits himself down & begins "Well!!"" (1982, 36). Her need for his approval adds to her ambivalence about his reading her writing, extending to the diary. She says of Leonard in 1917, "[O]ne's personality seems to echo across space, when he's not there to enclose all one's vibrations" (1977, 70). The "echo," always Woolf's word for audience, validates a sense of her personality as reflected off Leonard. Leonard's "echo" assisted her and concerned her at the beginning of the diary project and throughout her career, saying much about the dynamics of power between them.

If Leonard's pressure on Virginia to keep a diary was an effort to control her, then Virginia's emphasis on the "impersonal" in the diary undermines that control. In the conflicting patterns of diary entries, her response to Leonard is sometimes guarded, sometimes candidly affectionate, only rarely critical. She is ever cautious. The complexity of her feelings about him, her respect and resentment, may eclipse her writing about him, something she acknowledges she rarely does. The Woolf marriage "reads like a marriage which is worked at: a working marriage; and a marriage which works. The key to its completeness, she often perceives, lies in its privacy. . . . For much of the time she keeps it hidden even from the diaries, as though its particular virtue lies in not being too fully analyzed" (Lee 1997, 315–16). Their affection for each other and the strength of their marriage, however, become a narrative thread in the diary: "But my God—how satisfactory after, I think twelve years, to have any human being to whom one can speak so directly as I to L.!" (1980, 49). With the possibility of a husband reading the diary, this strategy probably was astute.

Because the concept of audience is a literary given and because she wrote her adolescent diaries under the gaze of her father, she readily accepts Leonard's role of diary reader, even when it limits her writing about him there. Her skill in textual manipulation to elicit audience
receptivity thus extends to the shaping of her diary. Woolf says of Lady Ottoline Morrell’s diary, “Ottoline keeps one . . . devoted however to her ‘inner life;’ which made me reflect that I haven’t an inner life” (1977, 79). Woolf has an inner life as her writing shows, even in the diary, but she deflects her husband’s watchful eye and designs writing strategies to gloss over raw feeling. Virginia’s restraint is remarkable; her respect and fondness for him overcome the anger, an oddity given the strength of the anger and rage she exhibited during one of her bouts of madness that had as its “principal feature . . . criticism of others—of men in general, of Leonard in particular . . .” (Spater and Parsons 1977, 68). In 1923 she notes Leonard’s too cautious care taking, writing that it “sapped” her “self reliance” (1978, 222).

The complexities of Woolf’s life and marriage add to her own perfectionist writer’s ethos in the care she exercises in writing a diary. She circumspectly writes a discourse that fluctuates between private and public, exposure and repression. She says in 1918, “but to take up the pen directly . . . shows I hope that this book is now a natural growth of mind—a rather dishevelled, rambling plant, running a yard of green stalk for every flower” (1977, 150). Perhaps because she sees the diaries as material similar to that which she writes for publication, Woolf considers its “dishevelled” quality as an early necessity. Even in the diary, however, the writer Woolf quickly turns the disheveled habits of mind into a coherent and manageable vision. Woolf’s textual presentation overrides any sense of a rudimentary self—what she writes metaphorically represents who she is in the presence of others. She insists on an orderly and coherent book, organizing entries consecutively, writing in books she has bound for the project. She begins new books in January, makes corrections in the margins of previous diaries, and adds travel diaries written on plain pages to extant books. Never “disheveled” in their physical presence, her diaries—Woolf early decides—will represent embodied and circumscribed form. As Lawrence Rosenwald suggests, any analysis of diary should include the aesthetic presentation (1988, 65–83). Woolf’s books suggest she intends them to be only indirectly self-revelatory, primarily precursors to fiction complete with potential readers.

She often acknowledges the semipublic status of her diary. For example, she questions in March 1939 whether in fiction the “diary form . . . wd . . . be too personal?” but says in the very next entry, “We go on Thursday. I’m of course for reasons I can’t go into selfishly relieved” (1984, 210). Woolf thus vacillates between writing for herself and cannily composing for others’ eyes. Leonard in particular occupies a double position in Virginia’s oscillation between self-scrutiny and audience
awareness. In one instance she writes to “discover her emotions” but
abruptly remarks, “But as L. is combing Sally I can’t concentrate. No room
of my own” (1984, 303).

Woolf’s rhetorical interests govern this pattern and purpose of revela-
tion and equivocation. She thus performs diary writing with many varied
voices, hoping to “achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shiv-
ering fragments; . . . the flights of the mind” (Woolf, quoted in Q. Bell
1972, I 138). She writes, knowing her watchful husband may or may not
read her diary entries. And she prepares her textual version of herself in
diaries as much for him as for herself, knowing they share goals with
regard to her well-being. Despite his honorable and fine intentions and
their shared purpose, over the years she often finds his analysis of her
galling. She writes in 1929, “Of course, Leonard puts a drag on, & I must
be very cautious, like a child, not to make too much noise playing” (1980,
332). As Lee says of Leonard: “There is a narrow line between this care-
ful watchfulness and a desire for control” (1997, 331). Leonard is always
there, imposing, forever watchful. When she becomes aware of his actual
physical presence as reader, she chafes under his gaze, writing occasional-
ly of her uneasiness in writing with someone else in the room: “If some-
one comes in one writes differently” (1984, 301).

Indeed, her recurring fatigue may have been caused in part by her
spending vast resources of creative energy validating Leonard and her mar-
riage and crushing her “ungrateful” criticisms. In the diary Woolf articu-
lates her great affection for Leonard, but her guilt over what she sees as her
failures in their marriage inhibits her criticism of him. “Leonard thinks less
well of me for powdering my nose, & spending money on dress. Never
mind. I adore Leonard” (1978, 303). Virginia carefully excises any anger,
only occasionally disturbing the even tone that covers over strong feeling
and eruption. She writes a rare, irritable entry after Vita Sackville-West has
visited the Woolfs: “L. (I say) spoilt the visit by glooming because I said he
had been angry. He shut up & was caustic He denied this, but admitted
that my habits of describing him, & others, had this effect often” (1980,
111). Clearly, Woolf recognizes both Leonard’s strength and limitation as
husband, perhaps as future editor of her work, saying with characteristic
mildness, “L., I think, suffers from his extreme clarity. He sees things so
clear that he can’t swim float & speculate” (1978, 222). Grateful for his
care, she avoids conflicts that trouble her and would trouble Leonard; she
chooses to emphasize the acceptable, the positive. Any rage she covers, say-

Their relationship becomes more comfortable and affectionate as the
years pass, but his vigilance over her person ends only at her death. Torn
between worry about others’ criticism and her fear of creative aridity, she despairs ambiguously that she “must go on doing this dance on hot bricks till I die” (1984, 63). Shaping the diary text and the role of audience, Woolf performs her “dance” before audiences in all her texts, even the diary.

Woolf’s Growing Fame: A Wider Audience

As Leonard’s interest in the diary wanes, Virginia’s fame and involvement with Bloomsbury increases, adding force to her audience awareness as she writes her diaries. Whereas Leonard is probably her only early reader, as her literary place in Bloomsbury becomes fixed and her reputation spreads, so does the likelihood of a more public audience. In January 1936, for example, she begins her entry by writing: “I open this, forced by a sense of what is expected by the public . . .” (1984, 8).

Woolf’s success brings her into fierce competition with male writers she respects and in some cases fears. Writing from within a coterie of masculinist modernist writers, Woolf approaches her diary with the knowledge that others watch and judge her according to literary conventions and expectations that seek to exclude her. Although her later diaries record her anxieties over relationships with literary women such as Vita Sackville-West, Elizabeth Bowen, and Rebecca West, her worries are personal and social rather than literary. Katherine Mansfield was the only woman whose writing Woolf viewed as equal to her own; yet even in this relationship Woolf seems as much concerned with friendship and the shared experience of writing as with Mansfield’s opinion. Woolf writes, “A woman caring as I care for writing is rare enough I suppose to give me the queerest sense of echo coming back to me from her mind . . .” (1978, 61). When Mansfield openly criticizes her, Woolf feels stung rather than slapped.

The men in literary Britain, the Cambridge Apostles, and the group known simply as Bloomsbury, comprise the audiences that stir her impulse in writing. Her diary entries record her adulation of Lytton Strachey, her fear of E. M. (Morgan) Forster’s criticism, and her close appraisal of T. S. Eliot’s writing. These literary elites kept diaries and alternately shared them and kept them secret, according to personal whim. She says in January 1918, “The diary habit has come to life at Charleston . . . the sad thing is that we daren’t trust each other to read our books; they lie, like vast consciences, in our most secret drawers” (199). Yet within this admission of secrecy lies the impulse to share with “Bunny” and “Duncan.” “Secret” they might be, but as Bloomsbury notoriously shared secrets and much else, the diary was at public risk.
E. M. Forster, for example, does share his diary with Woolf, and she compares his technique to her own: “[I]n his diary Morgan writes conversation—word for word, when the humour takes him” (II 27). Open literary and personal exchanges within Bloomsbury often extend to diaries, and Woolf’s care not to share too much is understandable; the ones who want to look can be scathing in their gossip and criticism. Forster, for example, labels her “the Invalid Lady of Bloomsbury” (Rose 1978, xi). Reducing Woolf’s talent and fame to a word connoting feminine weakness does not commend Forster as friend or critic but is typical. Such remarks show the masculine sense of superiority that characterizes literary snobs who too often deprecate a “lady” writer, even while they want to snoop in her diary.

Sensing male disapproval on many fronts, Woolf admits “I hate not to be liked” (1977, 262) and years later, as To the Lighthouse is published, says, “I am now almost an established figure—as a writer. They don’t laugh at me any longer” (1980, 127). Both of these admissions point to Woolf’s writing a diary while acutely conscious of others’ responses. Thus, her awareness of the masculine, literary audience that both includes and excludes her in their literary clique influences the shape and content of much of the diary, particularly as time passes. She can be defensive, cruelly responsive, knowingly evasive in her diary, aware of their interest, imagining their reproach, and carefully managing her responses. When Lytton Strachey criticizes the “discordancy” of Mrs. Dalloway, for example, questioning its “genius,” Woolf records his detailed objections, then defends her position in her diary, saying that the techniques he suggests would cause her “to lose touch with emotions” (1980, 32). The diary allows Woolf to respond to critics in her own defense, for her peace of mind, as well as to vent her more immediate anger. In a remarkable example of British understatement, she says, after a visit by Katherine Mansfield and J. Middleton Murry, “The male atmosphere is disconcerting to me” (1977, 265).

In the last years of her life, Woolf confronts this “atmosphere” more openly while at the same time acknowledging the diary as “semi public” (1984, 338). Coming to terms with Leonard’s presence and the lack of privacy her fame imposes on her, she still chafes under them. Openly deviating from the masculine modernist aesthetic, she creates fictions and essays such as A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas to establish literary works more resonant with her own depiction of life and art. This same independence of spirit allows her more easily to resist others’ snooping in the diary. “As I cannot write if anyone is in the room, as L. sits here when we light the fire, this book remains shut. A natural slimming process” (1984, 338). Reluctant to write
under scrutiny, she here reminds us of the force of audience pressure on the shape of the writing. The last volume of the diary, “slim” though it might be, manifests a strong sense of Woolf’s courageous and independent spirit.

Woolf struggles lifelong to keep in her writing “the right degree of freedom and reserve” (1982, 133), not until very late in her life gaining the confidence to write what she thinks without fear of criticism and reprisal. Even during her last days, with her madness returning, she writes elliptically, ever cautious. Because of Leslie Stephen’s early interference, Leonard’s watchful care, and Britain’s arrogant male literary establishment, Woolf often sickens with anxiety even as she boldly experiments. Her obsession with perfection, necessarily resulting in some kind of failure, comes in part from feelings of insecurity and in part from her dialogic sense of audience. She writes her diary, as well as her fictions, intensely aware of the external influences on her writing process. In her diary she questions: “Do I ever write, even here, for my own eye? If not, for whose eye?” (1984, 107). Woolf sees Leonard’s vigilant “eye” and modernist males’ jealous, exacting “eyes” watching her when she sits down to write.5 She mediates the private voice and the public acknowledgment in the diary text, her concurrent saying and unsaying exemplifying her lack of answer to her own rhetorical question: “Shd. one judge people by what they write? Shd. people show their naked skins?” (1984, 227).

Response to Scrutiny: “Proliferating Selves”

Woolf eludes the watcher-critic by experimenting with the narrative “I” in all her texts, including her diary. She endeavors “a summing up of all I know, feel, laugh at, despise, like, admire, hate, and so on” (1982, 152). To “grasp the whole” (1982, 152) she refuses to represent a knowable and authentic selfhood that limits self-representation and makes her vulnerable to others’ interpretations. Thus she proliferates her “I” to resist others’ controlling visions of her and to deflect criticisms. Although she necessarily articulates an “I” that represents what she calls “her own point of view” (1978, 107) in “this egoistic diary” (1982, 47), this operational, narrative “I” changes and multiplies within the daily diaries Woolf writes for more than twenty-six years. With shifts in time and circumstance, she privileges one “I” over other “I’s”: the writer, the wife, the sister, the critic— all speak in fluctuating voices of convention and rebellion, aware of the expectations of others.

The young girl standing in awe of Leslie Stephen’s mandates and the young woman grateful for Leonard Woolf’s attention dominates many of the early diaries. Louise DeSalvo writes of young Virginia’s diaries as full of fictions, silences, and pretenses, noting that “she is doing it to save her own
skin; to keep herself from being medicated, at the very least to keep herself from being sent away from the family” (1989, 239). Woolf thus manipulates the narrative “I” as early as 1897 using Miss Jan’s narrations. She notes in an October 16 diary entry that “Life is a hard business—one needs a rhinoceros skin—and that one has not got!” (1990, 132). The “hard business of life” continues in her relationship with Leonard. In January 1918 Virginia seeks to change Leonard’s mind about a commission he was undertaking, “speaking really not in my own character but in Effie’s” (1977, 22), only to have him turn “melancholy” (1977, 23). She responds, “All I can do is to unsay all I have said; & to say what I really mean” (1977, 23). Thus the problem of relationships prompts a shifting in voice to maintain harmony.

Woolf’s desire to deflect the critique and manipulations of others and her awareness of her ever-changing subjectivity merge in her multiple self-representations. As with many women diarists, Woolf’s life stories “move forward within a subtle sequence of relational cycles. Rather than playing the mannikin who arrives at multiplicity from chaos, a woman may see herself as multiplicity . . .” (Temple 1987, 42–43). Woolf clearly reviews past selves and sees someone other than her current self. At the age of fifty Woolf writes: “Yes, but what can I say about the Parthenon—that my own gray ghost met me, the girl of 23, with all her life to come . . .” (1982, 90). The double bind of choosing a life of both conformity and rebellion grips Woolf; the “gray ghost” of the conforming self often meets the “little wild ponies that tug me so many ways at once” (1984, 250).

Woolf’s proliferation of selves marks her project to encompass the contradictions of identity and experience. In To the Lighthouse, for example, Mrs. Ramsay, Lily Briscoe, Mrs. McNab, and Minta speak the multiple voices of women responding to their culture in different ways. Woolf speaks simultaneously through all of these women characters. “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with” (1927, 294), says Lily. Woolf’s dispersal of the feminine consciousness also scatters her cultural critique, disrupting a unified vision of the “mirroring surface.” All of Woolf’s women respond to patriarchy differently, some conciliating like Mrs. Ramsay, some choosing “art” like Lily Briscoe. Each response limits the feminine subject, but all of the responses together represent an amalgamation of voices that together characterize Woolf’s conception of the multiple feminine.

In her diary Woolf practices many representations of “the feminine”: its intricacies and its subsequent critique of an ideology that limits its boundaries. Even though Woolf often adapts what Sidonie Smith calls “speaking postures” to speak as “representative woman” (1987, 55), Woolf’s complexity and her willingness to experiment push her to reproduce these postures for multiple conceptions of the feminine. In the two entries Woolf writes in
January 1927, for example, she speaks of Ka Cox as “matronly, but substantial” (1980, 123); Nessa as “poor dear creature” (1980, 124); the “bountiful womanly Mrs. Rubens” (ibid.); and “Vita stalking in her Turkish dress” (1980, 125). Other entries designate women as “natural, juicy, unfettered” (1980, 199) and women writers as evidence of “the refinement; the clearness of cut; the patience; & humbleness” (1980, 62). The sheer number of descriptions of women provides multiple readings of feminine roles. She tries them on to discover her own feminine weaknesses and strengths. In one entry she writes of seeing her perceived strengths disappear only to become “rather an elderly dowdy fussy ugly incompetent woman vain, chattering & futile” (1980, 111). She often notes her “constant change of mood” (1980, 62) and promises herself she will “allow no rigid poses” (1982, 232). Her diary and fictional protagonists together depict representations of selves and other feminine designations. This strategy of diffusion powerfully and admirably defends Woolf against criticism and control.

The plethora of depictions gives her a means to criticize with seeming impersonality—as observer only. Her “I,” then, serves “as mirrors, echoes, or respondents in an internal dialogue” (Watson 1988, 188). As Woolf says at one point, “I hardly know which I am, or where: Virginia or Elvira; in the Pargiters or outside” (1982, 148). A woman exploring consciousness and evading cultural hegemony, Woolf thus depicts the multiple facets of personality, of the feminine. She maneuvers in opposition to the exact definitions that an audience can interrogate.

Woolf’s proliferation of selves not only advances her project to encompass the contradictions of identity and experience into a kind of communal reality; this strategy also saves her from categorical designations. By surrounding the narrative “I” in a chorus of other voices, Woolf directs audience attention away from “the delicacy & complexity of the soul—” (1978, 308) to “human life: this is the infinitely precious stuff issued in a narrow roll to us now, & then withdrawn forever” (1980, 95). Woolf sees life as synonymous with people; she describes them often in lieu of self-description. When others shift their focus to the success of the Hogarth Press, for example, she says with relief, “Happily, . . . I am now very little noticed, & so can forget the fictitious self, for it is half so, which fame makes up for one” (1980, 222). Woolf’s shy response to the world’s gaze reminds us that even in her diary she surrounds self-conceptions within a larger community of others: other selves, Bloomsbury, her family, the Woolfs, the villagers of Rodmell. Woolf’s genius flourished in these communities, which she exemplifies in astonishing detail as she weaves perceptions of her own subjectivity within a web of relationships, recountings of parties, and records of letters sent or received.
Woolf’s use of the community is extraordinary inforegrounding others to convey plural values, social reproduction, and “libidinal ties among a collectivity” (DuPlessis 1985, 172). She deploys diary strategies similar to fictional ones to reiterate themes at the expense of her own narrative. Yet within her chorus of voices and her gallery of portraits, Woolf defines a personal subjectivity that changes as her diary does: “Just as she can never be relegated to one self, so her diary cannot be reduced to one genre” (Podnieks 2000, 98).

In page after page, year after year, she assesses others, seeking correspondence to her own sense of shifting identity. Early in 1935 she compares herself to T. S. Eliot: “A religious soul: an unhappy man: a lonely very sensitive man, all wrapt up in fibres of self torture, doubt, conceit, desire for warmth & intimacy. And I’m very fond of him—like him in some of my reserves and subterfuges” (1982, 277). In studying those around her and positioning her diary personae within a larger network, she gathers a heightened sense of self-worth: “[B]ut with intimates, when talk is interesting, one sentence melts into another; heads & tails merge; there is never a complete beast” (1978, 163). As part of the “complete beast” she avoids accusations of self-obsession or egocentricity, although she mocks the “diariser” (1982, 291) self who confesses her husband thinks she has “too much ego in my cosmos” (1978, 191). By shifting others to the center stage of the diary text, she displaces her own personae. Steven Monte (2000) suggests that it is precisely Woolf’s willingness to consider other points of view that permits her to range freely through alternative perspectives and positions within the self.

Performing as a Writer: The Uses of Fiction

As Woolf directs the diary’s chorus of voices, she consciously performs her view of life, what she calls “writing imagining” (1980, 74). Diary/fiction interplay functions importantly for all diary/fiction writers, especially when diary writers deflect unpalatable truth and observation into fictions to save them a personal scrutiny by a personal audience. Woolf, for example, turns to fiction to display her agonizing conflicts: “oh to be free in fiction” (1982, 145). Turning autobiography into fictions, diary writers also construct fictions within the diary itself, blurring imagination and observation, creating scenes and characters that record their lives and recreate their own histories.

Virginia Woolf’s fictional sketch, “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection,” portrays the mind as stuffed, locked, and spreading: simultaneously illuminating and imagined, as multiple as refracted light. The sketch recalls a scene recorded in her 1929 diary of “Ethel Sands not look-
ing at her letters” (Woolf 1989, 306). Woolf later turns this diary scene into a story. She says of Isabella, her fictional Ethel:

Her mind was like her room . . . , she was full of locked drawers, stuffed with letters, like her cabinets . . . One must imagine—here she was in the looking glass. (ibid., 225)

This fictional passage, first created in a diary entry, underscores connections of the mind/diary story, echoing also an earlier description of her intended diary. In April 1919 Woolf writes:

What sort of diary should I like mine to be? . . . I should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds & ends without looking them through. (1977, 266)

For Woolf, then, the diary both orders and replicates the writer’s life in a supposedly indiscriminate mass of material. The reader of Woolf’s diary finds that the “mass of odds & ends” includes fictions, versions of experience meant for future fictions, and intentional distortions. Woolf’s talent as a writer enables her to relate versions of experience in various forms, blurring generic designations of fiction and autobiography. “If one writes only for one’s own pleasure—I don’t know what it is that happens. I suppose the convention of writing is destroyed” (1980, 201).

As early as 1906, with her first fictional publication of “The Journal of Joan Martyn,” Woolf depicts the importance of a woman’s voice in telling an alternate story to man’s standardized versions of history. Woolf’s vehicle, Joan’s living diary, takes up “Antiquaries’ Quarrels” of right and wrong, truth and fiction” (1989, 35). Joan recounts far more than the tombs of male ancestors or “the household book of Jaspar” (1989, 42), the strictly factual account so much preferred by the “fathers” of history. In this story Woolf fictionalizes her belief in the necessity of women writing their own experience of living, with “Joan Martyn” clarifying Woolf’s belief. Woolf’s fictionalizing “The Journal of Joan Martyn,” however, points to her impulse to write a diary and to write fiction, perhaps synonymously.

Censorship: Making Use of Silences

Using multiple voices and alternating fictional/autobiographical narratives within the diary, Woolf performs through contradiction, refusing specific and gendered designations of identity. Yet the continual presence
of both real and hypothetical audiences prompts her to write with a pro-
tective caution that sometimes results in self-censorship. Whether the
gaps and blanks in Woolf’s self-narrative are unconscious responses to cul-
tural taboos or conscious erasures to avoid scrutiny and manipulation,
these absences alone say much about the subordinate place of woman in
early-twentieth-century British culture. In 1939 she writes in her diary,
“All books now seem to me surrounded by a circle of invisible censors”
(1984, 229). Woolf articulately positions herself within her culture; what
she writes and what she censors become “an aesthetics of inhibition” (Lee
1997, 516).

Worried about inscribing aberrant, rebellious selves within her diary,
she encodes, leaves absences, explains aberrations at length, and ignores or
hurries through unconventional selves. Woolf’s novels, all in some ways
autobiographical, provide a forum for Woolf’s exploration of the painful
areas of her life. Calling Woolf’s fictions “the strip of pavement over the
abyss of self,” Shari Benstock argues that unlike fiction, the memoir threat-
ened Woolf too directly, forcing “Virginia Woolf to look into the abyss
directly—something she could not do” (1988, 29). Indeed, Woolf avoids
looking “into the abyss” in her diaries, too. In writing few memoirs, she
avoids looking directly at the self on the page. In her diaries, too, she turns
painful self-awareness to fiction and protects visions of herself. Woolf
understands the value of creating and exploring versions of reality in fic-
tion and knows, too, the value of diary silence, its resonance and its echoes.

Woolf uses the drama of the interval, that tension in the unarticulated.
Thus, between the scenes and portraits that make up the diary, Woolf
gives presence to what is not said: long conspicuous blanks after illness fol-
lowed by her expressed desire to take the diary “up again”; a few days of
writing missed and subsequent apologies; self-conscious elisions she men-
tions obliquely: “What a gap!” (1978, 125). Woolf’s interest in resonant
silences appears as she uses her diary to plan what years later becomes
*Between the Acts*. In this entry, atypical in style and content from other
entries, Woolf acknowledges the presence of absence in women’s writing
of the world and themselves. She writes in February 1927:

Why not invent a new kind of play—//
as for/instance
Woman thinks: . . .
He does.
Organ Plays.
She writes.
They say:
She sings:
Night speaks:
They miss
I think it must be something in this line . . . Away
from facts: free; yet concentrated . . .
But today is. (1980, 128)

Here Woolf postulates the gaps in narrative. In placing these lines in the
genre of drama, she acknowledges the subversion of audience expectation.
The unfinished lines foreground silences that “say.” Woolf acknowledges
the not-saying, yet says much in the emptiness that follows each line, the
blanks depicting intention and audience response to imaginative space.
She creates silence to imply without words the nature of the unspoken
reality of what “Woman thinks.” Gaps in the narrative protect Woolf
from criticism and appropriation by others and provide traces of person-
ality functioning subtly to shape her identity. As she herself notes on the
practice of silence, “[S]easons of silence, & brooding, & making up much
more than one can use, are fertilizing” (1980, 317).

Just as Woolf uses deflections, fictions, and silences to elude an audi-
ence eager to capture an immutable and authentic Virginia, we, as a later
audience, are anxious to discover all that Woolf left said and unsaid about
her experience. Her treatment of three topics particularly illustrates alter-
native unsaying and saying in diary text as opposed to fictional text: her
sexuality, her madness, her feminist politics. Each of these subjects, obvi-
ously important to Woolf, can best be “read” by juxtaposing her diaries
with her other texts, finding gaps in her diary narrative, and locating the
clues she leaves in fictional narratives. At odds with watchful others in her
diary audience, she deflects the self to fictional characters to have her say.

More Absences: Sexual/Textual Reserve

If diaries were truly private, Woolf’s reserve about sexual matters in her
diary might seem surprising. As an object of curiosity she had good rea-
son to be cautious; many rumors circulated through Bloomsbury about
Woolf’s history as molested, frigid, and lesbian. Wary of Leonard’s access
to the diaries and the misogynist literary coterie’s interest in them, she
senses she would deliver herself to the control of others if she were honest
and open about her sexual responses. No wonder she wrote the diary with
reticence. Her sister Vanessa, certainly, openly joked about Virginia’s
“coldness” and “crushes.” Angry explorations in a diary about youthful
abuse by a half-brother—now a member of the publishing establishment, George Duckworth—would open her more than him to scathing criticism. Seen as a sexual curiosity and under scrutiny by Leonard and Bloomsbury, Virginia better served herself by glossing over events and feelings. She could not entirely forget the past and was fearful of present and future sexual expectations.

Outright admissions of frigidity or lesbianism would mark her an exile of sorts in licentious yet censorious Bloomsbury. We cannot make the assumption, then, that Woolf’s textual reticence indicates a lack of sexual response; rather, the sensuality of her language combined with a narrative caution suggests that Woolf chooses to close her diary to sexual explanation. Never written in graphic sexual detail and often elliptical, Woolf’s diaries nevertheless reveal a sexual Virginia, especially in regard to relationships with women she loves. The diaries display sensual language and subtle erotics. By relegating stories with sexual themes to other autobiographical and fictional texts, she could choose the time and place of their “coming out.”

Woolf writes quite explicitly in “22 Hyde Park Gate” of her half-brother’s sexually molesting her but says next to nothing in her diary. No doubt this ongoing shame and dread confuses and mars her later sexual relationships with men, but Woolf herself avoids self-analysis. Even in the memoir, where she notes the circumstances and her “resenting, disliking it” (1976, 69), she analyzes the circumstances objectively, searching for a word “for so dumb and mixed a feeling,” wondering whether the experience seemed “to show a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched . . . must be instinctive” (ibid.). But within the memoir’s structure she undercuts its importance to her, calling it a “simple incident” (ibid.). In Moments of Being, her tale of sexual molestation comes at the end of a story of George’s affectionate and misguided attempts to help his sisters into society. Then quite abruptly she ruptures the amusing narrative by recalling the abuse, closing with “Yes, the old ladies of Kensington and Belgravia never knew that George Duckworth was not only father and mother, brother and sister to those poor Stephen girls; he was their lover also” (1976, 154). This sentence covertly contains anger and loathing, but only in this one instance does she admit its lasting influence.

Indeed, her comments about George in her diary are studiously neutral and rare. In her one mention of him in volume II, she refers to her “Memoir on George.” She responds to her essay as a writer, saying, “You should pretend to write about real people & make it all up—I was dashed of course. (& oh dear what nonsense—for if George is my climax I’m a mere scribbler)” (1978, 121). This bland deprecation of her work and by
implication George's sexual act elides any strong feelings of sexual rage or confusion. In fact, she seems to imply a fictionality in the memoir itself, giving her room for denial of events.

Her admission that George's actions indeed influenced her sexual response comes several years later in an entry in May 1926: “The heat has come, bringing with it the inexplicably disagreeable memories of parties, & George Duckworth; a fear haunts me even now, as I drive past Park Lane on top of a bus . . . I become out of love with everything” (1980, 87). In this entry Woolf obliquely refers to the dampening effect of earlier events on her ability to “love”; she carefully covers sexual anger while noting the sad effect of “parties, & George Duckworth” and is silent elsewhere in the diary. Perhaps conflicts of shame, rage, and affection for George's familial place in her life cloud her perception of self for too long, but she does not use the diary to clarify.

Others blamed George Duckworth for the frigidity they saw in Virginia. Woolf herself neither sees herself as frigid nor lays blame on her past. She prefers keeping her own council about this matter that so titillated Bloomsbury. Woolf's nephew, Quentin Bell, accepts an interpretation of Virginia's frigidity as truth and tells us that “Vanessa, Leonard, and, I think, Virginia herself were inclined to blame George Duckworth” (1972, II 6). Bell speaks with authority on the subject of his aunt's coldness, recalling, perhaps through the filter of his own youthfulness, the many family discussions about this lack of sexual warmth in her and reminding us, too, of the interest of others in Woolf's sexuality. Following their honeymoon and Leonard's subsequent disappointment in their marital union, rumors circulated through Bloomsbury about her frigidity. These whispers make Woolf particularly reticent. She notes that Clive's criticism of her work, for example, “is founded upon the theory that I cant feel sex: have the purple light cut off” (1980, 275). She responds to his criticism of her writing but ignores altogether his “theory.”

Leonard's conversations with Vanessa, which she shares with others, and his obviously autobiographical novel, The Wise Virgins, all speak of a frigidity that Virginia Woolf never denies or affirms. The truth to be uncovered fell victim to women's self-censorship even when under attack: “The truth lies buried in what women did not say, in the fiction of female frigidity to which Virginia herself submitted. . .” (L. Gordon 1984, 152). Yet Virginia, from the first regulated by a disappointed Leonard and under the gaze of a public avid for detail, has everything to lose by a sexual discourse, even in her diary.

Certainly Virginia writes only a few references to the marriage bed, always embedding them in the language of a sentimentalizing love: “so
completely entire, I mean L. and I” (1982, 130). One ambiguous diary entry in 1917 implies that the Woolfs were not necessarily celibate: “Illusions wouldn’t come back. However, they returned about 8:30, in front of the fire, & were going merrily till bedtime when some antics ended the day” (1977, 73). Though reserved about sexual/married life, she delightfully depicts others’ sexual exploits. She alludes to Vanessa’s sexual exuberance in a wonderfully ambiguous reference to her sister: “Nessa, astride her fine Arab, life I mean, takes further upheavals all in the days work” (1980, 239). She notes in June 1933 that Clive (Vanessa’s husband) is “lyrical about lovers” (1982, 109) and questions “Why the bees should swarm around [Adrian],” describing “the quivering shifting bee bag [as] the most sexual and sensual symbol” and writing that “the bees shoot whizz, like arrows of desire: fierce, sexual” (ibid.). About her life with Leonard she says, “Back from a good week end at Rodmell—a week end of not talking, sinking at once into deep safe book reading” (ibid.). Woolf seems alive with desire and certainly knows the feeling but does not connect her sexuality to her fond relationship with Leonard.

Strong cultural codes against women’s articulating details of sexual relationships may influence Woolf’s reserve; with Leonard’s availing himself of the diaries, however, she may feel a reluctance beyond mere cultural conditioning. She exercises discursive sexual responses in veiled references and oblique responses. She says in April 1931, “If I dared I would investigate my own sensations with regard to [Leonard], but out of laziness, humility, pride, I don’t know what reticence—refrain” (1982, 18). The “reticence” may be shyness or perhaps the risks that exposure can bring, the risks of “subjection to regulation and control” (Martin on Foucault 1988, 80).

Fearing others’ control and caring deeply about their opinions, Woolf may prefer the myth of her coldness to the truth of what even she may perceive as an aberrant lesbian sexuality that both excites and frightens her. The language of the diary clearly displays Woolf’s sexual preference for women. When she writes, for example, “Night speaks” . . . / “They Miss . . .” (1980, 128) in her entry foregrounding silent response, she obliquely implicates the unnamed man and woman in inherent heterosexual dysfunction. Using images of sexual ambivalence, Woolf writes in a later entry of the “wringing sausages, looking indecent, like black snakes amorously intertwined,” then remembers a dream when Bunny “took me in his arms—pale phantom of old love” (1982, 144). The phallic imagery of the snakes somehow reminds her of the lifeless “phantom” of heterosexual love. It takes a reader to give it that meaning—Woolf merely intimates. In another entry she censures a lively physicality in a homosexual
relationship. She deprecates Dady's sensuality, mocking his sexual beauty and Raymond's feelings for him. She says: “& one must agree, I think, that all exhibitions of s——— feeling have something silly, mawkish, about them, though why I can't say” (1980, 266). She implies that sexuality is for others, a word not to be written in the text of the self, a word never spelled out but named “s———.” But the word she wants to write is “sapphistry.”

As Woolf gains confidence as a writer and as a woman, she writes more confidently in the diary, using “the looser language of secret truthfulness” (Lee 1997, 485), evincing a kind of vitality that draws upon physical experience. This language disrupts the consciously conceived neutrality of her sexual self. In 1923, at the age of forty, she defines women as “pleasure givers . . .” (1980, 234), writes to her “new apparition Vita,” and, perhaps because of her past and present sexual feelings, writes “Love is the devil. No character can stand up against it” (1980, 224). In 1924 she insists: “And if we didn't live venturously, plucking the wild goat by the beard, & trembling over precipices, we should never be depressed . . . but already should be faded, fatalistic & aged” (1978, 308). She reports that Vita Sackville-West, her friend and probable lover, has been “implored” by others to resist “the serpent destroyer, V.W. I half like, half mind this” (II 324). In later diaries she mentions “kissing” Helen “on the lips”; her “friendship with Vita . . . over . . . as ripe fruit falls”; Ethel Smyth's adoration of her: “I get . . . two letters daily. I daresay the old fires of Sapphism are blazing for the last time.” While many of these references merely allude to Virginia Woolf’s sexuality, their explicit sexual language elaborates: “Vita . . . always giving me great pleasure to watch, & recalling some image of a ship breasting a sea, nobly, magnificently, with all sails spread, & the gold sunlight on them” (1980, 146). Often elliptical, a sexual Virginia appears, especially in regard to relationships with women she loves. “Her ‘little language unknown to men' suggested sexual skill as well as verbal skill” (J. Marcus 1987, 144).

Woolf reluctantly voices her sexual skill and desire in evasions and near-erasure of sexual history as she tries to conform to heterosexual marriage. Even though Leonard appears to tolerate her “friendships” with women, “by the autumn of 1926 he was finding Vita an irritation, and perhaps a threat” (Lee 1997, 497), prompting Vita to secrete love letters to Virginia in ones Leonard could read. In 1930 Virginia writes only that she “quarreled with L. (about Ethel Smyth) . . .” (1980, 298). Virginia may “plume and preen” in letters (Letters II 489) but not in the diary, replete with “drier, more reserved accounts” (Lee 1997, 480). As Adrienne Rich says, “Women's love for women has been represented almost entire-
ly through silence and lies . . . heterosexuality has forced the lesbian to dissemble . . .” (1979, 190). Woolf’s dissembling takes the form of glossing over her desire but using passionate, sensual, almost sexual language to describe the women she loves. She says, “A woman is in some ways so much better than a man—more natural, juicy, unfettered” (1980, 199). Her qualifying “in some ways” soothes the masculine ego of the diary’s audience.

Indeed, Woolf’s caution in sexual matters is well founded. Her sexuality makes her the public victim of sexual ridicule. A Bloomsbury noted for “buggery” (Woolf’s word) strangely sees Woolf’s lesbian leanings as amusing, monstrous, and indicative of her coldness. Quentin Bell notes, “To many she must have appeared as an angular, remote, odd, perhaps rather intimidating figure a fragile middle-aged poetess, a sexless Sappho . . .” (1972 II 185). Certainly Wyndham Lewis creates the character “Rhoda Hyman” as an austere and sexually cold aesthete who resembles Virginia in *The Roaring Queen* (1973). Virulently attacking Woolf, Lewis charges that her lack of traditional feminine desire emasculates men.

Woolf’s respect for Leonard and her insecurity about her sexual role forbid a self-portrayal as emasculator and Leonard as emasculated. If “male impotence and female potency” (‘Gilbert and Gubar 1988, 36) characterized modernism—a theme obviously obsessing Lewis—Woolf declines any hint in her diary.11 Still, the language within all of Woolf’s books, the diaries included, relays a sexual, subtle, and dynamic tension. A Woolf alive to an erotic creativity subtly rehearses the sexual subtexts of her novels.

**Deflecting Sexual Exploration to Fiction**

Woolf chooses fiction to depict more openly her views of sexual relationships, their imbalances of power, their terrifying unsettling nature. She views fiction as “disconnected from its author” (Gordon 1984, 98), freeing her to write what she censors in her diary. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, gives voice to the innocence of youth. Rachel’s almost passive “voyage” into the lush tropics of experience brings consequences of love and sexual ambivalence. Here Woolf creates a heroine concealing as much as she reveals under an oppressive weight of masculine dominance. The tragedy in the novel is Rachel’s inability to confront memory and identity. This theme of woman’s fear in openly confronting the erotic self spans the length of Woolf’s career. Written more than twenty-five years after *The Voyage Out*, Woolf’s last fictional endeavor still explores that part of reality that women fear to speak of candidly. Significantly, the repressions and silences of *Between the Acts* are intentional, not accidental.
In this novel Woolf directs readers to read “between” the lines, the acts. Instructing them to find what she leaves unsaid, she points us to a way of reading her diaries. In her novel/play, many characters maintain silences to conceal unconventional thinking that can be “acted out” neither in the play nor in the audience. Woolf’s strategies of depicting and imaging the silences in *Between the Acts* foreground the importance of the unsaid.

Isa can be understood as thematically representing the repressed Woolf of the diaries. Isa’s knowledge is sexual; she thinks the newspaper story of a girl gang-raped by soldiers is “real” (Woolf 1969, 20) and struggles with sexual desire and antipathy the entire day. Her unconventional passions and her feeling that sex is too often associated with violence render her unable to articulate her own history or to make herself heard in her household. Woolf writes *Between the Acts* to encompass the whole, including the scripted and spontaneous, the tragic and comic, the historical memory and present critique.

Significantly, the not-said becomes as important as the said. Both Miss Latrobe’s and Isa’s dramas characterize Woolf’s use of silence and space to simultaneously say and not say. This process of composing and refusing allows Virginia Woolf to write, like Isa, traces of thoughts not fully articulated. *Between the Acts* not only recognizes the silence that speaks itself in and around the actions and dialogue, but also tragically reiterates the savage anger and impotence of the tongueless nightingale who cannot speak and is forced to swallow her own rage. Thus Woolf’s fiction reminds us that the unsaid is not merely a rhetorical technique inviting the creativity of the reader, nor is the unsaid an intentional void allowing Woolf to hide her problems. Rather, the silences “between” the acts of speech function to articulate both the love and anger that cannot be spoken in the context of English culture. Unsanctioned love must remain unspoken. And just as the raped nightingale cannot speak of the sexual crime that has rendered her both raped and tongueless, Virginia Woolf’s diary silence on personal matters of sexuality reminds us as well of patriarchal strictures on women speaking the sexual and of Woolf’s own sexual reticence and trauma.

The discrepancy between her diary renderings of sexual interest and her fictional explorations into the nature of female sexuality has perhaps enhanced reader interest in Woolf as an expansive sexual woman. We have only to read *Orlando* to see Woolf’s refusal to narrow sexual possibility. Her fictional fantasy subverts conventions that confine an individual to one century, or one gender, or one country. The bisexual, captivating Orlando defies sexual category and control, and both Orlando and Woolf seduce readers with astonishing sexual playfulness. By pushing *Orlando* to
the limits of novel conventions, Woolf breaks through sexual conventions without inviting the reproach of others.

In contrast, Woolf’s diary discourse offers only shaded references to sexual history and preference; she avoids the direct hits of others who wish to judge. As a reader of others’ diaries, she may guess that readers, openly or not, often hope for sexual revelation. Indeed, so reticent about revealing her own sexual relationships and so imaginative fictionally about the nature of passion, she has become a central figure in reader configurations of woman’s sexuality.

Repression and Deflection: Woolf’s Madness

Even though we recognize that cultural codes of sexual repression influence Woolf’s depiction of her sexuality, we may find it surprising that repressive codes also extend to her writing explicitly of the mental instability that plagued her on and off from adolescence. Yet the cultural equation of sexuality and insanity induces similar repressions. In *The Female Malady* Elaine Showalter writes of the “moral management of women” who at the first sign of madness find imposed on them the “ladylike values of silence, decorum, taste, service, piety, and gratitude” (1987, 79). Given the cultural pressure to conform to “ladylike values” and Leonard’s very real and understandable obsession with the state of her sanity, Woolf chooses fictional and public articulations about madness rather than private revelations in a diary that will almost certainly result in others’ seeking to control and manage her. The diary’s immediacy makes control inevitable. Since Virginia was “such a liar about her own health that one doesn’t know what to believe” (VS-W to CB in Bell 1972, 117), Leonard might expect to find the diary key in signaling a forthcoming crisis. Woolf’s diary is not the primary text articulating the symptoms, the responses, or the horror of mental illness, however. She represses even this agony in the diary, deflecting her explorations to manageable, fictional ones.

Woolf’s madness is a cyclical trauma she grapples with from 1904 until the end of her life. As she writes to her friend Violet Dickinson after months of her first “rest cure,” imposed on her by her doctor, George Savage, “I have never spent such a wretched 8 months in my life, and that tyrannical and as I think, shortsighted Savage wants another two. . . . Really a doctor is worse than a husband” (Wolf 1975, 147–48). Ironically, she writes this without having yet experienced the double enemy of doctors (Dr. Savage and four other male, mental specialists Leonard consults) and husband. When she marries, she must worry about Leonard’s vigilance and “tyranny” as well as her doctors.
Leonard’s control of Virginia intensifies in proportion to her bouts of madness. From 1913 on he keeps a daily, detailed, meticulous diary of Virginia’s health, encoding her mental health in “Tamil and Sinhalese” (Lee 1997, 174). His control extends to what Virginia must eat, how many visitors she sees, how much rest she needs, and when she should exercise. He even weighs her regularly and records her weight in his diary. When he feels Virginia exhibits signs of instability, he moves quickly to consult with doctors to consign her to the “enforced passivity” of the rest cure she so hated (Showalter 1987, 181).

Understandably, Virginia avoids saying much in her diary that might promote Leonard’s avid interest. Although she writes fairly often of physical ailments, with occasional references to “headache” or “depression,” she is quick to mention her recovery, most often in the same entry. In August 1921, for example, she catalogues at some length a two-month stretch of illness: “wearisome headache, jumping pulse, aching back, frets, fidgets, lying awake, sleeping drought, sedatives, digitalis,” and so on. She abruptly says, “Let me make a vow that this shall never, never, happen again” (II 125).

The only long gaps in the journal occur during Virginia’s bouts of mania and deep depression, periods of diary exclusion and personal agony in her life. In the publications of the full diaries, her editor, Anne Oliver Bell, notifies the reader of these “spells” by italicized, editorial insertions within the diary text. Even Bell sometimes veils the symptoms of madness with euphemistic references to illness, headache, and flu. Woolf herself limits references to her “queer, difficult nervous system” (1980, 39) to passages written in reflection, when her illness is over: “Once or twice I have felt that odd whirl of wings in the head which comes when I am ill . . . it shuts itself up. It becomes chrysalis” (1980, 286–87), affecting her “personality, her behavior, her writing and her politics” (Lee 1997, 172).

Leonard reports that nearly all of their arguments concerned her illness (1964, 81). Understandably, Virginia tries to hide her sickness from him for as long as possible. This effort keeps her from explicit diary entries about her manic-depressive illness. In 1925, for instance, she says, “[A]h, but how quickly I sink; what violet shadows there are between the high lights, & one, perhaps, as unreasonable as another. But this properly belongs to a story” (1980, 10). This cautious reference to her madness that she dare not explicate in diary writing echoes a longer lament for “expressions” “unheard” and therefore unsaid. In June 1923 she longs to be more social, less cared for, but faces Leonard’s “old rigid obstacle—my health” (1978, 250):
But now I’m tied, imprisoned, inhibited... I’m letting my pen fling itself on paper like a leopard starved for blood—and I must wash and dress—so do not, in years to come, look too harshly upon this first outcry, the expression of many yet unheard. (ibid.)

Possibly she chooses the starving leopard image because “leopard” is only one letter away from “Leonard,” the force who too often silences her pen. Certainly she sees the leopard as power and the hunger her own. By denying herself the power of the leopard/Leonard masculine/sexual/assertive, she allows her silence, and Leonard, to dominate. The guilt of writing her desire that would “sacrifice his [Leonard’s] peace of mind” clearly stops her leopard-pen in years to come (ibid.). Although this diary entry shows strong feelings, such articulations are rare, reminding the reader of Woolf’s reluctance to articulate emotions that must seem painfully close to the manic rage of her illness. In order to give Leonard “peace of mind” and to protect herself from becoming even more “tied” than she already is, she does not often write onto her diary pages what she feels is aberrant.

Before her most serious and most manic illness in 1915, for example, she says nothing of symptoms and glosses over catalysts to present herself as a supportive wife. She erases entirely what was clearly a blow to her self-esteem and a betrayal of her most private sexual insecurities. Immediately after she read Leonard’s indictment of her frigidity in The Wise Virgins, her health declined steadily, culminating in her most serious breakdown (Gordon 1984). Virginia became “incoherent, excited and violent” and “took against Leonard” (A. Bell 1977, 39). Virginia’s diary entry following her reading of The Wise Virgins reads:

My opinion is that it’s a remarkable book; very bad in parts; first rate in others. A writer’s book, I think, because only a writer perhaps can see why the good parts are so very good, & why the bad parts aren’t very bad... I was made very happy by reading this; I like the poet-ic side of L. (1977, 32)

This entry shows either a thorough repression of her feelings or a conscious pretense. Even Anne Bell admits Leonard’s book contains “unsympathetic portraits” of the Woolfs, and if Virginia recognized those “portraits,” her diary entry is wrenching. The chapter titled “Katharine’s Opinion of Her Sister” fictionally describes Vanessa’s advice to Leonard after the Woolf’s lukewarm honeymoon. Both Vanessa and the fictional Katharine console the distraught husband about Virginia/Camilla’s frigidity (L. Woolf 1914, 149; A. Bell 1977, 6). Vanessa “depreciated the resemblance of the characters in
this novel” to those Leonard knew (A. Bell 1977, 9). Virginia herself must have known she figured prominently in his conception of Camilla, must have felt painfully accused, but she says nothing of his frigid “virgin” so conveniently close to her name of “Virgin”ia. After two more entries, her diary stops as her mania begins.

Virginia ceases diary writing altogether for nearly two years, in part because Leonard and the doctors forbad and then rationed it. Also, she may have broken off her diary ritual for so long because of her fear of revealing herself to Leonard or because the effort to hide herself behind the words was too grotesque. Indeed, when at Leonard’s urging she begins her diary again in 1917, her first entries are stilted. An entry in August typically sounds cramped: “Went into Lees. . . saw Cinema; bought several things. Met K.M.—her train very late. Bought 1 doz. Lily roots & some red leaved plants wh. have been put in the big bed” (1977, 43). The reversion to outings, to mentions of others without commentary removes Woolf from the center of her text. With Leonard waiting to hospitalize her at the instant of mental change, she refuses to expose herself. With madness acting so powerfully to change her life and her perceptions, Woolf finds articulation for it in other texts. Her other writings are offered to the public and not considered private; in fiction she feels less vulnerable to personal attack and control.

Deflection of Madness to Fiction

In an interesting deflection of self into character, Virginia Woolf gives to Septimus Smith in Mrs. Dalloway (1925) the madness and melancholy that she only later articulates sketchily in her diary and in “On Being Ill.” Unlike her veiled references to madness in her diary and unlike her effort to equate madness and creativity in her later essay, through Septimus Woolf bitterly rages and explores the causes and cures of madness. By creating a male character who “was a case of complete breakdown—complete nervous and physical breakdown” (ibid., 144), Woolf evades the condescending and pitying gaze of British intellectuals brought up knowing that “all mental illness in women was ascribed to their sexuality” (J. Marcus 1987, 101). Through Septimus Smith’s voice, Woolf changes the cultural configurations of madness, shifting the blame from the self to cultural causes such as war, society’s “little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder” (1925, 145). Woolf writes of Smith’s courage through his wife’s discourse but undermines cultural notions of military bravery by Smith’s statement that “he has committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by human nature” (ibid.). Woolf constructs Smith to announce an anti-
war stature and a damning antipatriarchy argument while she dismantles the notion that feminine weakness and sexuality cause madness. 14

With an adept technical maneuver, Woolf equates Smith’s “fall” to her own, alternating the narratives of Smith and his wife: Smith rages and suffers while his wife offers a more objective and sympathetic analysis. He speaks Woolf’s ravings; Rezia analyzes rationally. Rezia Smith’s analysis of Sir William Bradshaw’s “treatments” condemns his “worshipping proportion,” which made “England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it possible for the unfit to propagate their views” (150). Woolf thus condemns current psychiatric practices through a rational character. In contrast, through Septimus Smith’s consciousness, Woolf portrays the horror of madness and is sympathetic to his plight, despairing of her own: “As for the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead, where were they? . . . The brute with the red nostrils was snuffing into every secret place” (222–26). Smith’s inability to rid himself of the monstrous hints at Woolf’s own imaginings. By using alternating voices of rationality and irrationality, Woolf writes the story of madness, what she calls in her diary “the silent realms” (1982, 171). Fiction frees Woolf to break through that silence to posit an androgynous illness that does not damn the mad.

Woolf’s fluctuating care and silence about her illness in her diary and the carefully drawn fictional representations expose the dynamics of marriage and madness, as well as the diary writer’s simultaneous hiding and showing in a supposedly private context. In 1939 she writes, “Happily I’m interested in depression; & make myself play a game of assembling the fractured pieces” (1984, 215). Her “game” tries to control the mental fragility that ultimately brings her death. The autobiographical voices and the fictional ones combine to render a more complete subjectivity. Neither can be privileged.

Repression to Expression: Feminist Politics

As she ages, Woolf becomes accustomed to her audience, both real and potential, becoming increasingly willing to take on the issue of women’s rights and place in a patriarchy. Even in the diary Woolf depicts an ever-widening political vision, one that indicts English politics and institutions. As with the subjects of sexuality and madness, Woolf finds greater freedom for expression in texts outside the diary, particularly Three Guineas. As a writer in the public domain, Woolf takes risks politically; as a woman in the private realm, she more cautiously examines the volatile subject of man/woman relationships.
Those who seek an ardent feminist in Woolf’s diaries may be disappointed, especially in the early ones. Woolf’s range forbids a single reading of her attitude toward men and women and their relationships. Employing a strategy of deflection, Woolf plays no polemic politics in the diary. Only by tracing her views through the years of her diary can we locate her fluctuating interest in what as early as 1916 she calls “feminist politics.” In that year she writes to Margaret Llewelyn-Davies, “I become steadily more feminist, owing to The Times, which I read at breakfast & wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction keeps going a day longer without some vigorous young woman pulling us together” (J. Marcus 1987, 73). At this stage of her life, Woolf does not feel she is the woman to do it. Still uneasy about Leonard’s feelings for her, perhaps still unsure of her critical reputation, until the early 1930s Woolf chooses topics of writing, relationships, and cloaked fictions in the diary, not politically loaded feminist issues.

Woolf’s responses to individual relationships disrupt any reader’s attempt to affirm a gendered political constituency for Woolf. We may impose a feminist reading on her early diaries, but only later does Woolf read herself as feminist. In 1917, for example, she addresses the problem of man/woman relationships but only as they apply to friends. In writing of Dora Carrington and Ralph Partridge’s marriage, she says: “[H]e wants more control than I should care to give—control I mean of the body & the mind & time & thoughts of his loved. There’s the danger and her risk” (1978, 119). Her criticism of Ralph might apply equally to a criticism of Leonard, but Woolf fails to make the equation, choosing instead to sympathize with the “woman,” rather than give herself away. And Woolf’s sympathy does not always extend to women. Her acid tongue and devastating wit find women of all classes as objects of her derision, especially in the early diaries. She, for example, cruelly assesses “women’s faces in the streets! As senseless as playing cards; with tongues like adders” (1977, 149). Again, she may have identified these women with herself, but she does not admit the similarity.

As readers we might look at these two entries as representative. Her feminist sympathy for Dora may be her own identification with and sympathy for herself. Her anger with women in the streets points to an internalized anger at the subordinate situation of the “senseless” faces of the women, the same one she has with relation to Leonard. She turns her anger at controlling men inwardly on Dora, the women, and herself, projecting her fury onto women both like and unlike herself in station and intelligence, possibly sharing their passivity and submerged rage. Other women, therefore, act as safe targets for her self-loathing. In later diaries,
however, Woolf finds the will and motivation to direct her anger virulently toward men, who may have been the targets all along. She certainly knows her male audiences may read them but at this later date confronts that audience more directly, even in diary text.

She writes one such direct confrontation in February 1934. After reading J. E. Neal's unflattering portrait of Queen Elizabeth, she says sharply: “a fig for impartial and learned historians! All men are liars” (1982, 201). Entries this angry are rare, but in the later years she even takes on Leonard occasionally, although with characteristic mildness: “L. is very hard on people; . . . His desire, I suppose, to dominate. Love of power. And then he writes against it . . . it doesn’t matter, to me . . . & yet I hate people noticing it” (1982, 326). Almost always describing his treatment of her in a studied neutrality, a rather suspicious objectivity, she more often chooses to direct overt feminist jabs to others less close to home: Neal, or Ralph, or Clive. Not until *Three Guineas* does she make overt distinctions between men and patriarchal structures in her critique. In July 1927, for example, she says, “Love, love, love—Clive, Clive, Clive—that’s the tune of it, thrummed with rather callous persistency; a thick finger and thumb. Now love I dare say nothing against; but it is a feeble passion” (1980, 149). Why she “dare not” speak against love can only be guessed, but in relation to Clive she does just that.

In an entry written the year before her death she goes beyond the personal to indict the businessmen’s “male detached lives” . . . this cool man’s world: so weather tight: . . . sealed up; self sufficient; admirable; caustic; laconic; objective . . . not a chink through which one can see art, or books” (1984, 241). Aiming her disdain at unintellectual men, her commentary echoes criticisms she has made of Leonard or Clive. Woolf’s diary musings more closely parallel her public indictments against men at the end of her life, testifying to Woolf’s intense engagement with her art and her feminism. Her cultural interactions and observations change as she and her culture change. Her self-sufficiency and success prompt new relationships with her audience leading to more open exchanges, particularly on the political level.

*Three Guineas* seems to have freed Woolf to write more openly in her diary of her disenchantment with prevailing, gender-coded political structures. Even though Woolf does not often write of her grievances against institutionalized relations between men and women in her diary, a reference to an essay she plans to write (“On Being Despised” [1982, 271]) points to her plan for *Three Guineas* and uncovers her motivation in writing a book that “will need some courage” (1982, 354) because of its feminist political agenda. *Three Guineas* speaks strongly of an intellectual, impersonal, yet
committed view of the need to equalize women’s power and to restructure the masculine world in order to recognize the worth of daughters as well as sons. In giving “daughters” worth, she gives it to herself as well. As Anne Bell says, “In Three Guineas she said what she wished to say and, oddly enough, did not for once deeply mind what others said of it” (1984, viii).

Always mindful of audience, Woolf confronts her public directly in Three Guineas. Having had her say in public, she becomes more directly feminist in face-to-face confrontations with others and in her diary. When Morgan (E. M. Forster) offers to propose Woolf’s name to the London Library Committee, she refuses, saying, “Rather to my pleasure I answered No. I don’t want to be a sop—a face saver . . . years ago in the L.L. He sniffed about women on Ctee. One of these days I’ll refuse I said silently. And now I have” (1984 337). Years later Forster tells interviewer Wilfred Stone, “I was surprised to read that remark about her being furious with me in front of the London Library. I was only trying to be amusing” (Stone 1997, 58). Thus, publishing Three Guineas makes public the beliefs Woolf had long held and empowers her to greet her critics with greater confidence and directness.

Audience: The Force of the Internal and External
Caring deeply about what others think and finally shrugging off her very real fear of others’ criticism with Three Guineas, Woolf becomes aware of a disparaging, internalized audience—a highly critical and mean-spirited self. An audience to be reckoned with, this responsive “I” haunts her. In one entry she says, “Parsimony may be the end of this book. Also shame at my own verbosity . . . Who am I ashamed of? Myself reading them” (1984, 352). Her own perfectionist critical practices perform on her works as well as others. Until she finds the means to throw off the criticism of others, she cannot see that self-rebuke causes her fear of audience. Separating her self-assessment from assessment by others permits her to praise herself, rare indeed. In one instance the split between the reader in Woolf and the writer works to raise her esteem: “I hand my compliment to that terribly depressed woman, myself, whose head ached so often: who was so entirely convinced a failure; for in spite of everything I think she brought it off, & is to be congratulated” (1984, 39). What Woolf “brought off” was writing under the specter of many audiences: a critical audience; a loving but controlling domestic audience, Leonard; and an internalized, highly critical audience of her own intellect.

Given such fear of exposure, a husband who feels he must watch and control, and a public literary “set” avid for a look at Mrs. Woolf, why does
she write a diary when other avenues of expression are open to her? The answer lies not only in a writer’s habit of expression but also in her own passion to find a multiple conception of her reality and to shape a new vision. She acknowledges the diary’s rewards in saying, “Melancholy diminishes as I write. Why then don’t I write it down oftener? Well one’s vanity forbids. I want to appear a success even to myself” (1978, 72). This therapeutic reliance on the diary to record and reshape her perceptions keeps her writing long after Leonard Woolf’s promotion of it relaxes, long after her reputation spreads from her more public writings. Under the constraints that her audiences unintentionally put on the writer, Woolf sees her diary as a place of discovery and negotiation, keeping the valuable, dispersing the troublesome. She says, “Many many deep thoughts have visited me. And fled. The pen puts salt on their tails; they see the shadow and fly” (1984, 342). She articulates both external and internal experiences particularly in the last few years of her life, when she contemplates the multiplicity of being with increasing interest, working toward “synthesis of my being . . . nothing makes a whole unless I am writing” (1982, 161). When she sees herself slipping into insanity, however, her diary entries cover over the horror of her mind’s images and workings. During a “peculiar & . . . unpleasant” time for her in 1937 she muses: “The exposed moments are terrifying” (1984, 63). How much more terrifying for her are those few months in 1941 when disabling voices haunt her, signaling the return of an unendurable melancholia. To protect herself, she retreats from self-articulation and exposure.

When the madness returns, so does her caution and her care in hiding it in the diary. She endeavors to control and limit what she perceives, to silence the unacceptable. She seeks to protect both herself and Leonard from the horror that begins weeks before her death on March 28, 1941. She had begun her diary in January as usual, lining her margins, setting up “a diary as a book which she intended to fill, and it underscores a life stopped short” (Podnieks 2000, 106). She makes no mention of her increasing anxiety, admitting her fear only in a letter to Vanessa five days before her suicide. The diary conceals the intensity of her malady in desperately optimistic entries of resolve. Unable to expose herself to her own shame or to Leonard’s control, she consciously crafts inconsequential details to override the “black shivers” (1984, 266). She writes a diary of will: “Measure, order, precision are now my gods” (1984, 343). An internal audience judges fiercely, prompting her to promise herself and her husband to keep an “order” she can’t possibly maintain. Her dread of exposure comes from her own fears and her knowledge that Leonard and a myriad of doctors would take charge on discovering the depth of her malaise.
In the last entries of her diary Woolf alternates accounts of increasing frankness with those that evince a purposeful withdrawal from inward scrutiny. This oscillation, more than any overt commentary, signals the rupture within Woolf as well as in the text. She must have felt the illness coming on for months. She remarks in September 1940, “As I told Ethel Smyth, one must drop a safety curtain over one’s private scene” (1984, 323). In other entries she watches her mental state, even graphs her anxiety, but does it clinically. When she turns her gaze outward, she records rather nasty observations about others but does not tie her observations to her melancholy mind. Woolf develops an enhanced watchfulness that has an edge, a fear, and cruelty. In February 1941 she writes a long rambling entry, stridently and vulgarly descriptive: “powdering & painting, these common little tarts, while I sat, behind a thin door, p—-ing as quietly as I could” (1984, 357). She then depicts the “fat, smart” women who eat cakes, and uncharacteristically Woolf asks, “Where does the money come to feed these fat white slugs?” (1984, 357) Her disgust extends to those of her class: “We pay the penalty for our rung in society by internal boredom” (1984, 357). As with entries written early in her marriage, when she teeters on the edge of madness, Woolf writes bitterly, with an impersonal virulence and an earthy yet aesthetic loathing for all persons.

How much Leonard knew of the change in his wife is difficult to determine. Certainly her lashing out was indicative. Hindsight makes her madness obvious. But cannily, she carefully retreats to show more control: “Women sitting on seats. A pretty hat in a teashop—how fashion revives the eye! . . . No: I intend no introspection. I mark Henry James’s sentence: Observe perpetually . . . Observe my own despondency . . . Oh dear yes, I shall conquer this mood” (1984, 358). She does not conquer. Four days before she kills herself she writes not of madness or longing for death, but rather determination to “observe perpetually.” In her last entry she remarks: “L. is doing the rhododendrons . . .” (Woolf’s ellipsis) (1984, 359).

Instead of turning inward, Woolf attempts to step back and observe the beauty of the world and the rituals of domestic life that previously sustained her; Leonard’s efforts to prune, snip, and shape that beauty perhaps remind her unconsciously of his care and control. She deflects her gaze from her deteriorating condition and reassures Leonard who— noting her frail mental condition—may have been reading her journal. This last entry surely points to a desperate attempt to fix her attention on an external world. Even war, it seems, appears more immediately orderly than her mind.
Audience: Catalyst and Trespasser

During the last year of her life, depressed, she says, “It struck me that one curious feeling is, that the writing ‘I,’ has vanished. No audience. No echo. That’s part of one’s death” (1984, 293). The “echo” of audience had great importance to Woolf as a writer. Such an audience can curtail full disclosure, however, and ultimately reconstruct a writer’s intent. Woolf wrote her diary as an “odd mix-up of public and private” (1984, 110), knowing its potential incitements and dangers.

To illustrate the distortion an audience renders on any text, even one generically conceived as personal—the diary—we need only look at an incident that occurred after Virginia Woolf’s death. Quentin Bell recalls an evening when Leonard read aloud from his dead wife’s diary to an audience of friends. Bell “suspects” that Leonard had “come on a passage where she makes a bit too free with the frailties and absurdities of someone here present” and questions him. Leonard remarks, “that’s not why I broke off. I shall skip the next few pages because there’s not a word of truth in them” (Q. Bell 1977, xiv). That Leonard and friends would judge Virginia’s diaries, and by extension Virginia herself, and decide on her version of truth as lies speaks to Virginia’s perspicuity concerning her external audience. A patronizing and judgmental masculine audience turns her diary into a retrospective sham. That Bell, agreeing that Virginia does not write what he calls the “truth,” would mention this on the first page of his introduction to her diaries seems unconscionable; he calls into question Woolf’s perceptions before he presents them and completely disregards her own recognition that truth, identity, and perception are continually in process, in negotiation.

Woolf, fearing such trespass on the body of her work, wrote her diary as “autobiography in public” (1984, 141), using textual wiles to face her audience, to have her say: “[T]he fears are entirely outbalanced (this is honest) by the immense relief & peace I have gained, & enjoy this moment: . . . The pack may howl, but it shall never catch me” (1984, 141).