In the Presence of Audience

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Chapter 2

Katherine Mansfield:

“‘Damning little notebook[s]’
tell their own story”

As a woman, writer, myth, liar, creator, and actress, Katherine Mansfield positions multiple identities throughout her texts, both fictional and autobiographical. Simultaneously she exposes herself and misleads the reader who looks for the woman behind the story and within the language. Mansfield writes notebooks that manifest her complexity as a woman caught between her conservative New Zealander’s background and her progressive/oppressive life in Europe. Her life spent in a state of self-imposed exile, Mansfield feared remaining outside a mainstream she often despised, fighting to enter an established literary coterie she shocked. Elusive, she fades and disappears, then reappears boldly in robes of bright, and possibly false, colors.

Her biographers Antony Alpers, Claire Tomalin, Gillian Boddy, and Jeffrey Meyers all speak about her ambivalently. At once critical and admiring, they find her protean personality exciting and frustrating. Mansfield refuses definition, resists all her life the roles and labels others made for her. She alternately creates and collapses her own versions of self: “Katherine was a liar . . . , a bold and elaborate inventor of false versions . . . ; and if she was the heroine of her own life story, lies became not lies but fiction, a perfectly respectable thing” (Tomalin 1988, 57). In 1903, at age fifteen, Mansfield begins what we now call her Journal or her diary. Earlier Notebooks contain only childhood stories. She continues writing the personal reflections until her death in 1923. She writes “for” herself, to define herself, but also as a means of communicating versions of selves to others in order to guide their understanding of her. The volumes of her fifty-three notebooks express all the versions of her life, both imaginative and factual, all designed to expose and hide the actress seeking to please the audience. Aware that audiences sneer as often as they applaud, Mansfield enacts alternate versions of a self awaiting the fall but
hoping for better: “And God looked upon the fly fallen into the jug of milk and saw that it was good” (1925, 153).

Despite Mansfield’s unsavory personal reputation, her short-story collections, especially Bliss and The Garden Party, exhibit a strong literary talent. A satirical and sentimental writer in both her notebooks and stories, she creates insightful figures whose social and personal conflicts shift as quickly as her world does. Mansfield writes both her fictions and her journals to examine what it is to live in a world that frightens and judges, that takes more than it gives.

Leaving New Zealand voluntarily at age nineteen, Mansfield rushed into the different, equally uncomfortable worlds of Great Britain and continental Europe. Her move from New Zealand, necessary if she was to write and to grow, threw her into worlds where she did not fit. Diary entries of 1909 and 1911 show her pain: “[E]very gate and every door/Is locked ‘gainst me alone” (47). In 1917, six years after leaving New Zealand, she discovered her lingering illness was tuberculosis, removing her even further from mainstream social and literary practices but not from her desire to fit in, to be part of something.

In the journal form of autobiography, writers assign meanings daily, and only years later do definitive life patterns emerge. Mansfield’s Journal opens up interpretive questions about her life and the lives of women everywhere, rather than answering them conclusively and so dispelling them. Her life, her philosophies, her dreams, and her realities defy fixed roles, static ideas. In quoting poet John Keats, she defines her philosophy: “Better be ‘imprudent moveable than prudent fixtures” (127). Mansfield, living for years under the specter of death, extolled movement to avoid stagnation. But her movement and “imprudence” confronted her eagerness to please, putting in motion a life of seeking and evading. Mansfield’s diary tells her story, but in her desire to convince her husband and the world of her worth she creates a public-redeeming text.

Readers who believe diaries are secret, confidential—full of outpourings of desire and longing or scandalous sexual revelations—may find Mansfield’s journals disappointing. In writing her diaries she often creates more conventional selves than her history can contain. In both her fiction and her more personal notebooks, Mansfield writes stories that fluctuate in meaning, simultaneously conforming to and subverting from within the masculine ethos of modernist Europe. In writing so-called private text, she, as many women centuries before, finds herself “inevitably caught in mimicking male definitions of themselves” (Nussbaum 1988, 154) or, more likely, caught in acting out male definitions of woman.
Mansfield, who “assumed some 20 different names during her lifetime” (Boddy 1993, 101), proliferates identities in each version of her journal.²

Thus readers find it nearly impossible to locate any unified self or absolute truth. Unlike Woolf, Mansfield didn’t even try to present unified versions of the self for her husband. In April 1920 she addresses the problem of truth and subjectivity in an essay section of the Journal titled *The Flowering of the Self*: “True to oneself! which self? Which of my many—well really, that’s what it looks like [it’s] coming to—hundreds of selves? For what with complexes and repressions and reactions and vibrations and reflections, there are moments when I feel I am nothing but the small clerk of some hotel without a proprietor . . .” (1954, 205). Mansfield acknowledges with acuity her complexity and multiplicity. Her lack of center makes it impossible to be “true” to a self so fractured, sometimes bringing her emotional despair. She nevertheless writes of these proliferating selves in the awareness of the larger psychological and literary movement in Freudian/Modernist England.

*The Journal of Katherine Mansfield: Chaotic Choices*

The conflicting and paradoxical nature of Mansfield’s state of exile unmistakably surfaces in her personal papers. *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, edited by her husband, John Middleton Murry, first appeared four years after her death, with a fuller version released in 1954. In 2002, Margaret Scott published her complete edition, *Katherine Mansfield Notebooks.*³ The *Notebooks* include every entry from the earlier *Journal*, the adolescent diary of 1907 called *The Urewera Notebook*, previously edited by Ian Gordon, and additional notes on paper fragments, quotes from other writers, unsent letters, and the manuscript versions of unfinished stories, outlines, poems, shopping lists, and budgets—over seven hundred pages of papers only recently transcribed, organized, and collated in full.

Mansfield would begin a new diary in the front of a blank book, the entries would dwindle after a couple months, and finally she would write backward or upside down elsewhere in this book or another old or new book a few months later. In handwriting so difficult to read that even Murry struggled with it, Mansfield wrote in many notebooks and diaries concurrently, sometimes pinning pages together later for order. Her journal-writing method illustrates her conflicting need for order and her impulse for something new. Because of the huge number of fictional entries and fragments in the newer edition, I most often refer to the earlier, less complete but more manageable *Journal*. I also include new entries
from the *Notebooks* to better reflect the mass of personal papers that tell us much about Mansfield, using the terms *diary, journal,* and *notebook* interchangeably. The fictions, evasions, and bold statements make up Mansfield’s personal papers. They all record her impulse to live, to embrace the facts, and to invent new fictions of her life. These personal notebook/journal/diary entries show her experiments in fiction and self-expression mixed haphazardly.

**Journal Publication: Letting the Husband Decide**

Mansfield’s decisions to publish journal entries vary with her mood: Bursts of self-esteem empower her to confront her culture by making public all she writes; bursts of self-loathing lash out to vandalize or silence any self that might confirm her own inadequacy. “One thing I am determined upon. And that is *to leave no sign.* There was a time—it is not so long ago—when I should have written *all* that has happened . . . I *keep silence* as Mother kept silence” (1954, 254). Equating her own silence with her mother’s, Mansfield alludes to women’s place as outside articulation, a designation she resents, especially when it restrained her saying/staying power. Inhabiting the periphery of culture and despising her place, Mansfield nevertheless wills her papers to the traditional wielder of control and power over women: her husband. She writes to Murry before her death: “Please destroy all letters you do not wish to keep & all papers. You know my love of tidiness. Have a clean sweep Bogey, and leave all fair—will you?” (Murry in Boddy 1993, 102).

Bequeathing all her manuscripts to her chief critic, Murry, may have been an act designed to relinquish her construction of selves to his destruction of them. She instructs him to “publish as little as possible and tear up and burn as much as possible” (Boddy 1993, 99), clearly departing from her wish in 1916 “to keep a kind of minute book, to be published some day” (Mansfield 2002 2,33). Her fatigue, her illness, and her sense of resignation heighten her awareness of the very real critical and often abusive response to women’s writing. And as she reflects, “Looking back, I imagine I was always writing. Twaddle it was, too” (Mansfield 2002 2, 337). No longer energetic or spiteful, she relishes the erasure of designations that could disturb the more spiritualized self she felt she had become. After years of depicting her various selves as effaced and struggling, near her death she notes her desire for a wholeness she knew to be spurious, but one she idealistically hoped love could bring: “Being made ‘whole.’ Yes . . . By love serve ye one another” (1954, 259). The contradictions in her papers refute any reality of wholeness, except in this deathbed theory controlled by religious language.
These idealistic theoretical statements certainly contrast with earlier notebooks whose sensuality repeats itself in her description of both nature and woman: “Before me . . . a weird passionate abandon of birds—their strange cries—the fanciful shapes of the supple jacks—Then the advent of Bella—her charm in the dusk—the very dusk incarnarnate . . .” (I. Gordon 1978, 51). Murry’s edition includes few references to the adolescent diaries where this kind of sensuality surfaces, and he omits later fictions where Mansfield also relegates her eroticism. Sensitive to Bloomsbury’s disapproval, particularly with regard to Katherine, Murry edits his wife’s *Journal* to focus on her talent and her intelligence, not her sensuality.

However, after reading all the published *Journals* and *Notebooks*, I suggest that Mansfield censors herself more rigidly in writing her diaries than Murry does in editing them for publication. Murry merely trims and tightens and tidies, smoothing over Mansfield’s rougher edges in the *Journal* while she occasionally rips the fabric of convention in the notebook versions. Since Murry had never been able to subdue Mansfield for long in their marriage, her pretense to the contrary, his editorial art could have aided him in creating a new, more acceptable wife. “[Murry] was to spend . . . eleven years being baffled by her, and still longer trying to shape her image into something he could cope with” (Tomalin 1988, 95). But this is only partially the case.

Although Murry’s editorial posture undoubtedly influences his final version of Mansfield’s *Journal*, subsequent versions and her manuscripts verify his integrity. Scott says of Murry, “I was struck by how much of the material Murry had left unused. . . . How much he had misread, trimmed, punctuated and generally tidied up” (2002, xiv), but she also acknowledges that, in light of the difficulties of publishing the journals earlier, “He struggled on with the deciphering and whatever he did manage to read he published, without defensive explanations . . . almost his only suppressions were names of people still alive at the time of publication . . . he commands a respect and an admiration that no amount of disapproval of his editorial methods can diminish” (ibid.).

The Scott *Notebooks* show a Mansfield who is more aware of her difference, a New Zealander in exile, a woman forever aware of her audience’s judgment. This complete version tells more fully a woman’s stories and also what can be told—given the pressure of gendered codes and the real presence of audience: father/husband/censor/public. Evident in all the versions of her *Journal/Notebooks* is Mansfield’s “sense that exploration, with all its dangers, is preferable to inertia—indeed, necessary, if life is to be experienced to the full . . .” (Hankin 1983, 127). But even as
Mansfield envisions herself as larger than life, enacting roles and disguises, writing her own lines, she constructs restrained versions of self, choosing her facts, creating fictions in which to hide. With audiences in mind—at least much of the time—her own retraction and caution frame the entries. Her response to William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* sums up her vision of what it is to be the subject of a written text:

To act . . . to see ourselves in the part—to make a larger gesture than would be ours in life—to declaim, to pronounce, to even exaggerate.
To persuade ourselves? Or others? (1954, 275)

**Audience: Presence and Pressure**

The cool onlooker haunts Mansfield throughout her life, whether he is her father, her brother, her husband, Bloomsbury, or God. This presence of audience complicates Mansfield’s exploring and defining in journals. Readily inviting lovers (and later her husband) to view the contents of her diary and writing to an internalized audience sometimes conceived as her late brother, Mansfield also imagines a potential public readership for these diary notebooks as well. While the journal functions as a forum for independence and a rewriting of self or selves, it acts simultaneously as a site of control by a higher authority who will be its reader and a site of interest for future audiences only sensed as yet. The instant popularity of the 1927 and the 1954 editions of the *Journal* and the 2002 version depend on audiences avid for a peek at a woman who tantalized and mystified the British intellectual world.

Lytton Strachey, appalled by the limited subject in Katherine Mansfield’s *Journal*, says, “I see Murry lets out that it was written for publication—which no doubt explains a great deal. But why that foul-mouthed, virulent, brazen-faced broomstick of a creature should have got herself up as a pad of rose-scented cotton wool is beyond me” (Boddy 1993, 101). Others, such as A. R. D. Fairburn, were scandalized by its supposed fullness: “[Mansfield was] a woman whom Mr. Middleton Murray [sic] has already done his best to compromise in the minds of the reading public by cramming her incontinently down their throats on every possible occasion. . . . I had no business to be reading certain passages. They gave me the feeling that I had burst in upon a lady in her boudoir at an awkward moment” (McEldowney 1985, 112). The prurience and perversity of this criticism clearly indicate reasons that Mansfield herself, and Murry in her stead, cautiously exposed her notes as “private” text. Looking for a fixed identity or reality, readers of diaries...
often neglect to consider the play of identities within the swirling language of textual exploration, refusing one truth, one unity.

A diary writer, then, is not merely the object of self-scrutiny but concurrently the object of another’s view, another’s expectation. If these writers, like Mansfield, want desperately to please the men in their lives, they use strategies of deflection to write selves that satisfy their own momentary sense of self, yet also please their “watcher,” the Other.

Recording a dream in 1919, Mansfield writes: “The watcher appeared. He stood always in profile, his felt hat turned up at the side . . . ‘Hi, Missy’, he shouted to me. ‘Why don’t you give us a bit of a show out there?’” In the dream Mansfield takes off her clothes and a wave sweeps her away as she yells, “Help! Help!” (1954, 176). The ambiguous smile of the watcher coming closer ends her dream. Mansfield’s diary deflects the gaze of such “watchers” to save herself from the nightmare of naked exposure, even while the writing itself saves her from being overwhelmed by a masculine culture that dominates even her dreams.

An Imagined and Benign Masculine Audience: Brother

A pervasive male culture both entrances and repels Mansfield. She cannot set herself apart from her fascination with “the patriarchal lineage,” a pattern of “Father—Boss—God—Fate” that dominates the “fly,” her consistent metaphor for those with “bad luck, and ill health” (O’Sullivan 1994, 19). Yet she also cannot assuage her need for and attraction to male approval. In the early, unsettling years of her relationship with Murry, Katherine renews her relationship with her brother, Leslie Beauchamp. In October 1915, soon after their reunion, Leslie was killed during a grenade-training exercise. That year marks a lessening of Murry’s influence on Mansfield, as she had confided in Leslie, replacing a lover’s intimacy with a brother’s. The news of Leslie’s death leaves her in “a state of shattered dependence on Murry” (Tomalin 1988, 140), although Murry soon leaves her in France to recover from her shock and illness.

Her diary during this time records an imaginary dialogue between brother and sister that shows a poignant grief and a longing for death. The dead Leslie clearly becomes the audience of an entire section of the journal. She says, “Dearest heart, I know you are there, and I live with you, and I will write for you. . . . I give Jack my ‘surplus’ love, but to you I hold and to you I give my deepest love” (1954, 86). In writing to Leslie, Mansfield is able to write of her own identity at a time when her dependence on Murry threatened to overwhelm her. Because Mansfield always feels the need for masculine attachment and approval, she collapses her
own identity with her brother's, effacing her sense of self by writing of the two of them together. She says she needs to “Lose myself, lose myself to find you, dearest” (1954, 98) and promises to find Leslie in the book she will write and send to New Zealand.

Not until 1920, when she publishes the story collection Bliss, does Leslie figure predominately in Mansfield's fiction; the 1922 collection, The Garden Party, further fulfills Mansfield's promise to “find” him in her fictional work. In both collections a brother's presence consoles the female protagonist. In “The Garden Party,” for example, young Laurie consoles his sister Laura after her visit to a family mourning the death of a son: “She stopped, she looked at her brother. ‘Isn't life,’ she stammered, ‘isn't life—’ But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood” (1922, 61).

The Laura/Laurie synonymity and the mutuality of understanding point to Mansfield's appraisal of her brother as part of herself. Certainly in her privileging his place as audience of her Journal and subject of her work, she acknowledges his importance as part of the self. In “The Wind Blows” she writes of a brother and sister as one flesh: “Their heads bent, their legs just touching, they stride like one eager person through the town . . .” (Garden Party and Other Stories 1922, 42). Writing to Leslie in her Journal, Mansfield addresses the self–audience simultaneously. Seeing herself isolated and different from others, Mansfield constructs her self-perspective in relation to others, sensing an audience that looks and judges. As a woman, as a New Zealander, she too often lacks her own image of self. With her dead brother as audience, Mansfield values herself more; he becomes part of her, empowering her: “Dear brother, as I jot these notes, I am speaking to you. To whom did I always write when I kept those huge complaining diaries? Was it to myself? . . . Each time I take up my pen you are with me” (1954, 96). His clear presence in 1916 indicates Mansfield's desire to textually represent her brother's likeness. And even though Leslie as audience does not kindle the careful and manipulative discourse that the presence of Murry/husband does, Mansfield's discomfort with her feminine persona surfaces as she equates a masculine formulation with her own: “Perhaps 'the new man' will not live. Perhaps I am not yet risen” (97).

Later, in spring 1916, Mansfield shifts her diary topics from grieving remembrance to intellectual engagements. She emphasizes masculine achievement in comparison with her own, writing of Dostoevsky and Shakespeare until a meeting with her sister Chaddie sparks new memories and stories that she practices in the journal. In reviewing her meeting with Chaddie she addresses an audience who is clearly not Leslie. She apologizes
for not writing much that day and addresses someone who may be Murry or may be future readers: “Only you see, fool who is reading this, I went out awfully early” (1954, 113). From this point in the diary she resumes her self-narratives, practicing stories and reflections that do not always address her childhood directly. Clearly she has once again changed her self-conception. Her audience shifts to a more public and perhaps less sympathetic one.

Higher Stakes: Husband as Audience

While Mansfield’s journal acts as a forum for independence and a rewriting of selves, it functions simultaneously as a site of control by a “helpful” but higher authority who will be its reader. The audience of most of her adult diary is John Middleton Murry, her lover and later husband, whom she calls “Jack” or “Bogey.” They often write in each other’s notebooks, and she sends Murry sections of her journal when away as if to share the “real” with him and so convince him of her sincerity and worth. She says in 1922, “I wrote this for myself. I shall now risk sending it to Bogey. He may do with it what he likes” (2002 2, 187). On another occasion she writes, “[T]hese pages from my journal. Don’t let them distress you” (ibid., 285).

Murry, this “real reader,” was a literary power in his own right. By far the better known of the two, Murry commands a presence throughout the journal, and his power competes with Mansfield’s own. This subordinating of wife to husband seems all the more strange given Mansfield’s success as a writer, her travel, and her antics. But Mansfield, in the journal at least, sees herself as a traditional wife. And traditionally “the female has a more passive role; she is subordinated to a landscape which has its own hopes for her, or her view is limited by the man to man’s own viewing” (Caws 1980, 27). Mansfield’s attraction to “man’s own viewing” leads her to write a journal written for a man’s “look.” Although Mansfield wants “the power to control her own life without being held in any web of convention” (Tomalin 1988, 45), she also wants to appear feminine, passive, brilliant, and pure—qualities men admire.

Except for early years troubled by uncertainty about the permanence of their relationship and by the death of her brother, Mansfield writes with her husband in mind, often addressing him both directly and indirectly in the diary itself, most often with an eye toward currying his favor and proving herself in his eyes. She says in February 1921, “It is only by making myself worthy of Jack that I shall be worthy of what I mean our relationship to be. He that faileth in little things shall not succeed in great things” (1954, 240). In November of the same year she acknowledges,
“These days I have been awfully rebellious. . . . I want things that Jack can do without, that aren’t natural to him. I long for them” (1954, 271). Although this last entry only mildly criticizes, she writes of her separation from Jack’s values and of her fear that she lacks what he does not deem important, irrespective of her desire.

Thus Mansfield in her Journal alternately conforms to and resists both her husband and her culture’s construction of her as woman. In one poignant entry she voices her ambivalence about her role of wife as society sees it: “I don’t particularly want to live with him. I’d like to if it could be managed—but no sacrifices, please. As to learning—as to being a ‘little lovely darling’—it’s not conceivable. I want to work. . . . (1954, 184). In her journal entry she reminds him of her writer’s persona, explaining her lack of convention. In an entry that Murry calls “An unposted letter,” she chastises an audience, probably Murry, “Your letters sounded insincere to me; I did not believe them. . . . You see—to me—life and work are two things indivisible. . . . I think other people have given you a wrong idea of me, perhaps” (1954, 237). A few months later she writes as a traditional romantic heroine: “But I can say as truly as a girl in love: ‘He is all the world to me’” (1954, 252). Mansfield’s narrative oscillates between traditional sycophantic conceptions of the feminine and warring aspects of herself that refuse containment by social constructions. With Murry listening, she voices contradictions within herself but nevertheless constructs herself discursively to win his approval and to maintain her self-esteem.

In her short story “Marriage à la Mode” she writes from William’s point of view about Isabel, a wife who wishes to conform to a role of monogamous attention to her husband. Isabel says, “God forbid, my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness,” a refrain from within the journal pages. But the story ends with Isabel’s failure to write to William though she knows she should: “Of course she would stay here and write. . . . No, it was too difficult. . . . And, laughing in the new way, she ran down the stairs” (Garden Party and Other Stories 1922, 167). Mansfield’s fictional refusal to write to her husband, to explain herself, and to open herself to his scrutiny evinces her own ambivalence about her marriage and her writing for Murry’s eyes. Although the reader’s sympathy in this story is with William, the tragedy of conflicting roles and audiences is Mansfield’s. “She reveled in change, disguise, mystery, and mimicry” (Tomalin 1988, 89). She uses all of these techniques to both invite and deflect the male gaze: first her father’s, later her brother’s, then her lovers’ and husband’s. Mansfield’s conflict comes, as Peter Brooks points out, because narratives “need to be heard . . . desire to become the story of the listener as much as the teller” (1987, 55). In Mansfield’s diary narratives
she clearly invites the audience to read her shifting and evasive narrative performances, willingly suffering their judgment for the sake of the performance.

The Internal Audience: Self-Fictions, Self-Censorship

Mansfield’s indistinct fusion of her life stories from her fictions in her diaries imbues the *Journal* with an aesthetic, artistic quality that many diary narratives lack. Yet this same quality makes the separation of lived experience and imagined experience difficult—if not impossible. She writes most often in first person, yet she also frequently writes in third person to record events of her life as well as stories in progress. One entry, for example, simply says, “But at last she was conscious that a choice had to be made, that before dawn, these shadows would appear less real, making way for something different” (1954, 125).

The “she” represents perhaps a fictional character, though Mansfield does not hint that it does. She observes and she invents, subverting certainties: “‘Don’t you think it would be marvelous,’ she said, ‘to have just one person in one’s life to whom one could tell everything? She leant forward, put down her cup... ’” (1954, 175). Whether this entry shows Mansfield’s longing for intimacy, begins a story, or records a vignette—we cannot know. Whatever its intention, loneliness prevails. The “she” of Mansfield’s diaries cannot be assigned to fictional characters only; clearly Mansfield achieves distance and deflects exposure by referring to herself as “she,” too. Searching for a knowledge of self, Katherine Mansfield as woman expertly uses language to both answer and deflect questions, to be both “she” and “I,” to build “textual universes that are charged with imagination” (Duyfhuizen 1986, 178). She writes to fictionalize as well as to build her life through language.

Reconciling the oppositions of personal perception, of “I” and “she” can be excruciatingly painful. In Mansfield’s story “Miss Brill,” two onlookers view Miss Brill as a nonentity and an object for ridicule, “a stupid old thing” and “a silly old mug” (*Garden Party and Other Stories* 1920, 188) in grievous contrast to Miss Brill’s fictions about herself. But despite the distance between self-perceptions and the perception of others, Mansfield also acknowledges, through Miss Brill’s pain, the need to gain self-worth by others’ validation. The character Beryl in “The Prelude” looks in the mirror at her own beauty but knows her perception cannot alleviate her restlessness: “She leaned her arms along and looked at her pale shadow in it. How beautiful she looked, but there was nobody to see, nobody” (*Bliss and Other Stories* 1920, 42). Later Beryl despairs at the lack
of someone to see her and give substance to her fantasy of herself: “Oh, God, there she was, back again playing the same old game. False—false as ever. . . . I’m always acting a part. I’m never my real self for a moment” (Bliss and Other Stories 1920, 68). For Beryl and for her creator, reality cannot be discerned in the absence of a viewer. The oscillation between fact and fancy, between perceptions of self and perceptions by others exemplifies her changing identities and feelings, her apprehension of truth and lies. Mansfield says, “After supper I must start my journal and keep it day by day. But can I be honest? If I lie, it’s no use” (1954, 240). Trying to untangle the stories of Mansfield’s life as told by her biographers from the tales she spins in her journal can be as frustrating as discovering the “real” self of Miss Brill or Beryl.

More often, Mansfield creates a fiction of her life to articulate an acceptable self. In a rather typical entry where Mansfield worries about her idleness, she says: “But it all goes deeper. Yes, you are right. . . . I have not felt pure in heart, not humble, not good . . .” (1954, 270). But behind the façade other selves emerge. While Mansfield’s “she” longs for someone to tell “everything” even in her journal, Mansfield never tells “everything” or indeed “anything” that admits of Lady Ottoline’s or Dorothy Brett’s or Virginia Woolf’s critical perception of her. Ottoline describes her: “She is brilliant, witty in describing people and is certainly not kind or charitable” (Boddy 1988, 56). She knows their disdain.

Mansfield’s awareness of the distance between her idealized self-perceptions and the perceptions of her acquaintances and biographers surfaces in her fictions and in her journal as well. She knows the writer and the audience may be at odds, but she still desperately needs validation. In an entry in 1920 she writes, “She began to weep and could not stop. What was he made of—to talk of them giving each other up? . . . Never say again you have imagination—never say you have the capacity to love and that you know pity. You have said things to me that have wounded me for ever. I must go on . . .” (1954, 199). The fluctuation of pronouns “she” to “I” and “he” to “you” illustrates the blurring of her public and private writing, her fictions and her realities. She writes in relation to Murry, and directly to him, confusing her personal voice with her fictional ones, the better to hide, better to answer Murry’s condemnations.

A Wider Audience: Relationships

Mansfield’s intense desire to please, displayed in sites of disclosure and censorship, creates a narrative tension in her journal. Destructive relationships with others make her cynical and effacing but at the same time adamant
about her need for independence and equality. She says in 1915, “But I am so made that as soon as I am with anyone, I begin to give consideration to their opinions and their desire…” (1954, 81); a few months later, in writing of the people who became characters in her stories, she says, “Granted that these people exist and all the differences, complexities and resolutions are true to them—why should I write about them? They are not near me” (1954, 93). Her constant shifting of allegiances and her fearful interplay with acquaintances leaves her sense of identity diffuse and fragmented. Her own cautious persona, lacking the richness of her personality, addresses a critical audience both real and imagined. “She once told Ottoline that she sometimes did not know when she was acting, and when she was living her own life, adding, ‘Have I any real self left?’” (Alpers 1980, 244). This difficulty in separating the self-fictions and dramas from her ideological identities seen by others pronounces itself in the diary.

Mansfield’s occasional ill temper writes itself into the diary text, but her vitriol, promiscuous behavior, and unconventionality are remarkably lacking. The Journal, for example, shows no references to the “kissing” scene at a 1914 Garsington Christmas party where Mansfield and Mark Gertler,4 as part of a play, erotically and openly shocked Bloomsbury by antics that Gertler describes as making “violent love” (Boddy 1988, 42). The literate, sensible, if somewhat emotional presence Mansfield centers in her journal hardly seems the same woman whose charade with Gertler made her notorious for her wild and wanton ways. Virginia Woolf, in the early years of their relationship, writes to Vanessa that Mansfield seemed “to have gone every sort of hog since she was 17, which is interesting” (Woolf, quoted in Alpers 1980, 248). Clearly, Mansfield writes a persona into her private text that varies widely from the public’s perception of her.

At odds with Bloomsbury’s eroticized version of her, Mansfield creates a rather romantic fantasy of self for her diary. She certainly knows that Bloomsbury gossips about her and sees her in a less flattering light than she does herself. In a cryptic entry that seems to refer to a child she conceived but aborted or miscarried, she says, “If one wasn’t so afraid—why should I be? this isn’t going to be read by Bloomsbury et Cie—I’d say we had a child—a love child, and it’s dead” (1954, 187). She provides only vague references to the “we,” the “child,” the time, and all of the background circumstances. She notes that “Bloomsbury” will not read this entry, yet she writes in the shadow of their readership.

As her fame spreads and her relationships with literary men increase, Mansfield becomes aware of herself as a woman who, like her fictional Beryl, is “laughing in the new way.” She becomes aware, too, that she has come under the scrutiny of not only a husband but a masculine and liter-
ary public also. Ironically, others’ textual representations of Mansfield added to the public’s interest in her work. Because of her increasing fame and notoriety, she becomes aware that her Journal will be of public interest—even after her death. When Virginia Woolf, for example, asks to see her Journal, Mansfield promises to send it to her, though she never kept that promise (Blodgett 1988, 57).

Certainly Woolf’s interest reminds Mansfield of her place, precarious though it is, in literary London. Indeed, her tentative plans to publish her journal may have been a ploy to defend herself from the gossipy innuendos and the rumors spread about her in the tightly knit literary community. She is clearly wary of the British writing establishment, who read and judged her writing. Mansfield writes to Dorothy Brett upon the publication of Prelude: “And won’t the ‘Intellectuals’ just hate it. They’ll think it’s a New Primer for Infant Readers. Let ’em” (KM to DB, May 12, 1918). Mansfield’s assessment of how the literati would receive her work is not far off the mark. Most critics acknowledged her writing talent and creativity, but her relentlessly iconoclastic and perhaps feminine viewpoint confounded them. The English Review, for example, criticizes her work as “cruel, passionless and cynical,” while others complained of her “narrow and somewhat superficial themes” (Morrow 1993, 73). Mansfield’s critics ambivalently responded to her person and her work: “Of course, it is all girlishly overdramatic in the Katherine Mansfield way, but that is no reflection on its sincerity. After all, it was done, and done splendidly” (O’Connor 1993, 177).

Though they couldn’t quite dismiss her stories, her personal indiscretions incensed Mansfield’s contemporaries. She outraged men. Her rebellious nature and affront to convention provided male authors a characterization to abuse fictionally, even though some regarded her affectionately, as is certainly the case with D. H. Lawrence and A. R. Orage. Fictional and well-documented nonfictional critiques of Mansfield appeared in the literary circle’s virulent prose: D. H. Lawrence’s characterization of Katherine as Gudrun in Women in Love; A. R. Orage’s fictional depiction in a series of stories dubbed “Tales for Men Only”; and Aldous Huxley’s satirization after her death in Those Barren Leaves. They vilify her, ignoring (textually at least) the more passive, feminine Mansfield. Other fictional characterizations and her own fiction and personal letters document relationships and affairs entirely left out of her journal; her diaries certainly do not adequately inscribe her complexity. Murry’s own insider status may have made her leery of writing anything that, if passed on to others through him, might increase her exile within that literary circle. She wanted the mask of respectability, particularly in her Journal.
From early childhood, “appearances were very important” (Tomalin 1988, 10) to Mansfield, yet she persists in following her own course even when it makes her a pariah. While courting Lady Ottoline’s favor, for example, she began a flirtation (possibly an affair though he denied it) with Lady Ottoline’s lover, Bertrand Russell. Dorothy Brett, possibly courting Murry, began “mischief making” between Katherine and Lady Ottoline. Brett brought Katherine’s so-called treachery to the attention of Lady Ottoline, who accuses her. “‘To Hell with the Blooms Berries,’ said Mansfield” (A. Smith 1999, 34), responding with more bravado than she feels at this rift. In the published *Journal* no entries at all refer to October 1916, when these antics supposedly took place; the only entry in November discusses “window cleaners” and “death.” Her refusal to address her betrayal of Ottoline is no surprise. She leaves out many of her dealings with other people, focusing on Murry, herself, and occasionally Ida Baker, her close companion, whom she calls “L.M.” Mansfield may omit these dealings to protect the passive and proper image of herself that she prefers as the subject of her diary. Mansfield’s letters, hundreds of them to friends such as Lady Ottoline, Violet and Sidney Schiff, S. S. Kotelianski, Lytton Strachey, John Galsworthy, and Mark Gertler better document her relationships and their importance. She refers to them infrequently in the *Journal*.

She rarely privately reflects or gives opinions about people as we might expect. Her relationship with Frieda and D. H. Lawrence is an exception, as she uses the diary to write in detail of their exploits. The two couples alternately lived together, admired, fought, and finally ignored each other. An entry on January 10, 1915, says: “Windy and dark. In the morning, Frieda suddenly. She had had a row with Lawrence. She tired me to death . . .” (1954, 67). She chooses a letter to Beatrice Campbell, not the diary, as the site for a statement about Lawrence in response to what she saw as his obsessions: “I shall never see sex in the running brooks, sex in stones & sex in everything. The number of things that are really phallic, from fountain pen fillers onwards!” (Boddy 1988, 54). Only rarely does she acknowledge sex in the *Journal*. Her letter shows the wit, sexuality, and mocking tone that Mansfield uses to write to others; the journal most often records sentimental, glossed-over feelings.

A notable erasure in her journal text is the lack of any response to Virginia Woolf. Mansfield’s letters to Woolf depict respect and affection: “We have got the same job, Virginia & it is really very curious & thrilling that we should both . . . be after so very nearly the same thing . . .” (A. Smith 1999, 35). Not one reference to Woolf exists in Mansfield’s diaries and notebooks, though Virginia Woolf made several references to
Mansfield in her own diaries. She may fear Woolf or merely curry her favor. She writes Murry that “the Woolves . . . are smelly” (ibid., 36), perhaps having heard something of Woolf’s early response to her: “[S]he stinks like a civet cat that had taken to street walking” (Woolf 1977, 58). Woolf later makes clear her growing respect and affection for Mansfield. But Mansfield never writes of herself either as positively or as negatively as Woolf does.

Mansfield often writes of herself as rather ethereal, above the lascivious, worldly people who surround her. In December 1920 she says, “I should like this to be accepted as my confession....Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become Love. . . . I must pass from personal love which has failed me to a greater love. I must give to the whole of life what I gave to him [Murry]” (Journal 228). Woolf’s nasty “civet cat” distorts Mansfield’s own designation of her sexual presence; according to Mansfield, she is merely taken in by “personal love.” In an earlier letter to Woolf she merely refutes her reputation: “[D]on’t let THEM ever persuade you that I spend any of my precious time swapping hats or committing adultery—I’m far too arrogant & proud” (A. Smith 1999, 35). Perhaps the split in perception says much about each woman’s method of seeing. To Mansfield, “love” and “cat” are both parts of a necessarily fragmented, submerged identity.

For the most part, Mansfield encloses the world of her diary tightly, refusing to acknowledge her successes or failures with others, refusing to compare herself to other writers. Possibly she is simply jealous of others who have more standing than she. Unlike Woolf’s diary, Mansfield’s journal is largely free of speculation about the reception of her work and says little about the other writers—except Murry—with whom she competes. Feeling a keen sense of rivalry with almost every person she meets and with every writer she knows, she reserves the adulation she gives to writers for Oscar Wilde, William Shakespeare, John Keats, and other dead masters. She only reluctantly writes about her relationships, especially literary rivals, showing her unease in forming friendships and competing in what she perceives as a masculine, misogynist, literary society.

Mansfield uses Chekhov to speak for her when she quotes his Excellent People: “An Author’s vanity is vindictive, implacable, incapable of forgiveness” (Journal 126). Even though she may be indirectly referring to her own vanity, she most clearly wants to rebuke the vanity in other authors, fearing as she does their deprecation. But the allusion is oblique. By writing “out” the literary establishment in her journal, she writes “in” her own vision of herself as woman and writer.
Choosing an Audience:
Journal Omissions, Fictional Permissions

Mansfield fills diary notebooks with drafts of fiction, layering the large gaps of the personal with imaginative stories. A void of personal narratives censors the most chaotic episodes. In fiction, conventions of untruth and fantasy protect her; in a diary, a genre conventionally regarded as a site for self-exposure and self-examination, Mansfield senses she would be open to scathing and vicious censure were it to be read. Her 1909 notebooks exemplify her silence during deep crisis. Pregnancy, lover’s neglect, broken marriage, the death of an illegitimate infant child, and subsequent affairs made Mansfield vulnerable to criticism, and her self-image must have undergone a battering. She did not confide in her diary.

The sad saga and increasing diary omissions begin in late 1908, when Mansfield falls in love with musician Garnet Trowell. Garnet’s father, Thomas, had been her cello teacher in New Zealand, moving to England the year before Mansfield did. When she finds herself without lodging, the Trowells invite her to live with them, but when Thomas discovers she has become pregnant, he blames Katherine and throws her out of the house. Garnet’s weakness and betrayal and his family’s censure at the time of her pregnancy comes in her “first adult year in Europe” (Meyers 2002, 36), “at the most vulnerable moment of her life, when her parents were 12,000 miles away” (2002, 43–44). Feeling attacked, alone, and vulnerable as 1909 began, she feels no better when her mother arrives in May to hustle off the twenty-year-old Katherine to a German convent to await a late-summer birth. Katherine leaves as soon as she can in favor of a “conveniently obscure spa” (49).

She writes next to nothing in her personal papers of her abandonment, the first signs of tuberculosis, a short-term husband—George Bowden, whom she leaves the morning after the wedding—her exile in Germany, and the late-pregnancy stillbirth of Garnet’s child, followed by two short-term lovers—an Australian journalist “S.V.” and Polish critic Floryan Sobieniowski. She keeps silent about circumstances and relationships but briefly alludes to painful emotions. On Good Friday 1909 she compares herself to Christ and his crucifixion: “I thirst too—I hang upon the Cross. Let me be crucified—so that I may cry ‘It is finished’” (1954, 39). After a short poem she acknowledges her painful silence: “I cannot say it now. Maybe I shall be able to, much later” (ibid.). A short time later she fantasizes a maternal scene, wondering about the time “when I shall sit and read aloud to my little son” (40–41).
She resumes writing only the impersonal until late June. Then, heavy with a child, she writes, “[T]he pain makes me shiver and feel dizzy. To be alone, and to feel a terrible confusion in your body which affects you mentally . . .” (1954, 41). Before that summer’s miscarriage, she writes of the anguish of her circumstances and her determination to raise her child: “[S]ome day when I am asked: ‘Mother, where was I born?’ and I answer: ‘In Bavaria, dear,’ I shall feel again, I think, this coldness—physical, mental—heart coldness, hand coldness, soul coldness” (42). Mansfield gives readers condensed glimpses of an agonized, idealized, and histrionic Katherine. Other Katherines were not under scrutiny in 1909 or written in records she later “destroyed” (Tomalin 1988, 69). Mansfield’s response to her life in 1909 is “guesswork” (Alpers 1980, 92), though over several years she attempts to fictionalize this episode, writing a plan for the unfinished story, “Maata.” Mansfield details the betrayal and anguish of the time but romanticizes a male character’s grief and heartbreak, not the woman’s (Notebooks 2 2002, 254).

Textual evasion even in the masses of papers that comprise her notebooks illustrates one method of self-narrative. Another method of self-production through fictional personae may be more telling during these years. The women at the center of many stories in *In a German Pension* (1911) manifest a deeply rooted fear of sexuality and the inevitable consequences for a woman—the bearing of a child. Mansfield writes of women both seduced and debased by man’s sexual aggressiveness; also, during this period she writes of birth as rather horrifying and tragic. In “Frau Fisher,” the young woman narrator protests, “I like empty beds,” only to be chastised by the Frau, “That cannot be true because it is not natural,” to which the narrator replies, compounding her “unnatural” nature, “But I consider child-bearing the most ignominious of all professions” (Mansfield 1911, 31). In “At Lehmann’s” a “Young Man” entices Sabina into sexual play: “The room seemed to swim around Sabina. Suddenly, from the room above, a frightful, tearing shriek. . . . In the silence the thin wailing of a baby. ‘Ach!’ shrieked Sabina, running from the room” (60). In “A Birthday” a young Andreas views a father’s insensitive waiting for the birth of a son: “She waited a moment, expectantly, rolling her eyes, then in full loathing of mankind went back into the kitchen and vowed herself to sterility” (71). In all the *German Pension* stories the protagonist becomes aware of a brutish sexuality and the consequent terror of childbearing. The erasure of diary entries in the *Journal* concerning woman’s sexual fear and maternal abhorrence points to Mansfield’s fear of rebuke, whether her own or others, and her preference for relegating to fiction what most troubles her. She notes in a much later
entry 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” (1954, 294).

This fear of confession and exposure doubtless plagued her at a time in her life when she was so vulnerable to negative judgments. Her ill health may have reminded her of the early death of diarist Marie Bashkirtseff, whose mother published her diary after her death. Bashkirtseff’s diary “made an indelible impression on Katherine” (Tomalin 1988, 42). Knowing that publication of a confessional diary, even posthumously, would open her to vilifying criticism and social ostracism encourages her self-censorship. The price of revelation is too high for Mansfield. She chooses to censor her so-called private papers and to write more open rebellions into stories read as products of the imagination rather than as depictions of actual experience. Such deflection to fiction serves Mansfield particularly well when she confronts the issues of sexual politics.

Mansfield’s hostility to man’s sexual use of woman and her fear of motherhood does not last long after the distress of 1909. Although always ambivalent about both man’s and woman’s manipulation of sexual power, she is too interested in sexual intrigue to relegate her desire to strict sexual conventions. Her last two stories in *In A German Pension* point to a changing perception of women’s sexuality. In “The Swing of the Pendulum” the protagonist, probably a prostitute, hungers “for the nearness of someone . . . who knew nothing at all about her—and made no demands—but just lived” (105); in “A Blaze” the protagonist acknowledges both her desire and her ambivalence: “I can’t help seeking admiration any more than a cat can help going to people to be stroked. . . . I like men to adore me—to flatter me—even to make love to me—but I would never give myself to any man” (116).

The intensity of her sexual desire, ambivalence, and rebellion is missing from the diary text, but if her fiction is any indicator, Mansfield maintains an unconventional sexuality that haunts her throughout her life. Her post-1909 willingness to feign acquiescence to repressive sexual mores, at least as written in her *Journal*, points to a growing sensitivity to others’ criticism, especially Murry’s, whose presence in her life dominated from 1912 until her death. Mansfield’s biographers record her disastrous early marriage, many probable lovers, almost certain gonorrhea, and maybe an abortion. Letters, interviews, and particularly Mansfield’s fiction give credence to her sexual rebellion. Yet even the new complete version of her *Notebooks* lacks journal entries to support a reading of Mansfield as in any way licentious. In the “mass” of her *Notebooks* Mansfield minimizes her sexuality and its consequences. In one instance she writes, “I should like
to have a secret code to put on 'record' what I feel today... the lifted cur-
tain... the hand at the fire with the ring & stretched fingers... no, its
[sic] snowing... the telegram to say he's not... just the words arrive. But
if I say more I'll give myself away. B.O.C.” (Notebooks 2 2002, 218).

Mansfield’s fictional women, however, characterize an erotic wholeness
that her diary pages lack. Beryl’s sexual compulsion and fear in “At the
Bay,” Bertha’s ardent longings in “Bliss,” and Hennie’s body flowering
from “its dark bud” (Mansfield 1922, 139) in “The Young Girl” all
expose a woman’s sensual, sexual desire and love of intrigue that
Mansfield only hints at in her adult private writings. In “At the Bay,”
Beryl fantasizes: “Her arms were round his neck; he held her. . . . She
wants a lover. . . . Let us make our fire . . .” (1922, 52). The desire for
power and for sex rests in Hennie, too, as her cheeks “crimsoned, her eyes
grew dark. . . . ’L—let me, please,’ she stammered, in a warm, eager voice.
‘I like it. I love waiting! . . . I’m always waiting—in all kinds of places . . .”
(1922, 51). Beryl and Hennie long for men, objects of female desire, rep-
resenting idealized versions of Mansfield’s sexual imagination.

Mansfield creates a more complex portrait of feminine sexuality in the
bisexual longings of Bertha in “Bliss”: “And the two women stood side by
side looking at the slender flowering tree. . . . Both, as it were, caught in
that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly . . . won-
dering what they were to do in this one [world] with all this blissful trea-
sure that burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their
hair and their hands” (131). Miss Fulton and Bertha’s husband both sub-
sequently betray Bertha, speaking to Mansfield’s fearful apprehension of
the consequences of such desire. Mansfield writes short stories and poems
within her notebooks and diaries that imagine the pleasure and the erotic
fullness of a woman’s sexual desire, as well as the pain that often attends it.

Excluding or encoding references to her sexuality in her personal note-
books is not so surprising when we consider the shame her earlier escapades
brought her. Ironically, adolescent women often write openly about sexual
matters. Troubled by strict social condemnation for sexual escapades, they
seem as yet untroubled by the pain a society—intent on punishing sex as a
primal sin—can wield. In 1907, for example, Mansfield rhetorically
addresses Oscar Wilde: “O Oscar! Am I peculiarly susceptible to sexual
impulse?” (Notebooks 1 2002, 101). These early entries—prepregnancy,
pre–Murry Mansfield—are most open about her sexuality, often attributing
the entries to “A.W.” (A Woman), presumably herself: “‘Nature makes such
fools of us! What is the use of liking anyone if the washerwoman can do
exactly the same thing?” (Journal 1954, 11). Her spoiled, adolescent per-
sona speaks with disdain of lower-class women partly because she fears that
sexual longing is aligned with low station and partly because she fears that such desire will reduce her own status as woman. Awareness of class and what behaviors are expected in each class shapes the diary writer's text, and sexuality has often been the forbidden text of the middle class. Mansfield, sensing the cultural taboos surrounding sexual pleasure, writes as “A.W.” with an adolescent openness she later loses.

In her ironic A.W. entries she distances herself from her own intense, perhaps foolish, sexual liaisons. Yet she, in the self-absorbed, thickly detailed style of Marie Bashkirtseff, dramatizes her emotional entanglements, using language that elevates the erotic, admitting that “My mind is like a Russian novel” (Urewera Notebook 1978, 13). Only in these early adolescent journals does Mansfield openly admit to her bisexuality. Recently published in the Notebooks, those passages seem torrid examples of adolescent sexual fantasy and revelation. Recovering fact from fancy in such description is problematic: “We lay down together, still silently, she every now and then pressing me to her, kissing me, my head on her breasts, her hands round my body, stroking me, lovingly—warming me . . .” (Notebooks 1 2002, 101). She clearly writes in her adolescent notebooks of her early bisexual affair with a Maori girl named Maata, though she calls it “unclean.” These entries are more candid and exploratory than those written later when her conception of herself as wife and writer forbid sexual explication. Although Mansfield’s diary entries repress her “sexual anarchy” (Tomalin 1988, 118), she also disrupts and undermines the conventional feminine ethos of passivity she so often constructs.

Her diary entries imply that Mansfield’s physical passions are fleeting, unrealized, fantasized, and uninteresting; this is simply not the whole truth. Although she often complains about her marriage to Murry and her sufferings at the hands of others, her complaints are not specifically sexual, and idealized love is her answer to everything: “Mysterious fitness of our relationship! And all those things which he does impose on my mind please me so deeply that they feel natural to me. It is all part of this feeling that he and I, different beyond the idea of difference, are yet an organic whole” (Journal 1954, 232). When Mansfield moves beyond a lyrical explanation of love and acknowledges physical passions, she fictionalizes and deflects personal engagement by using the third-person pronoun. In one such entry titled “The Blow,” a fictional man comes “like a blow on her heart—for . . . ‘This—,’ tightly, quickly, he caught her up into his arms” (Journal 1954, 153). This diary entry may have been a practice version for the story “The Wind Blows,” where Matilda’s music lesson with Mr. Bullen excites her sexual awareness. Later in her own room she thinks, “The wind, the wind. It’s frightening to be here in her room by
herself. The bed, the mirror . . . it's the bed that is frightening. There it lies, sound asleep . . .” (Bliss 1920, 141). Although the journal entry and the story share the imagery of wind as desire, the similarity ends there. Perhaps “The Wind Blows” prepares another fiction Mansfield never wrote, or perhaps it is personal text, coded for a diary.

Reality and fantasy as well as fiction and autobiography collapse when Mansfield relegates tales of sexual encounter to fictional stories written within her notebooks. This method tempts readers to suspend judgment, to deflect criticism. This impulse to cover the personal joins the writer's project to fictionalize and fantasize in stories: “For women, borders—of ego, genre, discipline, geography—are made to be crossed” (Diane P. Freedman in Podnieks 2000, 68). Fictions within the diary allow Mansfield to blur the parameters of fiction and autobiography, disguising a sexuality at odds with convention. Trapped by her own course and the judgment of others, Mansfield deflects in fiction and role playing. When she cannot speak of the low and carnivalesque, she creates characters who do, allowing her the freedom to speak her desire while remaining hidden from readers' condemnation.

Sensing that Murry cannot acknowledge the complexity of his wife's sexuality, she evades. Without access to the complete Notebooks, with their sexualized poems and fictions, Alpers somewhat erroneously calls “her only explicit statement anywhere on the subject of sexual relations” (1980, 316) the letter Mansfield writes to Murry about her cousin Elizabeth's lack of sexual desire: “I sometimes wonder whether the act of surrender is not the greatest of all—the highest. It 'needs' real humility and at the same time an absolute belief in one's own essential freedom . . . it is pure risk. That is true for me as a human being and as a writer” (KM to JMM, November 7, 1920). Equating sexuality to freedom and to writing, Mansfield still represses expression of it in her Journal. Her unwillingness to “risk” sexual articulation points to the self-censor that prevents overt articulation of the forbidden. It also points to her awareness of Murry as audience.

Mansfield's journal writing often favors the “imaginary” because her fictional fragments provide the raw material for her work, what she most prizes and most candidly shares for examination and judgment by Murry, a hardly impartial audience. Mansfield pretends to willingly submit to Murry's dominance, forcing her to censor the pen that writes a sexual presence. When the writer is a woman/wife/artist and the reader is a male/husband/critic, his judgment is a crucial consideration. In one outpouring of anger during a separation, Mansfield writes more spontaneously and emotionally than is her usual method. But even in the outpouring she desairs: “If one wasn’t so
afraid—why should I be—these [diary entries] aren’t going to be read by Bloomsbury et Cie . . .” (Notebooks 2 2002, 182).

As the specter of an audience—particularly Murry—appears, Mansfield hesitates and wavers in diary fragments. Such entries deflate Mansfield’s surface positions. She sometimes prefaces a criticism of Murry with a statement of her loyalty, perhaps to disarm him, perhaps to take away her statement’s sting: “There is the inexplicable fact that I love my typical English husband. I do lament that he is not warm, ardent, eager, full of quick response, careless, spendthrift of himself, vividly alive, high-spirited. But it makes no difference to my love. But the lack of these qualities in his country I HATE—” (Journal 1954, 158–59). If the list of complaints were not so long, so revealing of Mansfield’s disgust with Murry’s values, we could rely on the love she posits for him. Surely the hate she deflects to England she directs to Murry as well. As this entry shows, Mansfield’s restructuring of selves and attitudes in her journal does not altogether mask rage and rebellion. It undermines her fantasies of idyllic love and marriage. In using such strategies, she protects the sensitive, creative, conventional woman that she longs to be. Her diary pages record her efforts to appease a man who wants more than she can give: “It’s like his Why is lunch late? As though I had but to wave my hand and the banquet descended. But doesn’t that prove how happy he would have been with a real WIFE!” (Journal 1954, 148).

As Brett said of Mansfield, “Her great delight was a game she played of being someone else. . . . She would act the part completely until she even got herself mixed up as to who and what she was” (Boddy 1988, 62). Role-playing in her diary deflects the reader’s gaze, allowing pretenses and covers. She recreates selves to inhabit conventional centers. She writes both to love Murry and undermine him, to question convention and bend to conventional restrictions: “I thought of Jack . . . within reach—within call. I remembered there was a time when this thought was a distraction. . . . It took away from my power to work. . . . I, as it were, made him my short story” (Journal 1954, 233). Professing her love, she also notes the effect an attention-demanding man has on a woman writer; the man instead of the art becomes the center of the project, heresy to Mansfield.

At nineteen Mansfield writes on the “bogey” of socially inscribed love: “It is the hopelessly insipid doctrine that love is the only thing in the world taught, hammered into women, from generation to generation . . .” (37). The mature Mansfield also calls love’s expectation a “bogey,” the name she reserved for Murry in their life together. She obviously recognizes the enemy as “Bogey,” whether Murry or love, even as she acknowledges its enticing entanglements.
Mansfield foregrounds her dependence on the conventional and romanticized forms of love in her personal journal narratives and relegates her critique to the vast number of fictional fragments and narratives within her notebooks. Not surprisingly, her published fiction thematically depicts romantic love as exploiting women. Interestingly, her fiction often blames “love,” not the men women love, for unhappiness. Her creation of Linda in “Prelude,” a woman whom marriage and children did not serve, allows Mansfield space to portray her mother fictional and permits expression of her own doubts about culture’s expectation of women. In thinking of her husband, Linda critiques the uneasy balance of affection and power that traditional marriage promotes: “For she was really quite fond of him; . . . If only he wouldn’t jump at her so. He was too strong for her. There were times when . . . she just had not screamed at the top of her voice: ‘You are killing me. . . . I have had three great lumps of children already . . .’” (Bliss and Other Stories 1920, 62). Mansfield herself echoes Linda’s despair when she says in her Journal, “I am become—Mother. I don’t care a rap for people. I shall always love Jack and be his wife but I couldn’t get back to that anguish—joy . . .” (1954, 184). Mansfield’s marriage to Murry disappoints her, yet she makes childish and peevish complaints and rebuttals of his criticism in the notebooks. Only her fiction powerfully expresses her ideological critique.

Shifting Audience: Shifting Text

The 1914 notebooks destabilize Mansfield’s conventional-wife persona as she records her passion for Francis Carco and what Murry calls their “stupid and deeply-disappointing” affair (quoted in Meyers 2002, 111). In several entries she writes of longing for their intimacy and sexual engagement. In August, dissatisfied with Murry, she desires another lover to “nurse me, love me, hold me, comfort me” (Journal 1954, 61). These entries so boldly express the need for another man that they are startling in Mansfield’s journal; she habitually reconstructs all reference to sexual desire in oblique but romanticized entries focused on Murry.8 But the 1914 entries record her obsession with Carco’s letters and finally her excitement in traveling to France to be with him. She even writes overtly of lovemaking: “And F. quite naked, making up the fire with the tiny brass poker—so natural, so beautiful—and then he was gone (Journal 1954, 75) . . . the act of love seemed somehow quite incidental, we talked so much . . .” (78), playing down her sexual response, emphasizing intimacy. She thus simultaneously confronts and conforms to traditional moral and ethical teachings that urge women to nurture men but repress sexual desire.
Mansfield wants to please both herself and others by her virtue but is sexually promiscuous. Her biographer Meyers, however, believes that she was faithful to Murry after her affair with Carco ended in 1915. She longs to escape the confines of a life too alien and too dull, longs to do “the other thing with moderate care” since “Jack is not really interested” (Notebooks 1 2002, 287). Even though Mansfield dreams of another lover and certainly risks much in her flirtations and brief affairs with other men, the idealized lover did not materialize for Katherine, as he or she seldom does, at least never for long. But the articulation of the fantasy, the specifics of her longings for Carco, and at least one rather overt expression of bisexual desire point to Mansfield’s refusal, at least in 1914, to be subordinated to a dominant male ethic that represses sexual choice in women.

An overt reference to her ongoing friendship with Ida Baker, or L.M., as she calls her, a mostly present companion to Mansfield, similarly disrupts the idealized-wife presentation of herself, illustrating a further subversion of traditional sexual strictures. In a section titled “Toothache Sunday” in March 1914, Mansfield writes of L.M.: “And as I tucked her up, she was so touching— . . . that it was easy to stoop to kiss her, not as I usually do, one little half-kiss, but quick loving kisses such as one delights to give a tired child. ‘Oh!’ she sighed, ‘I have dreamed of this . . . I could not kiss her lips. Ah, how I long to talk about it sometimes . . .’” (Journal 1954, 53–54). L.M.’s sexual longings and Mansfield’s tenderness and simultaneous revulsion are rarely addressed in the diaries, though Mansfield sometimes refers to L.M. as “wife.” Mansfield’s journal entries often mention her need to have L.M. work for her or do favors for her, her sense of the inevitability of L.M.’s presence. Her journal illustrates a pattern of criticism, not the attachment that she displays in her letters to L.M.? Given Murry and L.M.’s coolness toward each other, Mansfield probably uses the fluctuating narratives of letter and journal to conceal her mixed loyalties. Murry, after all, read her journal. “Her . . . merciless playing off of Ida Baker against Murry was surely an aspect of her deep-rooted propensity to bisexuality” (Hankin 1983, 38). Murry’s jealousy dictates that Mansfield must gloss over such feelings. On January 1, 1919, Mansfield writes: “J. was very chagrined because I thought of [L.M.], and not only of him. That rather spoiled his New Year. We ought to have clasped . . .” (Journal 1954, 154). Mansfield’s regard for Murry’s feelings prevent articulation of her own.

Constrained by cultural codes, Mansfield for the most part hides her sexual ambivalence in her notebooks though her practice fictions certainly play with sexual themes, occasionally even bisexual themes. In 1920 two fragments equate the kissing of a woman with “kissing a church candle” and kiss-
ing “nuns who have prayed all night in cold churches” (Journal 1954, 202, 220). Both fictions begin “I kissed her” and end with the other woman’s disparaging the speaker, once directly, once by calling on the “Father.” The first entry Mansfield calls “Wickedness,” the next “The Kiss,” and both seem to equate loving a woman to both the spiritual and the wicked. She ends her second attempt at writing this vignette by saying, “(But still I haven’t said what I wanted to say)” (221). Mansfield makes these ambiguous fictions impossible to locate in terms of sexual or spiritual philosophy, though their ambiguity may be her failure to say what she wishes.

Women-identified writers, lesbians, and by extension bisexuals, “although silenced . . . [are] not altogether voiceless, for according to the logic of Foucault’s repressive hypothesis, what is prohibited returns in new and resignifying forms, shaping and recontextualizing the manifest content of the text” (Loftus 1977, 36). Mansfield, caught up in the compulsory heterosexuality of western culture, still occasionally taunts Murry with her bisexuality. At a time when she wavers between leaving him and staying with him, she writes from Paris: “[T]here arrived ‘du monde’ including a very lovely young woman, married & curious—blonde—passionate. We danced together” (Boddy 1988, 45). She quickly retracts this affront to his masculinity by writing him the next day of her intense longing for the conventional life of “a chinese nurse with green trousers and two babies who rush at me and clasp my knees” (ibid., 46). Mansfield’s need to both provoke and please Murry promotes her vacillations, moving her from scenes of transgression to scenes of surrender.

Mansfield’s adolescent diaries and her Notebooks of 1914 and early 1915 exhibit her boldest depiction of her sexual nonconformity. During these years Murry was not the audience of her journal, and her feeling of reckless sexuality left her rather unconcerned about future readers. Although they often separated for various reasons, they never did sever their marriage. After May 1915 Mansfield’s entries say little either of her sexual nature or of any liaisons that follow. Murry once again becomes her audience. “But Jack & My work they are all I think of” (Notebooks 2 2002, 125). Though she reflects on the past and their relationship is marred by separation, she sees Jack as the center of her emotional life, or so her diary implies.

Resisting Her Audience: Foregrounding Change

One strategy Mansfield uses to configure the contradictions within her identity is emphasis on change. The diaries foreground fluctuations of method, of feeling, of mood, of place, of health. By constantly shifting the papers and notebooks, the subject matter, and the emotional temper of
the diary, she not only explores reality rather prosaically in the modernist
traditions of refraction and distortion but also resists containment by any
audience anxious to accuse and control. By switching narratives she refus-
es appropriation by Jack or by the English.

Her exile from man, woman, culture, God—partly self-willed, partly
beyond her control—assists her in resisting containment. Mansfield's ill
health and restlessness dictated that she move from place to place in search
of warmth, stability, health, and doctors. Banishment protects her from
others, but she consequently mourns the loss. Textually, too, she fragments
versions of herself, allowing glimpses, then drawing away from exposure.
Such fluctuating narrative postures are typical of diaries written over time
and are particularly striking in Mansfield's notebooks: “I can never be
Jack's lover again” (Journal 1954, 86) shifts to “Jack is my first thought”
(129). The shifting advances and retreats typify Mansfield's dealing with
others and her confrontations with cultural pressure. Mansfield's widely
divergent responses to her audiences may be her attempts to manipulate
the feelings of others as well as to resist their values.

To simultaneously appease and defy, Mansfield “conceals” much of her
interaction with others but breaks the silence at times to let her anger and
jealousy speak. She scathingly criticizes Murry's relationship with
Dorothy Brett, for example. She uses her diary to complain to him of his
neglect and to beg for his loyalty: "J. let fall this morning the fact that he
had considered taking rooms in D.'s house this winter. . . . Was their rela-
tionship friendship? Oh no! He kissed her. . . . Who could count on such
a man! I am simply disgusted to my very soul" (Journal 1954, 208).

Playing the betrayed wife rather than acknowledging the adulterer in her-
self, she fears others' appropriation. She notes, for example, "M is too jeal-
ous. He is like a hawk over his possessions" (150). Therefore, Mansfield
tells tales of self as she wishes her audience to read them. And because of
her uneasy relationship to others as well as to her own sense of self, the
tone of the journal changes in response to mood swings ranging from
despairing to euphoric.10

The emotional Mansfield nearly always gives way to the intellectual
woman capable of writing fiction that “dramatizes the interconnection
between the desire to escape from reality and the desire to change it”
(New 1999, 110). Sometimes a feminist sensibility more apparent in her
fiction slips through her obsessions with love, Jack, illness, and art.
Mansfield struggles with the roles of man and woman and the importance
of those roles in creating the larger culture. Within the diary text, part of
a poem called the “butterfly” depicts the precarious nature between the
masculine and feminine, the fragile and the aggressive:
But just at that moment
a dirty-looking dog,
its mean tail
between its legs,
came loping down the lane
It just glanced aside
at the butterfly—did not bite
Just gave a feeble snap
and ran further.
But she was dead. (Journal 1954, 152)

The vulnerability of woman meets the “mean tail between” the legs of man, though her “it” seems to render the dog genderless, giving the poem a neutral stance. Mansfield’s underlying themes of terror and alienation in a man’s world politicizes the poem. In letters she verifies her explorations of gender, showing a wit and sharpness not so evident in the diary entries. In 1919 her white-and-black cat “Charles Chaplin” had kittens. She writes Woolf about the surprising turn of events: “He would only lie still when I stroked his belly and (I) said: ‘It’s all right, old chap. It’s bound to happen to a man sooner or later’” (Meyers 2002, 183). Mocking gendered constructions, she enjoys the theoretical stripping of male power in humorous emasculations—but only in letters, poems, and fictions—evidence enough in any case.

Her Last Audience: Invitation to Laughter and Grief
Mansfield often breaks the tension between the personae within the notebooks and her audience with humor, thereby undercutting the intensity of another’s judgment. She invites us to laugh with her most often at the tragic—and serious—progress of her illness. In her entries she uses discursive techniques designed to distance the inevitable. In 1921 a series of diary notes (marked by crosses and checks to designate future publication) seems to mock the approaching death she fears: “The red geraniums have bought the garden over my head and taken possession” is followed by “J. digs the garden as though he were exhuming a hated body or making a hole for a loved one”; a bit later “Dark Bogey is a little inclined to jump into the milk jug to rescue the fly,” then finally “the champagne was no good at all . . . there was something positively malicious in the way the little bubbles hurled themselves to the rim, danced, broke . . . they seemed to be jeering at her” (Notebooks 2 2002, 158–64). More pointedly, a response to one of
her many doctors ridicules the medical establishment that sought to control and cure her: “Saw the fool of a doctor to-day. Diddle-dum-dum-dee! Cod is the only word! Bad-in-age! Flat-ter-ie! Gal-an-ter-ie! Frogs!” (Journal 1954, 198). Her cynical humor jeers at the doctor and her own hatred.

A limerick written in July 1919 records her fear and skepticism:

“T edious Brief Adventure of K.M.”

A Doctor who came from Jamaica
Said: This time I’ll mend her
or break her
I’ll plug her with serum;
And if she can’t bear ’em
I’ll call in the next undertaker. (Journal 1954, 178)

Whether to cheer herself or Murry or subsequent audiences, these entries invite laughter and speculation: How does she feel? What is real? Who speaks? In another entry she intimates that her flippant speaker might be “Mr. Despondency’s daughter, Muchafraid [who] went through the water singing” (Journal 1954, 166). Mansfield’s attempt to make light of her illness and Murry’s response to it cannot disguise her resentment and fear of death. Her humor, her satires, ditties, and reports on happy days speak to a pervasive yet often undermined optimism. They articulate an intense desire to live and an underlying dread. Mansfield, trying to alleviate the couple’s horror at the progress of her illness, uses humor to invite shared laughter, not disaster.

Bravely facing death while trying to outwit its cruelty, Mansfield nevertheless finds the illness and her loss of future nearly unendurable. These lines surface throughout the last notebooks—rare but poignant: “The worst of it is I have again lost hope. I don’t & can’t believe this will change. I have got off the raft again and am swept here and there by the sea” (Notebooks 2 2002, 326). Sometimes she creates sentimental metaphors to describe death’s shadow: “The flower petals fold. They are by the sun/Forgotten. In a shadowy wood they grow/Where the dark trees keep up a to-and-fro/Shadowy waving. Who will watch them shine/When I have dreamed my dream?” (Journal 1954, 188). Mansfield encourages a shared fantasy: “Ah, darling mine,” inviting Murry to join her in sardonic laughter and to dream with her as “petals fold” (ibid.). Mansfield’s gentleness may have been an effort to counter her own fear and Murry’s response. In another entry she angrily throws back his words:
“[H]is nerves, he wasn’t made of whipcord or steel, the fruit was bitter for him” (Notebooks 2 2002, 179). The journal makes clear that despite both their efforts, Mansfield’s dying is “difficult,” as Mansfield suffers for years, moves from place to place, arranges both their travel arrangements, and tries to maintain a marriage in the face of personal tragedy.

The most moving parts of her notebooks are those entries in the last two years, so obviously written to gain Murry’s admiration and to revivify their flagging spirits. “Important. When we begin to take our failures non-seriously, it means we are ceasing to be afraid of them. It is of immense importance to learn to laugh at ourselves.” Written three months before her death, Mansfield next asks quite seriously, “What remains of all those years together? . . . Who gave up and why?” (Journal 1954, 331). Feeling she should laugh, she despairs, torn between helping her “reader” get through her death and facing it honestly herself.

Trying to work out life’s mystery and her own reaction to the death that stalks her, she sends her diary entries to Murry: “And when I say ‘I fear’—don’t let it disturb you, dearest heart” (Journal 1954, 334). The sheer number of references to illness and death belie both her flippant, disregarding dismissals and her transcending idealizations. As early as 1915 she posits a “fiery energy . . . to bear suffering” (Journal 1954, 70). When her brother Leslie dies, Mansfield mocks any fear of death, remarking: “[N]ot only am I not afraid of death—I welcome the idea of death” (Journal 1954, 86). But from 1918, when she finds the “bright red blood” from her lungs, she speaks of an intense longing to live: “How unbearable it would be to die—leave ‘scraps’, ‘bits’ . . . nothing real finished” (Journal 1954, 129). Positioning herself as writer with much to keep her busy, Mansfield staves off death for a while at least. A fiction within the diary pages speaks to her heightened sense of vulnerability. When a friend reaches out to the ill Eve, inquiring about her health, Eve “waves her away. ‘Don’t be too nice to me!’ . . . There were tears in her eyes, her lips were trembling. ‘I shall make a fool of myself if you do’” (Journal 1954, 308). We never see the weakness of tears in Mansfield’s personal entries; her notebooks serve as a site for mental courage, her last hope. The enfeebling emotional character of her illness she most often places in diary fictions and fragments, not in personal entries.

She creates a text that goes on, even in the face of death. A diary is open ended, never finished, never inviting closure. Her diary records, fictionalizes, and reworks her life—becomes a hedge against death. Two months before her death she writes: “My spirit is nearly dead. My spring of life is so starved that it’s just not dry. . . . Ah, I feel a little calmer already to be writing. Thank God for writing!” (Journal 1954, 332). Her last entry does
not record a reconciliation with death but lists words she wanted translated into Russian so to better communicate at the Gurdjieff Institute, where she spent her last months. As an earlier journal entry states: “[W]e do not feel our own death, and write stories as though we were never going to die” (Journal 1954, 171). What Mansfield once labeled her “vile little diary” (Journal 1954, 63) provides the writer with a new story of selves that will never be finished. She cannot record her own death.