Once upon a time a woman of much wit, talent, and considerable fame lived in England among a literary circle who considered her the “center” of their intellectual society. The literary greats of the late-Victorian, early-Edwardian period gathered at her home, South Lodge, in Campden Hill Road, Kensington, to talk, drink, argue, edit books, and be charmed by their hostess, Violet Hunt. Though her current biographers Joan Hardwick and Barbara Belford place Hunt at the center of the circle because of her force and talent, for nearly a century others saw her as important because of her connections to famous ancestors and the men whom she dazzled. A younger and lesser of the literary “lights,” Douglas Goldring, in his *South Lodge: Reminiscences of Violet Hunt, Ford Madox Ford and the English Review Circle,* for example, begins his autobiography with a flourish of name dropping, recalling Hunt as the hostess who entertained literary London: Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Cunninghame Graham, Robert Browning, Oscar Wilde, and most influentially, Ford Madox Ford (1943). Ancestral connections of Hunt and Ford likewise overshadowed Hunt’s achievements, if not Ford’s: Mrs. Alfred Hunt, Violet’s mother; Dr. Francis Hueffer, Ford’s father; Ford Madox Brown, Ford’s grandfather; Matthew Arnold, Violet’s family friend; Canon Greenwell, Violet’s godfather and a famous archaeologist; Christina Rossetti, famous poet and Ford’s aunt; and other pre-Raphaelite poets and painters of Hunt’s and Ford’s parents’ generation. Enchantment seems to surround Violet Hunt.

In noting the influential and famous, however, we should not give short shrift to Hunt herself. In writing about Hunt, past writers emphasized the “senile decay” (Wallis diaries in Belford 1990, 276) that characterized Hunt’s old age, or Ford’s fame and her connection to him. Lost are her own remarkable achievements. “For though Violet had qualities Ford lacked—qualities
which she managed to infuse into one of his best novels, *The Good Soldier*—
he was the greater figure of the two, and she was aware of it” (Goldring 1943, xii). Hunt’s most recent displacement occurs in the 1983 publication of her 1917 diary. Editors Robert Secor and Marie Secor titled it *The Return of the Good Soldier: Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt’s 1917 Diary*; Hunt again is subsumed by Ford. The diary is “his” only insofar as he occupies a place in the “content” of the diary. In getting the diary published the Secors depended on Ford’s fame rather than on Hunt’s life and talent.

The recent Hunt biographies do better. Joan Hardwick’s 1990 *Immodest Violet* looks closely at this woman with the “colourful and dynamic past” (xv), making excellent use of Hunt’s fiction to intuit and explain the woman writer. In her 1990 *Violet* Barbara Belford uses newly discovered diaries to examine the woman, “Victorian vixen,” and “Edwardian Egeria” (11) more completely than those previously seeking the key to Hunt’s character. Yet even Belford—or her publishers—cannot resist the subtitle: : *The Story of the Irrepressible Violet Hunt and Her Circle of Lovers and Friends—Ford Madox Ford, H. G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, and Henry James.* Hunt, the hostess and mistress, enchants, overtaking her literary achievements. In many respects she herself shaped this legacy.¹

Hunt tells her own story chiefly in relation to Ford’s supremacy; her tale becomes a story of the Beast who overwhelms a willing Beauty. In *The Desirable Alien at Home in Germany*, a public travel diary written in 1911 and published in 1913, and the far more personal diaries written throughout her life, Hunt explicitly plays out her confrontations with the mythic and the real of her life with Ford Madox Ford. The *1917 Diary* provides an interesting private counterpoint to *The Desirable Alien*, cowritten with Ford and meant for immediate publication. Her *1917 Diary* was hers alone, not cowritten, yet it too focuses on Ford or his absence. These two diary narratives and the quasi-autobiographical *Zeppelin Nights* that Hunt also coauthored with Ford illustrate the way his presence and later absence as editor and audience influence Hunt. Her shaping of the texts performs the shape of the self.

**Shadowed by Ford: Living and Writing “Their” Mythology**

Hunt had obviously won Ford’s respect for her literary abilities when he suggested she write her travel diary/memoir, *The Desirable Alien at Home in Germany*. But Ford being Ford, he then appropriated it, adding chapters and notes, finally publishing it under both their names.² Her obvious adoration of him and her willingness to forward his career at the expense of her own made Hunt a more-than-Muse that Ford used to further his own reputation.
Hunt’s achievement at the time she met Ford was nearly equal to his own: “She was well launched in literary England, not only as a contributor to such journals as Black & White, Chapman’s Magazine, The Venture, and the English Review, but as a novelist of some merit and popularity, notably her 1908 publication of White Rose of Weary Leaf (Secor and Secor 1983, 14). In her lifetime Hunt wrote seventeen novels, collaborated with her mother, Margaret Hunt, on another, coauthored two more works with Ford, wrote a collection of short stories, a memoir of her life with Ford, and a biography of Elizabeth Sidall called The Wife of Rossetti. She made her living by writing, and the best literary journals reviewed her: the London News, London Review, and The Athenaeum (Belford 1990, 102). The Literary World acclaimed her as “one of the smartest dialogue writers of the day” (Goldring 1943, 5–6), and even Henry James told her she was a writer of “confirmed genius” (Belford 1990, 164). Flushed with admiration in the early days of their relationship, Ford tells Hunt “they will make a ‘goodly couple,’ beside whom such literary lights as Shaw and Galsworthy will appear but ‘slow-witted fools’” (Secor and Secor 1983, 15). Certainly in the early days of their relationship Hunt saw herself as an author equal to Ford.

As their uncertain relationship progressed and she permitted his Edwardian masculinity to dominate her adapted Victorian femininity, she craved a position of “wife.” Hunt’s take-charge willfulness and ironic concern for social acceptance confronted Ford’s waffling nature and his “German instinct for games” (Belford 1990, 154). Caught in the destructive crossfire of restrictive ideology and sexual individuality, Hunt felt trapped. Marriage would, she thought, release her. Her role as conventional wife/nurturer was doomed.

Responding to her obsession to possess and be possessed by Ford, Hunt writes texts both fictional and personal, public and private, shaping Ford into a hero/husband and herself into a supplicant/wife. In turning their lives into narrative, Hunt duplicates bourgeois social formations in the diaries and Zeppelin Nights. She thus participates textually in constructing her own illusions and cultural myths. The tensions within these texts point to Hunt’s knowledge—conscious or unconscious—of their precarious nature, but she is caught. Thus she writes from within social and class paradigms, though often subversively. When Ford turns to Stella Bowen and others for his nurture, Hunt puts into play the personae of the wronged woman and the abusive cad in her 1917 Diary and autobiography, I Have This to Say (1926). Ultimately the early myths Hunt creates about their “marriage,” his “genius,” and her “romance” undermine her as surely as Ford’s own manipulations and betrayals.
Certainly all her autobiographical depictions and narratives alienated her from literary London, an audience less concerned with truth than propriety. Ironically, Ford’s fictional renderings of their life together received accolades, then as now. “[Ford] depicted and transformed his relations with Hunt in . . . novels not because he shared her need to defend her conduct against criticism by the outside world, but because he was an artist who needed to reconstruct reality in ways that allowed him to accept it and himself” (Secor and Secor 1983, 28). Hunt’s own artistic reconstructions are seen differently. The woman whose vitality and unconventionality inspired Henry James to call her the “Purple Patch” and the “Improper Person of Babylon” (Secor 1986, 32) simply undermined the ethos of feminine literary restraint, then and now.

Early rebellions and refusals to conform to sexual restrictions make her involvement with the married Ford unsurprising. Her scripting their future in romantic and conventional terms is even more so. Known for her conversational brilliance and “nasty wit” (Belford 1990, 13), even before Ford, Hunt’s flamboyance and personality explicitly confronted conformist constructions of femininity: “Popular rumour credited her with being very French and fast, a fashionable and faintly vicious blue-stocking” who in her girlhood was called by friends “the immodest Violet” (Goldring 1943, 42–43). In order to modify these contradictory depictions to win Ford’s hand in marriage, Hunt invented a new persona for herself, one Ford could dominate. This persona masquerades in the costumes of respectability and conformity, making an uncomfortable and fictional space for Hunt. Although Ford appropriated much of the textual Violet Hunt and consumed her emotional interest until her death, a more vital Hunt still manages to maintain a subtext of rebellion and refusal that threatens the continuing masculine assumptions about her work and her life.

Ford as Subject and Audience: The Context of The Desirable Alien and the 1917 Diary

Although Violet Hunt kept diaries from 1882 in which she first recorded Oscar Wilde’s now legendary proposal of marriage to her in 1879, none of them except the 1917 Diary and The Desirable Alien have been published, perhaps because Hunt wrote these two diary texts during the years of her involvement with Ford.

Ford entered Violet’s adult life in 1907. She was forty-five, eleven years older than the dapper Ford. Through a series of social visits and literary collaborations surrounding The English Review they became intimate, Ford telling her by May 1909 that “he was in love with her” (Secor and
Secor 1983, 13). The liaison was vastly complicated; Ford was already married to Elsie Martindale Hueffer, the mother of two of his daughters. Elsie was ill and indisposed to entertain any of his literary friends; Ford was miserable and “most susceptible when he was unhappy” (Mizener 1971, 177). Goldring saw Elsie as “a fanatical Catholic—not of the gay, tolerant, ‘merrie’ England type, but more on the lines of ‘bloody Mary’” (1943, 22); recent biographers more generously depict Elsie as “fretful and unhappy,” somewhat tolerant, even of Ford’s adulteries. Nevertheless, the “marriage was under great strain” (Hardwick 1990, 39). He was miserable and set upon a pattern he was to repeat with various women: “Ford seemed able to stay in love for five years, and drag the relationship on for a further five, and no more” (Kavanagh 1996, 54).

He wanted Hunt as his “wife,” but Elsie refused to give him an English divorce and demanded that he pay support for her and the children, something that Ford did only by the monetary largess of Hunt, at that time a wealthy woman. For the rest of his life Ford took a “wife” many times (four he lived with, several others with whom he had affairs). On the “wife’s” income, he lived with each for many years, only to leave her for another when he became restless. Only Elsie legally married him under British law. For a time Hunt, as his mistress, happily pretended friendship.

Hunt’s “life crashed” (Belford 1990, 168) when Elsie “caught” Hunt and Ford as they left the train together after a trip to France. Though Hunt swears they were “chaperoned to the hilt, or the nines!” (Hunt 1926, 84), she acknowledges her desire to marry, to gain a respectable place in London society: “One had to take... all the care in the world to prevent one’s flopping, feminine, vulnerable character from getting smirched. . . . Marriage? At that moment, standing bewildered, worried, and frightened, I would have taken cover—married anyone!” (ibid., 86). Although their relationship became a scandal, Ford convinced her that their marriage was merely a matter of time, of law, of citizenship. Perhaps foolishly, Hunt felt hopeful. Early-twentieth-century women’s fiction exhorts women to give everything up to love: “If love is true and pure, it will ‘endureth all things . . . [and] never faileth.’ If it does fail, it isn’t true love. . . . These stories all encourage idealistic faith in the power of ‘true love’” (Searles and Mickish 1984, 270–71). In 1912, frustrated and furious with English law that kept him married to Elsie and financially bereft, Ford fled to Germany in the hope of procuring German citizenship and a German divorce. Ford, then Hueffer, had many kin in Germany and was told that a year of residency would win him a German divorce. Hunt, eager and in “love,” willingly pretended to be Ford’s lawful wife even before the questionable German/French ceremony took place, if it ever did.
Ford told The Daily Mirror that he “had married Hunt in Germany,” explaining that he “was able to take advantage of German law because he was heir to large Prussian estates” (Secor and Secor 1983, 18). Elsie threatened to sue the paper and a retraction was printed. But real scandal erupted furiously in 1913, when The Throne pictured “Mrs. Alfred Hunt, joint authoress with her daughter, Miss Violet Hunt (Mrs. Ford Madox Hueffer) . . . of a forthcoming novel, . . . ‘The Governess’” (in Belford 1990, 29). Elsie sued. The Throne refused to retract the name of Mrs. Ford Madox Hueffer in relation to Hunt. This suit “would bring to a costly and humiliating conclusion Hunt’s and Ford’s pretensions that they were legitimately married” (Cheng 1989, 535).

The marriage’s validity was of overwhelming importance to Hunt. Her family withheld funds and visits from her niece Rosamund because of Aunt Violet’s “giddy and godless life” (Secor and Secor 1983, 17). Her longing for marriage went much deeper, however. The codified representations of love and marriage of the early twentieth century legitimated only women who were married; the unmarried woman held stigmatized roles of spinster/waste or fallen-woman/threat. Hunt, “fallen” after several love affairs with married men, craved love and respectability. An unsympathetic Goldring writes: “Married! That was the dream of Violet’s life, to be able, at last, to parade a husband” (1943, 81).

Hunt’s Desirable Alien records their mythical marriage, her self-division as wife/writer, and the couple’s desperate ploy to escape English law yet retain the trappings of civility and moral repute (1913). But when confronted by a vicious Elsie, public exposure in English courts, and an increasing anti-German sentiment as politics began to change, Ford and Hunt came back to England, turning their backs on Germany. “In all probability, in a fit of exasperation, Ford exclaimed: ‘Hang it all. What does it matter? Let’s go home and say we’ve been married’” (Goldring 1943, 97). When the Throne debacle exposed them, Ford let the issue of their “marriage” die; Hunt fought bitterly but was no match for the system, especially given the lack of any authenticating papers. Rather than join her in the fight for their “marriage,” Ford lost interest in the law and its dictates and simply lived with Hunt until boredom and The Great War brought him his escape.

Her life had changed, her dreams had shattered. “The story was so tangled and the uproar so intense that no one ever found out what really happened . . .” (King 1995, 91). Hunt always insisted she and Ford had married, though she says in I Have This to Say, “to vouchsafe the whole truth at this juncture would, I am told, land me in prison for three months without the option of a fine” (1926, v). Her close friend Rebecca West
contended that Hunt and Ford were married in France, but Hunt would only finally say she thought she “was in law—his wife. I have been rudely taught since that it was not so—that I never did become a legal wife” (ibid., vi). For Ford as for his fictional heroes “the distinction between marriage and adultery, wife and mistress vanishes and we discover yet again the anguished confrontation between a weak hero, unequal to the demands of the woman he loves, and a frustrated wife/mistress whose frustration brings her to act as a soul-destroying fury” (Webb 1977–1978, 592). Even though the “hero” is devastated, the pattern savagely shatters a “wife/mistress.” She must live with the social reverberations of airing her complaints, what society considers taunting exhibitionism.4

This turn of events ultimately brought Hunt to the year 1917, a year in which she wrote a diary vastly different in style, content, and tone from the 1912 Alien diary. But as different as these two “life-texts” are, Hunt wrote both exposing the ambivalent role of a woman who supports, yet subverts, prevailing western cultural mythologies. And an audience was on her mind.

Victorian Conventions: The Travel Diary

The Desirable Alien, ignored by all but a few scholars, has been called an “impressionistic book about Germany” (J. Miller 1990, 211), an “extravagant panegyric to Germany and German life” (Cheng 1989, 535), and “a very satisfactory book about a country” (Ford, 1913a, vii). Hunt refers to it only once in her memoir, noting that in the couple’s “escape” from Germany in 1913 she had a copy with her: “My new book—all about Germany!” (ibid., 249). But The Desirable Alien is not exclusively a documentary text about a foreign country; Hunt wrote it in the fashion of Victorian travel diaries, making it a text of exploration: of a foreign land, of a Victorian honeymoon of sorts, of the self.

Victorian women’s travel diaries “help them visualize themselves and their place in the world differently” (Huff 1988, 119); when it records a honeymoon, it records the couple’s “transformation that was both highly visible and deeply private” (Michie 2001, 230). The travel diary’s public nature shapes the experience as well as the text. Because diaries do not depend on narrow and predictable generic conventions, as the writer and audiences change so do the forms, the emphases, and the narratives. To many English women, England stood for “restraint” and their travels stood for “freedom” (Huff 1988, 123–24); for Hunt, writing as mistress/wife, this is particularly true. Hunt clearly followed the conventions of Victorian women’s travel diaries, deciding for the most part on personalized narrative
rather than rigidly impersonal conventions. *The Desirable Alien* is a circulating discourse, moving in and out of subjective diary modes to objective documentary rhetoric, placing Ford variously as audience, cowriter, and amender.

Hunt records an idyllic trek in a land giving her an anti-biographical new chance for love and a new persona as a married woman. Only in antiautobiographical subtexts does she present and cover over personal experiences and struggles—hence, a “book all about Germany.” She envisions a vast audience: her “husband,” whom she wished to charm and win forever, and the German and British public as well. She entertains her audiences with much wit and zest, recording images, responding to events, reflecting on what it means to be a woman living “abroad.” Necessarily, Hunt, a woman of much candor, must write for herself as well: “For I am . . . a non-sifter of evidence, hasty, liking to scorch through to my end, and within, egregiously, incredibly sincere” (1926, 8). *The Desirable Alien* taxed Hunt’s sincerity, caught in the whirlwind of quasi-marriage, English gossip, and German law.

Beginning with her “Introduction: How One Becomes an Alien,” Hunt throws herself headlong into the project of becoming “German,” being a “wife,” and supporting Ford’s endeavors. From the start she perceives herself as an “alien,” traveling throughout the country as a tourist while pretending to a preordained and fated German soul. “My Germanhood was obviously Fate” (1913a, 5). She inhabits no real place in Germany, roving everywhere with Ford, soaking up German character, and writing a travel journal to please others. Her emotional investment in Ford, and thus his project, triggers her eager performance. Presumably at Ford’s suggestion, she writes the book as evidence of their sincere love of Germany and civilized marriage. Clearly, Ford and Hunt use the book to seduce German authorities into granting Ford citizenship and a subsequent divorce. “The book, in fact, tries to present an endearing image of Ford and Hunt as a neo-connubial couple, he stolidly lecturing in a bullish Germanic way and she lovingly and domestically trying to please him” (Cheng 1989, 536). But outspoken and rather uninhibited, Hunt resiliently lives housed in the new self-promulgated domestic and passive Hausfrau; she writes both personas in the journal, weaving an entertaining, subtly subversive self-text within the political narrative.

Ford’s agenda for the book is purposeful, political, public; certainly he uses the quasi-journal format for his own rhetorical ends. He says in the preface: “So you have here a book of impressions. If I did not like it I should not be writing this introduction; if I had not very much admired the kindly, careless, inaccurate, and brilliantly precise mind of the author, I presume the book would never have been written” (x). Ford’s affection-
ate condescension introduces what he feels is his superior grasp of
German history and character, telling readers that Hunt’s “first impres-
sions” perhaps “colour[ed]” her information and response (viii). In a sense
he excuses her observations as mere journal entries, though he notes that
Hunt’s impressions “are formed” from childhood teachings by German
governesses and “the good Grimm!” (ix). He interjects his masculine dif-
fERENCE in assessing culture, describing how educated gentlemen form
their views: “But, were I writing a book about Germany, I think that I
should see first what Bismarckism, Nietzscheism, and agnosticism of the
Jatho type have made of the land of the good Grimm” (ibid.). Thus he
gives her views a fairy-tale status that contrasts with his own informed
versions. If she errs or offends, naivety is the cause. By reminding readers
repeatedly in the preface that this is a book only of Hunt’s impressions,
especially first impressions, Ford addresses her work to heighten its role as
tavel narrative, deflecting its propagandist characteristics and interjecting
his own agenda: “[T]here is no such thing as Germany as distinct from
England . . . people are just people” (xii). He thus places himself as an
international humanist that, given his Hueffer name and German kins-
men, allows him to be as German as English, no traitor to either country.
To that extent The Desirable Alien is indeed a panegyric, a propaganda
piece written to gain personal ends, Ford’s first—secondarily and romant-
tically, Hunt’s.

The Desirable Alien: Ford's Control of Audience

In 1913 Chatto and Windus published The Desirable Alien: At Home in
Germany, described as “by Violet Hunt with Preface and Two Additional
Chapters by Ford Madox Hueffer.” Playing to readers in England and
Germany, the title describes not two aliens but one, presumably Hunt,
Ford the one “at home in Germany.” Each chapter focuses on a trip to a
German site and responds to it, highlighting the author’s surprises about
German culture and history. Hunt’s engaging titles capture reader inter-
“Bones, Babies, and Anabaptists.” Others more plainly follow travel book
conventions: “Celle,” “Trier,” or even “Lions and Lace Curtains.” Hunt’s
easily defined chapters promote the text as a traditional travel journal. She
organizes by place, rather than date, the twenty-two chapters dividing her
year in Germany. Hunt, following diary conventions of her precursors,
does not foreground her alien status in both England and Germany. She
adopts the woman traveler’s discursive tradition of correcting her own
“misconceptions and those of others by comparing and contrasting two
ways of life” (Huff 1988, 121). Without really betraying the country of her birth, she thus follows Ford’s plans for her textual liaison with Germany. He leaves it to Hunt to write charming, domestic observations and entertaining, humorous pieces about their exploits in their new country. Her ironic wit often leads her dangerously close to satire, but Ford’s intrusions into the text provide correctives to her “nonsense” (Hunt 1913a, 175 n), enabling him to negotiate textually the duplicity inherent in their project—to be both English and German, unmarried and married.

Ford’s two contributions, Chapter VII (“Utopia”) and Chapter XVI (“How It Feels to Be Members of Subject Races”), formally explore his politics and personal philosophy. He choreographed the sequence of his chapters to position serious issues of political morality within pages made comic by “a slight, wiry, lanky, ex-Englishwoman” whose “spirit fainted many a time, where a stout, heavily-clad German Frau leads cheerfully” (81). Ford, in his “Utopia,” seriously imagines political and cultural perfection, hoping to “exhaust the intellectual and artistic sides of our community” (49), and then acknowledges that “such a town is impossible . . . unthinkable. And yet from this town we are writing” (51).

In “How It Feels to Be Members of Subject Races” Ford analyzes the causes of Prussian domination and reservedly pretends to respect and understand its heroic, dominating culture and warlike stance. Thus, Ford pretends to honor the “superiority” of German institutions over those of the British while philosophically honoring colonial dominance. Lest others suspect his motives, he surrounds this propagandist tract with Hunt’s more personal and ironic observations about “the domestic life of nations” (52). It is Hunt who voices their differences in apprehending the culture and history of Germany: “And all the way from Hildesheim, Joseph Leopold and I were thinking, from totally different standpoints, of the great and important town we were about to visit” (220). Hunt’s charm mitigates the politically charged agendas of Ford, making them more palatable to both English and German readers.

Less palatable today are Ford’s footnotes, his exertions of control over Hunt’s text. He corrects her errors of perception, contradicts her observations, and rides roughshod over her book; the lengthy notes seem to intrude upon the text itself. “Ford is an ubiquitous and God-like presence throughout” (Cheng 1989, 536). In the first few chapters Ford writes infrequent and short notes, but by the text’s end, when Violet increasingly critiques her impressions of Germany, many of Ford’s footnotes are longer than her original narrative. Even though he often softens his intrusions by humor, he obviously prefers his impressions to hers, retelling her narrative from his
own point of view or calling into question her version of events. When Hunt, for example, expresses astonishment at signboards bearing the words “Only for Old Ladies,” “Verboten to Old Ladies,” and “reserved for Cavaliers,” Ford remarks in a footnote, “I do not believe that these notice boards ever existed. Our author was probably hypnotized into seeing them by the English belief that such things exist in Germany” (1913a, 268).

Ford’s defense of Germany at Hunt’s expense furthers his political agenda. And even though he injects ironic humor into the text, in doing so he denies Hunt the authority of her own voice. When, for example, she notes the poor repair of German monuments and the shoddy way the Germans treat their ex-military men, saying “That is the way they save the Government’s money in Germany” (262), Ford footnotes his assertion that “It is the way they do it in England, too” (262), adding a full paragraph on governmental systems. His footnotes assert his “superior” censorious place in her journal. His pandering to Germany’s political power may have prompted him to gloss her text to undermine her acute observations that readers could have perceived as anti-German. When Hunt says, “All my days in this land are rounded off by a silence—the silence of a German forest” (123), we must consider that her own muffling by Ford must have been equally hard to bear: “I am always afraid of offending Joseph Leopold’s Catholic susceptibilities” (107). Though she makes this remark within a humorous context, Hunt often bore the brunt of Ford’s “susceptibilities.” As “Joseph Leopold,” Ford served as both audience and intruder in Hunt’s text, soliciting her desire, promoting her narrative, forcing her surrender to his controlling consciousness. His forceful presence leads Hunt to rhetorical moves that affect both the form and the content of the diary text.

Unlike Virginia Woolf’s diary or Katherine Mansfield’s lifelong journal, Hunt’s Desirable Alien follows a tradition of short, spontaneous travel diaries often meant for publication. The “union of the universal and the personal” (Kirchhoff 1990, 337) imbues much Victorian autobiography with a heightened sense of responding to public commonalities, the audience visible. Though the performance may be subtle, from its outset The Desirable Alien was planned with plural audiences in mind, complicating Hunt’s ability to tell her tales. It called upon her powers to structure experience enigmatically to please whom she could without relinquishing her own narrative pleasure.

The German Audience: Praise and Politics

Hunt gives obvious attention to her German audience, referring to “my readers,” in the pro-German context of her first chapter, “How One
Becomes an Alien." She describes to her readers the German vineyards who "are going to induct me into the sacred and mysterious rites of German citizenship" (16) and defines her writing task as "writing a book about Germany" (80). Desirous of convincing German authorities of her own and Ford’s sincerity of purpose in becoming German citizens, Hunt writes openly of their pleasure in German citizenship: “In our own principality, so I am told by Joseph Leopold, his name is a name of awe; here he is apt to get casually designated as ‘a German Princeling’ or ‘some Serenity or other’” (4). She adulates certain German institutions and vistas, reveling in their excellence. The Wirtschaftsgarten she calls “reasonable,” “utilitarian,” and “poetical” (65); “The Kur” is “that great German institution” (89); trains in Germany glide “swiftly and sweetly (106); the wine country is “a great green landscape that lay beneath the sky like a jewel. . . . It was pure religion” (309).

Her hyperbolic praise complies with Ford’s purpose of the book, the seduction of German authority. She plays to a rising nationalistic and sentimental vision of Germany; through humor and irony, however, she manages to avoid writing propagandistic essays such as those Ford included. For example, she writes of viewing a parade of “smart officers of My nationality” on her first day as a “German,” saying, “but thank God—I am advised to thank God—I need not call myself a Prussian, though, perforce, the Kaiser—a ‘sacred’ Prussian—has constituted himself my First War Lord” (4). She draws on a tradition of women travelogue writers, focusing on her “odyssey” in Germany, what Mary Wollstonecraft calls “the incidental occurrences, the strange things that may possibly occur on the road” (1967, 9). Hunt’s seeming spontaneity deflects the imagined German audience’s suspicions about the sycophantic nature of the narrative as she urges German magistrates to note their superior culture through the eyes of a new and rather naive narrator.

Such playing to German audiences depends not only on her adulation of Germany but also on her deprecation of the inferior land, institutions, and people she and Ford left. An Englishman is likely to be a “tricksy, moody genius” (Hunt 1913a, 29) and have “weak gastric juices” (40). She quotes George Meredith’s opinion of the dullness in the English caused by “their sports, their fierce feastings, and their oppositions to ideas” (44) and questions whether it is the “restless Celtic elements in the English population. . . . that has unsettled it” (69). Long descriptions of German meals often end with allusions to “maimed” (164) British cooking; German architecture is practical and beautiful, English architecture built only “for pretty” (130). She damns England, and by extension she praises Germany: “I am glad to think that the Puritan spirit in England, which vetoes colour, charm, gaiety,
and all attempts at beauty... cannot prevent the gas-lamp’s flare, however dreary” (78). The “colour” and “charm” of Germany needs no such faint and false light, or so Hunt implies. However, in her later memoir she recalls “the colours of everything, since Rotterdam, were not positively distasteful but raw and strident, as they always are in Germany... nothing ‘pretty-pretty’ anywhere” (125). In *Alien* Hunt seeks to ally herself with German readers, reveling in their virtues. “Her applause for Germany and her critique of England serve Ford’s purposes for the book: “impressions” of “my beloved country” (1913a, x).

Whether her German audience believed in her sincerity we cannot know. Hunt and Ford had to flee Germany just as the book was published in England; World War I split Europe into polemical camps, and the force of English patriotism and German guns brought Ford and Hunt home to England in a hurry. It is unlikely that the book would have influenced German lawmakers in ensuring his citizenship and divorce as Ford had hoped. Nothing he had done in over a year in Germany persuaded German authority to honor his petitions. Ford overestimated his own literary importance and that of literature in general on the German authorities. They simply were not the audience he imagined them to be.

The English Audience: Background Watchers

Ford’s imagined audience for the book was unequivocally German, and Ford’s influence on Hunt cannot be underestimated; Hunt calls Ford and Germany her “Fate” (5). Ford calls Hunt’s presence with him in Germany “blind destiny” (x). But Hunt still regards England a “safe shelter” (15) despite its gossip and its divorce laws; she writes for an English audience as well as a German one. Given all her barbed critiques of British culture, with a wry English wit she still manages to assure English audiences of her thorough English womanhood. She regards the Germans as rather unsubtle and Teutonic, seeing only the obvious. She depends on an English ironic humor to gain her native audience’s sympathy.

Hunt depends on her tone and subtle subtexts to entertain a British audience attuned to irony, comfortable with self-satire. As the book won a measure of success in London, careful readers may have been aware of Hunt’s uncompromising Englishwoman persona at the heart of the German adventure. In the first chapter she reports her “brooding over all the privileges” she had lost when she applied for German citizenship, not the least of which was freedom to march for women, “for I had chosen to belong to a country where women do not even dream of emancipation” (2); she cuts the critique short and ponders others’ applying for alien status looking “by no means
downhearted” (3). She ends Chapter I rather regretfully, noting that when she returns to England “I shall be an—I trust—desirable alien” (16), affectionately regarding her native land and already planning a return. In the next chapter she adulates German hospitality but notes the near scandal her “harem skirt” from England caused to German sensibility. She reports the “husband” of the house as “silent . . . probably already [he] saw the police of his native town politely requesting me to desist from giving the natives of H—food for reflection. And so, indeed, it proved” (25). Here Hunt mocks the provincial German prudery and the omnipresent German authorities, while allowing English audiences an insider’s status, at least where fashion is concerned.

She seeks to win her English audience through her pervasive use of English literary allusion that shapes the text and provides irony. She begins the book with parodic lines from *Twelfth Night*: “Some persons are, of course, born Germans; some achieve citizenship. . . . Others, again, have the honour thrust upon them” (1). Shakespeare’s trickster Maria writes these lines in a forged letter to bedevil and entrap the puritan Malvolio. By beginning *Alien* with comic, ambiguous references to the large yawning gaps between appearance and reality, she calls her own text into question. Like Maria, Hunt twists a text to her own use, mocking her writing, her own love madness, and her audience. Also, she comically draws a comparison between herself and Malvolio, both recipients of a dubious honor “thrust” upon them, in Hunt’s case a new citizenship. Her fanciful use of Shakespeare clearly speaks to an English audience familiar with the subtleties of Shakespeare’s art. In order to deflect German criticism about her use of English literature throughout and to play to her German audience, she introduces the reader to a German “master of the house” who is thoroughly versed in Shakespeare, though enigmatically she says of his knowledge of other English authors, “To him they were as recondite, as undiscoverable as Shakespeare” (28). Although she seems to be talking of the “master’s” knowledge of the private lives of authors as opposed to their works, her phrasing certainly evokes some doubt about this German’s deep understanding of English literature.

Hunt’s project to charm British audiences by employing shared cultural references and excluding all but the most educated of German audiences must have been conscious. Her book, after all, is written in English, to be published in England. In Chapter V, for example, Hunt’s sharp tongue turns on Germany none too subtly, and she uses English allusion both to deepen and obscure her critique. She notes, “No misery shows in Germany.... But, on the other hand, no one ever looks very happy in Germany” (52–53). Although Hunt deflects her criticisms by many positive details about German life, from the lack of slums to the “good
liquor,” she mocks their “collective contentment.” She ties to German culture Wordsworth’s “senile ideal ‘to live without ambition, hope, or aim’” (53–54); she further alludes to Michael of Northgate’s medieval text, “Ayenbite of Inwyt” (54), to further promote her insight into the German’s lack of conscience coupled with a plethora of sentimental regret. Hunt finishes her paragraph bitingly by invoking Shakespeare: “Perhaps, individually, Germans dimly realize that they are fulfilling the ideal summed up by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for the benefit of Hamlet… ‘happy in that they are not over-happy’” (54). In comparing Germans, even “dimly,” to the two nonentities called from Wittenburg to betray Hamlet, Hunt’s criticism becomes scathing, but English audiences see this more clearly than German ones.

The most prevalent method Hunt uses to win approval from both German and English audiences is her collapsing of cultural boundaries, her effort to see herself and the world as universal. Her definition of “culture” shows a sophisticated grasp of what modern scholars take for granted: “I consider ‘culture’, so-called, to be only education-deep, and in no way instinctive” (28). Hunt’s work follows Ford’s example, but her humanism seems more specific, more grounded in the details of culture than in politics. She compares her enjoyment of Wirtschaftsgarten to her childhood memories of “The Strawberry Gardens near Maiden Castle” (66). In Chapter XVII, “Queens Discrowned,” she so blurs the British royal families’ histories that the English become German and vice versa. Retelling a court scandal in Germany, Hunt remarks, “George was the mumpish son of the Electress, who might par impossible have some day to go over and reign in Great Britain” (224). In the same chapter she equates “depressing” suburbs in Germany with those of “say, Hamilton Terrace or Addison Road” (238). Ford feels obliged to assert Germany’s ascendancy in this equation, however, and footnotes her reference saying Hunt was wrong to “confuse . . . disorderly” London suburbs with “carefully planned” German ones. He goes on to say that since Germany gave England “reasonable and utilitarian Rulers,” Germany should also consider giving the British “plans” for the “development of modern cities” (239).

In this way Hunt argues for the equality of the two cultures whereas Ford insists on German superiority, despite his earlier preface eradicating the significance of national character. But then Hunt speaks as one “at home” in the family circles of all three nations” (30), referring to France as well as Germany and Britain, and prefers a less authoritarian insistence on German ascendancy. In becoming a citizen of the world, Hunt shows her willingness to adapt. The Germans might see this as positive, while the English might feel less betrayed. But Hunt’s motives in playing to the
English audience, even though she dare not offend the Germans, may have been her practicality. In *I Have This to Say* she writes: “We had both taken London en grippe, but in my heart of hearts I knew it would be London in the end—at any rate, London for six months of the year” (1926, 162). Though ostensibly writing to further Ford’s plans for German citizenship and to please her German readers (not the least of whom was Ford himself), the British Hunt writes also to win the English; she knows that despite Ford’s plans, she would remain English.

The Joseph Leopold Audience: Most Personal

Hunt tells us in her later memoir, “We two—who were to ‘rule the world,’ in lover’s parlance—must do our best to make our own corner of it healthy. I must manage to play up properly to a genius, and, as a hardy motorist once said to me, ‘not clutter up the brake!’” (1926, 126). In 1911, for Violet Hunt and Joseph Leopold Hueffer the “corner” was Germany. Joseph Leopold was to write books as “money was to be made” (ibid.), and Hunt was to make life comfortable and fun for his genius. In their years in Germany, Hunt wrote the book *Alien*, making whatever money “was to be made.” As it turned out, Ford could not write during this period. He was constantly frustrated by writer’s block, caused he said, by all his embroilment in English and German law. To become a German citizen, Ford was required to live in Giessen, which Ford thought provincial and deadening. Never the man to flourish in confinement, Ford preferred to socialize and travel. Though Ford was a prolific writer, Hunt insists that he could write only when “he could shut the door on writs and duns, bores and viragos, refusing to be confronted with any of the problems that beset an author unfortunately doubled with a man” (ibid.).

Of course, the frustrated “genius,” as Hunt calls Ford, insists on overseeing Hunt’s text to ensure its Germanic precision. That the diary/memoir is Hunt’s makes no difference to Ford, who assumes a coauthorship while writing fewer than twenty pages of text. At most, Ford is audience/editor, and editors “must worry about any reputations that the diary might damage” (Blodgett 1988, 45). Ford, of course, was fanatical about his own reputation. As author, Hunt was most worried about saving her reputation by winning him, using her book to flatter and tease him, to love him and win him to marriage. In collusion, she centers her diary on him.

Ubiquitous, “Joseph Leopold” becomes Hunt’s created character. She portrays him as writer, genius, and German husband who instructs her in an overbearing but appealing manner. Her pronoun use in *Alien* is as often “we” as “I,” and a very specific “we” it is: “We went, Joseph Leopold
and I . . .” (1913a, 72). After an early chapter describing her trip to Germany and emphasizing the presence of Joseph Leopold's mother as chaperon, she plays the new bride to his husbandly power, demure and outlandish in turn, learning her husband's culture willingly and imperfectly. In her first description of the German town of H—-7 she remarks on the storks that she has “come so far to see” and notes, “Joseph Leopold said: “They have come out of the wood”” (22). This entry typically tests her perceptions against his, quoting his exact words, including his perceptions in her own phrases. His footnote “Storks never come out of the woods. They never go in them . . .” (22) shows Ford's characteristic response, denying his words, dryly humoring the author for her naivety. Hunt often quotes Ford, as if his exact words give veracity to her account, flattering him by her attention, mocking him gently for his stolid speech. When Joseph Leopold instructs Hunt, for example, on German forests, she questions him about the possibility of wild animals and records his answer: “ ‘Es kann wohn sein’ (It might easily be), says Joseph Leopold” (122). This verbal jousting provides much of the charm of the book, though Ford's genius and Hunt's foolishness is the theme of their game, Hunt granting him his subtle slights.

Ford's footnoting Alien tempts Hunt to interject incidents to please him. At the end of an anecdote in which someone mistakes Hunt for Ford's “mother's companion,” she says, “Of course, Mütterchen looks ridiculously young” (36), flattering her “mother-in-law” and taking the sting out of the insult to her own age and position. In describing the costume of the Hessen women, she writes of the “vast woollen petticoats, 'kept out,' as we women would say, by bolsters at the hips, of a strong stained-glass-window colour, suggesting the pictures of Ford Madox Brown” (103). Hunt's reference to Ford's grandfather's art as it applies to German settings and scenes shows her politic approach to wooing Ford. As she says later, “All this time I was being told, like Bluebeard’s wife, not to go queering any pitches by the exhibition of unfeminine curiosity” (1926, 169). Hunt's need to be herself and to be a perfectly acceptable wife according to conventions of a country about which she knew little necessarily brought about a radical split in her concept of identity, one that manifests itself in her writing in the diary.

Playing to her Audiences: Splitting the Subject

Hunt's author/persona contradiction stretches the narrative in various directions, disallowing any one subject position. Though Hunt makes the effort to appear together/unified for her audiences' sake, a spirited,
mischievous Hunt surfaces to face a self who imagines herself as the German patriot-wife of Ford the patriarch. In attempting to be all that Ford and his newfound compatriots expect, she revivifies a distant German heritage, reminding readers that her mother “had been an old resident in my new country” (37), remembering childhood visits, recalling her French governess, Milly, “a German in disguise... a spy” (5). Speaking to Germans of Germany, she embraces a heritage not quite her own. In other passages, however, her voice becomes reflective, more private, and much less consenting: “I had chosen to belong to a country where women do not even dream of emancipation...” (2). The tension between the various subjectivities in the narrative, from German Frau to feminist Englishwoman, exposes the fraying seams of a work simultaneously private and public.

In essence, her role of German wife is a masquerade, though she is loath to admit it to herself or her audience. She tells her audience of her obedience to her husband: “He ordered me to go in, use my newly-acquired German, and engage rooms...” (163). Later, after telling of wonderful German meals and a visit to a German circus, Hunt says, “And now I must take the bitter taste out of my mouth with a pretty story” (171). How she acquired the “bitter taste” is ambiguous, but clearly as the teller of stories she seeks to make “pretty” what is sometimes unpalatable.

Yet Hunt insists on imbuing her stories with sharp and sometimes antagonistic observations. German character sometimes suffers in consequence. When reporting on German children, for example, Hunt notes the “affluence,” the “gorgeous and variegated garments,” and the “tumble-down, decrepit appearance of the abodes from which they pour” (186). Fascinated by the “officers” in Germany, Hunt reports on her hate and fear of soldiers, remarking on the “aggressiveness of a Prussian officer” (207), the “horrid jimp-skimp ill-made grey ulsters that the Einjährige wear” (208), and the way “these rude handsome men... infest every walk of life” (208). Even though she notes the beauty of “the flamboyant cloak of grey” and remembers that one of them was “polite,” her negative perceptions of the German military texture her prose.

Hunt forges on bluntly, critiquing German life and institutions with a seeming disregard for the disapproval of her audiences. Yet Hunt is canny. In one case her criticism is couched in the middle of the chapter “‘Drizzlin’ and Officers.” She begins by extolling the virtues of sewing, edges into her critique, and minimizes her cuts by turning her impressionistic diary into a romance at chapter’s end: “During the war scare of 1910 eighty-four thousand men were quartered in Trier... The citizens did not mind that, for daughters went off marvelously...” (209). By giv-
ing primacy to marriage over war, Hunt reminds readers that her perceptions emerge from within a feminine perspective; she makes her critique less dogmatic by that reminder.

Ford tries to rescue her manifest disgust at this highly regarded German institution by footnoting correctives and treating her perceptions as comic. He doubts her ability to "penetrate into the psychologies of these gentlemen" (207), says she would see "precisely the same thing in England" (207), and corrects her slur on "regimental bands" by recalling his own pleasure at such displays. Ford's resculpting of an erring Violet Hunt in Alien presents yet another Hunt identity into the narrative. Ford's validation or lack of same concerning Hunt's identity comes through his frequent notations throughout the book. His footnotes imply that Hunt is a highly imaginative, too inventive recorder whom Ford must set straight. When Hunt remarks on official costumes as promoted by the government, Ford remarks in a footnote, "I do not know what may be our author's authority for making this statement, nor do I fancy that she knows herself" (125). When Hunt is most critical, Ford shifts reader attention to the identities that Ford creates for Hunt so that she does not undermine his purpose for the journal. Ford's image of Hunt is overlaid on her own, exposing the double nature of her narrative and the complexity of her writing for multiple audiences.

Hunt's travel narrative thus becomes a text of point and counterpoint, with Ford allowed the last word. This honeymoon diary trope "imports . . . a popular cultural rendering of the ideal honeymoon as a learning experience in which the husband figures as a guide" (Michie 2001, 239). Nevertheless, Hunt's intelligence, vivacity, and sense of fun emerge even under the heavy weight of Ford's corrections. Though Hunt never exposes anything of herself or of him that is particularly negative, she creates characterizations and personae that contradict, shift, and charm the reader into glossing over the dissonance.

Hunt's persona as a naive storyteller grants her a narrative freedom. Hunt, an experienced writer of fiction and hardly naive herself, self-consciously crafts the feminine narrator in Alien to protect her narrative from Ford's heavy-handed interference. Her feminization of the chapter on the German military, for example, may have saved Hunt's "incorrect" perspective from Ford's excision. Ford follows Hunt's critique with his own chapter called "Subject Races," praising the Prussian ability to "administer . . . to enrich us" (1913a, 217). He undoubtedly feels a masculine authority is needed to exert some influence. She follows Ford's rather weighty treatise on politics and war with "Queens Discrowned," refuting a purely masculine view of history, emphasizing the historical connections of Germany and England through their women, their romantic alliances of lovers and hus-
bands, and the economic betrayals of those same men. She traces her own love of history and its connection with the “Now—-!” (249) throughout the lengthy chapter, personalizing the historical perspective. Hunt places her nostalgia and homesickness in historical narrative in order to position herself happily beside Ford and his German relatives in the next chapter.

Hunt’s Silences: Keeping Her Audience Interested

In any diary where a very real audience peeks over the shoulder of its writer, that writer may build in silences, using the act of erasure to subvert the power of audience control. When that audience also has the last word, as editor Ford did over Hunt’s *Alien*, the writer contrives the silences, choosing which subjects must be ignored completely and which can be inserted cleverly without inviting the censor’s notice.

One subject Hunt chooses to put under erasure was her illness, undefined even in her later memoir, *I Have This to Say* (1926). Her illness during “their first year in exile” (145), in “the days I seemed to be bleeding to death” (142), occasioned two separate surgeries, the last more severe than the first. Hunt’s symptoms, vague even in her memoir and ignored in her diary, point to what women today still call “female problems,” and her last operation probably was a hysterectomy. During this time “Ford was getting domiciled for his naturalism” (145) while Hunt, “weak and tottery from illness” (144), returned to England because “I was British enough to want a British opinion” (147). In this memoir Hunt refers to her illness by remembering Ford “dying just to run across to me to see how I am, which would of course be suicidal to his hopes” (145). Indeed, he escapes German control for a bit and surreptitiously visits Hunt for ten days following her operation. As she says years later of 1911, “I was still ill, worn, carped at, criticized” (172). Writing *Alien* that same year, she excludes references to her illness and surgery though they surely influenced her impressions of Germany and limited her travel.

Decentering herself from the text, Hunt may have considered personal revelations regarding illness not only extraneous but also inappropriate. In one passage she alludes to an illness “contracted in the course of the next few weeks” (1913a, 191). She thus explains her inability to buy and bring back to health a starving dog. The dog’s malady, brought on by neglect from his German owners, acts as a metaphor for her own flagging health. In later memoirs she includes reflections on the toll illness took on her work, her travel, and her relationships; her near exclusion in *Alien* verifies her use of that travel diary to visualize Germany in ways that pleased audiences, not to convey a spontaneous rendering of experience.
Her narrative of omission may have resulted from her desire to authorize the marriage fiction within the text. To admit she had problems associated with both middle-aged and sexually licentious bodies destroys the fabricated marriage fantasy subtext that empowers her impressions of life in Germany. Hunt, educated within Victorian literary traditions, strongly equates the strength of the body to that of text. Had her illness conformed to the virginal Victorian heroine's delicacy, perhaps she would have found a place for inclusion of this important personal crisis. Since she opted for a bodily image of the wiry, strong Englishwoman, acknowledging illness would undermine her purpose. Hunt chooses a young bride persona who writes a honeymoon diary, rather than include evidence of a body or marriage beset by conflict. She writes her desire for traditional Victorian womanhood: wife and mother. Neither the feminist nor the wife could admit the frailty that menopause or syphilis might bring.8

Her concern for her semi-youthful bride image expresses itself throughout the text. Goldring tells us that Hunt lied about her age, and she certainly does not create a middle-aged, forty-eight-year-old persona in *Alien*. She alludes to herself as “an alien bride” (Hunt 1913a, 26), hopeful for children, blurring her desire to see “the homely cabbage which ushers English babies into the world” (21) with her potential as a mother in Germany. Her age and her illness prevented any possibility of bearing a child in 1911, when most of *Alien* was written. But this reproductive impossibility becomes part of the dream fiction of the text. In her memoir Hunt mentions Ford’s wish that “If he had a child it should be Christened in Germany” (1926, 177). Ford surely knew that Hunt was beyond childbearing age and knew her operation must prevent even a miraculous conception. Impossibility meets desire, and Hunt pretends for her own sake as well as Ford’s. Early in *Alien*, when Hunt sets up the idyllic marriage plot, she hints at the importance of children in making a home, calling on the myth of the stork to solicit Ford’s complicity in feigning the possibility of family. Perhaps the Germans, ignorant of Hunt’s age or condition, promoted the idea of a family citizenry. As Joseph Leopold introduces Hunt to their new house, he confesses: “[O]ur house... is new—very new—too new... It did not seem as if a nest of storks would find that high pitched roof an easy platform whereon to raise a large family” (1913a, 21). Her youthful, fertile persona simply did not exist except in the imagination.

Hunt’s endeavors to consolidate her English birth with her supposed German citizenship encourages the use of a strong, zesty persona at the expense of a sympathetic, but weak identity. “A brilliant skater on ice,” Hunt was known for her vitality (Sinclair 1922, 106). Her 1911 frailty
would be especially galling when contrasted to the stolid Germans she depicts in *Alien*. She says of German young women, “All the girls were gay, and with good figures, though inclined to be stout... rosy cheeks” (1913a, 58). Though she repeatedly talks of the “phthisic” (58), “ethereal” (90), “haggard” (78) Englishwoman, she often chooses an observer’s persona who reports. Certainly she never aligns herself with the ailing and infirm. Her English audience depended on her vigor to give the lie to her depictions of English frailty; the German audience expected in her an exemplum of the “noble female creatures” of Germany (103).

Linking disease with age, Hunt avoids reference to a changing body that implies the “loss” of sexuality and reproductivity, those traditional male-held values concerning women. Hunt knew what men liked and knew too their attitude toward illness. Certainly she knew Ford’s attitude. Ford “found the excitement of sexual exploration irresistible and the sympathy of an attractive woman necessary to the dramatization of himself as the unjustly suffering man” (Mizener 1971, 177). Certainly he didn’t want a fellow sufferer usurping his position. Hunt must have suspected this about Ford’s character. In her novel *The House of Many Mirrors*, the ailing Rosamund, dying of a mysterious female complaint, “becomes hopelessly caught,” forced to listen to her husband “adumbrating his theories of the illness which he conceived her to be suffering” (1915, 142). “Only really healthy specimens please him” (162).

Since Hunt will not die, as Rosamund does, she chooses to negate the influence of her illness by refusing to give it textual veracity. She remains in *Alien* as a vital and healthy “specimen,” her unspoken sexuality intact.

Acknowledging the silences that accompanied her public persona and hence her writing, Hunt writes, “Yes, I know they are puzzling, my great white silences..., absurdist lacunas in my narration of the things that impressed me, the things that depressed me as they fell in the course of the flurried years 1908 to 1914” (1926, v). In *Alien* years earlier, Hunt wrote in “lacunae” willingly, in keeping with Ford’s wish to “preserve appearances” (Secor and Secor 1983, 20). Ford writes his own passion for privacy into his *No More Parades*, in which he describes Tietjen’s regard for restraint in making the private public: “[T]he instinct for privacy—as to his relationships, his passions, or even as to his most unimportant motives—was as strong as the instinct of life itself. He would literally rather be dead than an open book” (1962, 70). Obviously in suggesting to Hunt that she write a book of impressions, Ford encouraged her impressions of Germany and the external world; he wanted to limit her disclosure of their personal affairs.

With the stakes high, Hunt writes the travel diary as citizenship ploy
and honeymoon trip, ever aware of its fictions. Such narratives traditionally served “as a backdrop and sign of the transformative cultural work of marriage” (Michie 2001, 234). Traveling with Ford first as fiancée and then “wife,” writing a book at his behest, Hunt avoids portraying herself as one with German women and instead equates herself with the abused “queens” of German kings, English in a foreign land. This scene, late in the book, indicates Hunt’s fatigue, her ambivalent sexual feeling in her ambiguous role of not-quite wife or mistress, not-quite German or English.

Called upon to present the couple as husband and wife blissfully traveling throughout their new country on an extended honeymoon, Hunt must rely on conventional marital sexual depictions, that is, neutral, unspoken, assumed. Hunt’s avidity for a wifely role enabled her to write of traditional scenes of marriage. But juxtaposed to these scenes she couches depictions of nature, fairy tales, and history redolent of her passionate, sexual nature. Hunt, all her life interested in the emotional and sexual interplay between men and women, acquiesces to Ford’s sensibility in this book she calls her own and turns away from the rather destructive erotics that underpinned their relationship during the year or so of the journal.

Ford effectively silences the emotional flamboyance, what Goldring calls a lack of “emotional reticence” (1943, 42), which normally characterizes her writing. But as anyone who seeks to repress an integral part of one’s self and literary method, Hunt lets her interest and engagement in sensual and sexual matters surface intermittently, if only to hint at the “devil’s cauldron that had been preparing succulent horrors for me ever since 1908” (1926, 116). Hunt’s relationship to sexuality might be described as “succulent horrors,” her desire warring with a kind of tragic inevitability; she needed “to live always in the boiling middle of things or, to mix metaphors, in a world of thin ice and broken eggs that will never make an omelette” (ibid., 123). This “boiling” invites the inevitable punishment reserved for the promiscuous antiheroines of the fairy tale. In Alien she used these sexually charged morality tales to tell and foretell her own story.

Hunt’s use of fairy tales circulates evocative, sensual, and sometimes grotesque images. Highly erotic language retells these stories, imbuing recollections with a sexual presence that unsettles the glossy exterior of the “impressions” of Germany. She recalls the “leaping firelight” that accompanied her childhood listening and uses words and images recalling a primitive sexuality: “Beauty and the Beast” is replaced by “The Woodcutter’s Child,” a tale “savage,” “unromantic,” and “incomplete” (8). Hunt remembers her governess telling this “horrible, grotesque” tale,
implying a castration at the story's center, causing a “shiver” (ibid.).
“[A]fter that night the story was tabooed by our elders . . . it was vulgar” (ibid.). Hunt's continued enjoyment of the savagery of Grimm's tales hints at unresolved sexual anger.

Hunt eroticizes nature in Alien, especially the rivers of Germany, suggesting the fluidity of woman's sexual desire, the depth of the darkness that underlies its social signification. Moving through the Valley of Apollyan, the river is “so big, so black, so simple, so straight in its bed . . .” (14). Masculine seduction and fertility meet the river: “Old, grey, helpless, and forlorn, the banks look under the glare of the truculent virile shafts of gold that are fostering and ripening the vine screens . . .” (ibid.). Through her language Hunt joins masculine and feminine nature: “I go gliding into the country of my adoption, insinuating myself by these peaceful methods of penetration” (15). Written early in her year in Germany, Hunt overestimates her feminine insinuation and peaceful penetration into the masculine Ford and his country, Germany. Her role of wife undermines much of her power while Ford plays the authoritative German husband.

Critics of her day regarded her as a “tragic realist” (Sinclair 1922, 111) and a “psychological realist . . . [an] incorruptible truthteller” (117–18). A more recent review of her work notes that she and her characters “could not retreat from the sexual awareness and self-sufficiency by which [they] lived” (Secor and Secor 1978, 26). But in Alien, a book that was to be regarded as her journal of “impressions,” she only obliquely explored the sexual and confined her haunting, psychological realism to portraying German character, refusing a depth of characterization in favor of a comic domestic farce for herself and Ford. Given the complexities of the Ford/Hunt “honeymoon,” unsurprisingly she leaves Celle “brown, dusty, parchment-like,” feeling “chilly and grown old” (1913a, 248).

Allusion as Disruption: Grimm Germany

As part of the travel narrative convention and as part of her intention to focus on their public life together, Hunt describes scenes from all over Germany. In many she emphasizes the colors, the scenic beauty of the countryside, and the charm of the villages. But she dispels the typically pro-German discourse by literary techniques within the travel journal. Using these strategies subtly, Hunt alludes to a personal engagement with her “mate” and Germany that the surface narrative belies. Using the motifs of light/dark and German fairy tales, for example, Hunt alludes to a darker, frightening Germany that contradicts her more sanguine portrayals. Although she often mentions England shrouded in fog and dark-
ness, she talks too of the light of sun, of the lamp that shines in England despite the repressed overlay of English life. In describing Germany, the bright sun might “glare” on many days, and her many references to the black and rather horrifying forests undermine her brighter depictions. In her chapter “Pax Germanica: Servants, Fairy Tales, and Tailors” she seems to embrace German life while simultaneously exposing a darker side that does not fit Ford’s rhetorical agenda. Using her familiarity with “the legends of Grimm,” she explores the depth of German forests and their attendant myths of wickedness, treachery, and misery. She tells of one “particular afternoon” when “the sun was not ‘shining bright, no gentle breeze was blowing among the trees, and everything did not seem gay and pleasant . . .’” (63).

This “favorite” Grimm beginning is prologue to her own tale, which she compares with the tale of two doomed lovers, Jorinde and Joringel. As she and Joseph Leopold walked through the woods, “We were on the fringe of a much deeper, darker patch of forest . . . and lost even the consoling sight of the red disc of the sun” (63). Hunt’s tale ends with the horrible cry of a wild cat, filling her with fear and horror. This story introduces the darkness of German forests, symbolizing the wild and primitive nature of Germany. In “Princes and Prescriptions” she notes the “fierce electric light” (97) of the Kur-Haus but reminds readers that the King “is your Commissioner of Woods and Forests, your head of police, all in one” (102), juxtaposing a harsh civility to an even harsher primeval system. In “Blue Pates and Schoppen” she recalls a walk through a forest where she loses the sun: “It seems at one time utterly gone out and departed this side of the earth; at another gleaming sudden and angry between the dark bars like a woodcutter’s fire” (122). Hunt thinks Germany has within it a malevolent force that cannot be contained. The forest embodies this power: “[T]he forest is so big and you are so little” (122). Hunt increasingly sees her place with Ford in Germany as insignificant; she expresses her unhappiness only in subtexts to conserve Germany’s, and Ford’s, approval.

Hunt’s references to myths and legends both soften and deepen her contemporary critique of Germany. In “Celle” she pictures “The little candle of legend that flings its light on a naughty world . . .” (260). Through “the very least tamely light” (ibid.), she obliquely exposes all that the dark forests tend to darken and silence. She mocks the all-male smoking room, commenting that an “adventurous female . . . [may] follow her Orpheus into a milder sort of hell, rank with tobacco fumes” (278). Her long analysis of Browning’s “model of all wandering sages and nomadic geniuses . . ., The Pied Piper” (178), gives Hunt the opportunity to explore the German treatment of artists through another’s reworking of
legend, allowing herself criticism at three removes. She praises artists (“these moral lynch-lawyers”) and criticizes those who betray or underpay these “pipers,” mocking “‘Hamelin town by famous Hanover city’ . . . full of every conceivable form of exploitation of the legend” (181). Because she dare not offend her diary’s audience with personal tirades against German practices and her fears for Ford, she shows her disdain for German “exploitation” within a grander analysis of poetry and legend.

Through legend, Hunt imagines the dangers and cruelties of a Germany full of “wonderments, witches and warlocks” (184). Even her enthusiastic portrayal of the wine country includes mention of the “curse” of the “envious sisters Three Eyes and One Eye” (304), which made the region fertile yet fraught with mystic and fearsome power. Hunt’s mythic passages disrupt glowing accounts of her newfound country. She evokes worlds of myth and fantasy, worlds that may not exist except in the imagination of the teller. Just as the Pied Piper did, Hunt hopes to “bewitch” the “fat, self-sufficient burgomasters” (178) by her subversive tale.

**Having Her Say: In Fiction**

Ford’s ambivalence about her roles of wife and mistress along with their precarious marital position made Hunt’s experiences in Germany peculiarly akin to the macabre Tales of the Uneasy, which she wrote the same year. These tales depict Hunt’s “characteristic leaning to the gruesome and uncanny” (Sinclair 1922, 107), particularly in relation to the dynamics of passion between men and women. The “uneasy” bespeaks the twisted, powerful emotions between the man and woman centered in each story. Autobiographical in a psychological sense, the tales indeed expose the sexual tensions and displacements between strong, erotically motivated women and men who are destroyed by these women. Secor and Secor note that “in these ghost stories Violet Hunt often seems most frightened of herself” (1978, 18). Indeed, her heroines seem to be self-portraits of women driven by desire and turned savage by the cold manipulations of men who will not or cannot commit themselves to love or passion. Hunt, in “The Telegram,” writes of the flirtatious Alice Damer, “not an outrageous, noisy, ill-bred flirt but what is known as a quiet flirt” (1911, 4). As Alice ages she feels the pressing need to marry, but fears her need will be destructive to herself and the man who “must” be her husband. In “The Operation” Hunt writes of the wife-mistress-genius triangle, noting that Florence “[w]ith fond remorselessness . . . had driven him to drive his wife to divorce him . . . , as if unconscious of the larger issues she was stirring—another woman’s happiness, a man’s honour, and an actor’s art, for
Joe was a genius” (ibid., 41). Mabel, “little Lady Greenwell” in the story “The Memoir,” worries about her husband’s penchant for young women, saying, “He was a born flirt, and he was eight years younger than his wife. Wives, who were burdened with odious supernumerary years, must, of course, give their man a little rope” (75). Alice painfully notes that “women simply ‘clawed him’ for their parties, and adored him for their boudoirs” (ibid.). In these stories Hunt assiduously studies the psychological strands of desire, both sexual and emotional, in her characters’ entanglements. The contraries of socially inscribed marriage and socially repressed sexual desire surface in possessiveness, destructive dependencies, and masculine aggression disguised as passivity.

The plots are commonplace, but the contorted psychologies of the characters make them indeed Tales of the Uneasy. “The Prayer” is her most chilling story. A character called Alice deprives Edward of his will by the strength of hers; Edward then turns on her to recapture his own vitality at her expense: “Where she was pale he was well-coloured; the network of little filmy wrinkles that, on close inspections, covered her face, had no parallel on his smooth skin” (21). Alice’s consuming love turns back on her, destroying first their relationship and then her life.

These stories fiercely foreshadow Hunt’s obsessive love, Ford’s betrayal, and Hunt’s subsequent decline. She had seen and feared his fickleness and her own passion and knew he would use both against her. The sexual language Hunt uses in her stories tells the reader where the destructive will resides, and the ferocity of the stories denotes a channeling of frustration and fear that she dare not insert in The Desirable Alien. Hunt relegates the themes of erotics, betrayals, and sexual politics to her fictional Tales of the Uneasy lest she be deemed undesirable by her audiences in writing of such issues in autobiographical text. What Hunt feels “uneasy” about inevitably surfaces in Alien, however, denoting the strength of her feelings.

Deflecting criticism and ostracism, she speaks in a comic, resistant, and disobedient voice seemingly allowing correction by a higher, German, and masculine authority. By creating a persona who both is and is not Hunt, rather the mythic wife of Ford, she embarks on a journey more fictional than she wishes to concede. Hunt thus negotiates the rugged course of multiple audience expectations. Her many audiences exhort her to tell all, but their expectations both shape and stifle the telling. To negotiate this double bind, she mythologizes her German experience, telling her own story within a text of contradictions, gaps, and uneasy juxtapositions. When critic Edward Garnett says of Ford that “Facts never worry Joseph Leopold much!” Hunt responds perhaps to her own project as much as to Garnett’s criticism: “And why should they? [Facts] were made for slaves.
not for gipsies; for policemen, not for authors. Truth and fiction are probably all one—part of the cosmos . . .” (1926, 209). Hunt therefore uses “facts” to create her “cosmos.” As these bewitching stories imply, romantic enchantment cannot last forever, nor could the fantasy of the Hueffers.

Autobiographical “Impressions”: Change

Enchantment with Germany could not last long in the years 1911 and 1912. As Hunt puts it, “The promise of the rainbow was not to be fulfilled. We could not see the blood-red ray in the spectrum, but Germany was all wrong with us!” (1926, 183). The approaching war, which finally not even Ford could ignore, and Ford’s boredom with the divorce/marriage question leads them irrevocably back to London. Unwilling, however, to end Alien by articulating doubts about the “flattening” Prussian presence beginning to haunt Ford and Hunt, she ends ambiguously, motoring back into “Belgium—for the time . . .” (1913a, 327). She sustains the energy of her fantasy of Germany and her marriage to Ford even as the book’s close intimates a broadening of scope, an “alien” returning to a world more familiar. In the last paragraph Hunt emphasizes the drinking of the “healths of several nationalities . . . Belgian, English, German, and French—” bringing her internationalism full circle. To the bitter end she maintained an integrity to a book whose purpose all but unraveled by the time of publication.

Leaving Germany and returning to London, Hunt found to her despair that she returned with nothing accomplished: no marriage (at least no “papers”) and no freedom from the law’s imposition. Earlier, temporary visits to England had brought them hundreds of invitations to parties to honor them both. Not this time. Ford’s wife Elsie sued The Throne for referring to Hunt as “Mrs. Hueffer,” and the English courts investigated Hunt’s false position of “wife” with ruthlessness. Ford faced bankruptcy, and although he did not mind “so much” his loss of financial security, he was bored silly with Hunt’s obsessive explanations of the “Marriage Mirage” (Belford 1990, 183): “All this damned me thoroughly with Joseph Leopold” (1926, 199). But the scandal of The Throne and the 1913 publication of The Desirable Alien brought them under scandal and scrutiny.

Hunt—angry, obsessive, and afraid—did not thrive. She was shunned by society, by her old friend Henry James, and by Goneril and Regan (Hunt’s names for her traitorous sisters). Whether literal or figurative, the honeymoon was over; Hunt had to face the reality of an unmarried life with a man increasingly absorbed with his writing, his plans, his friends. Her “zealous public crusade” to legitimate herself as Mrs. Hueffer “alienated” Ford further. Finally, in 1913 Hunt and Ford again toured “the
Rhineland” with friends. She meditated “on the failed fairy tale of living in a castle with her medieval knight. To make herself more miserable, she reread *The Desirable Alien*, with its prodigal portrayal of a nation that no longer existed (Belford 1990, 209). Neither did Hunt’s life as Mrs. Hueffer. By 1914 the romance of Ford and Hunt was dying.

Indeed, Hunt’s loss of Ford as a sympathetic audience changed her. ‘Her Alien playfulness changes to increasing acrimony. At his behest, Germany was the subject of ‘their’ *Desirable Alien*; Ford’s fame and sense of history were to be the center of their coauthored *Zeppelin Nights*. Their partially autobiographical *Zeppelin Nights* traces the transition in their relationship. Even though *Zeppelin Nights* may deserve no true place in a study of Hunt’s diary narratives, its transitional and autobiographical place in her writing with Ford and about Ford make it pertinent. In it, Hunt endeavors to place Ford and their relationship in a fictional and viable literary narrative. The equivocations she writes into that text move tellingly from the hopeful and zesty narrative of *Alien* in 1911. In *Zeppelin* Hunt rather frantically elevates Ford to a central position of knowledge and fame, yet exposes, perhaps unconsciously, the pomposity and cruelty of his personality.

Hunt doubles her narrative role with that of her fictional Candour Viola, creating gaps and slippages in appraising Ford as Serapion. Viola mirrors Hunt’s passion and folly in loving him. Hunt views her persona, Mrs. Candour Viola, with a cynicism that springs from her own appraisal of her romantic and ridiculous naivety where (Ford) is concerned: “‘No . . . no . . . no!’” Candour called out. Serapion looked at her with that superior air, that air of masterfulness that made us all wonder how she could do anything but detest the fellow” (1913b, 305). Hunt’s parodic voice and Viola’s adoration coalesce to provide a frame for Ford’s genius and arrogance. Hunt positions him in *Zeppelin Nights* as both subject and audience, with Hunt herself peeking from behind the portrait as a court jester, dancing in attendance and subtly subverting his performance.

Hunt, less willing in 1916 than in 1911 to bury her own wit and genius under Ford’s more famous presence, met critical acclaim for her part in writing *Zeppelin*. One reviewer says, “There are flashes of Miss Hunt’s genius dispersed throughout the volume, and one is sensible that she has made a heroic attempt to leaven the mass of Mr. Hueffer’s dull offensiveness” (Prothero 1916, 293). Certainly Hunt’s intent to win back Ford’s fading affection by again offering her talents at the altar of his presence was undermined by such reviews. Ford had become less an authority for their shared “impressions” and more an enshrined subject in someone else’s narrative. Thus, the double narrative of paternal origins that
Ford empowers in *Alien* becomes in *Zeppelin Nights* a double narrative choreographed by feminine direction. The pleasure of the performance was clearly Hunt's.

Alas, *Zeppelin Nights* is their last performance together. In it Hunt depicts Viola's tears and Serapion's enlistment in the armed forces, which for Ford took place in 1915. The book foreshadows Hunt's heartbreak and Ford's betrayal so painfully written into her *1917 Diary*. As *Zeppelin Nights* ends and the *1917 Diary* begins, Ford begins to openly court other women, embarking on his long, ambivalent process of ridding himself of Violet Hunt. The Ford in *Zeppelin Nights* is the Serapion who embodies art: "'Oh, but tell him he's too valuable,' Candour appealed to all of us. 'Art alone is too valuable'" (306); the Ford in the diary written a year later is "my Frankenstein monster" (Secor and Secor 1983, 58). Yet despite the monstrousness of Ford in his relationship to Hunt, in each of Hunt's overt autobiographical portraits of her relationship with Ford, *Alien*, *Zeppelin*, *Diary*, Hunt defines herself solely in relationship to him. His presence as audience, coauthor, and lover in the first two of these three books overshadows her own prosaic reality. In the *Diary*, his absence similarly overshadows her own performance as a person, and she bitterly displays a self-inflicted self-abasement. The effect of the loss of Ford as lover and as audience on her sense of identity and on her life stories becomes glaringly clear in Hunt's *1917 Diary*.

**1917 Diary**: Without Fantasy, without the “Other” Audience

The *1917 Diary* shows Hunt still laboring under her obsession with Ford. Clearly he is not a coauthor; his centrality of subject remains. They no longer collaborate, and he no longer functions as her audience because of their estrangement. The diary is particularly interesting when compared to the travel diary, *Alien*. The romance, the myth, the fairy-tale prosaic quality, the subtlety and humor of the subversions and disruptions—all are gone, to be replaced by a stark view of reality, a bitter and cynical "psychological realism." After much disappointment, for example, she ponders once again living with Ford, saying, "[I]f I go on with him, it will be a dog's life—(or a bitch's)" (1983, 59). Thus, she replaces her flirtatious recognition of Ford as omniscient audience by abrupt, detailed depictions of her life both with and without him.

The diary, "a monodrama, complete with recalled dialogue and choral commentary" (Secor and Secor 1983, 7), lacks the dialogic quality of man/woman conflicting voices. In *Alien* Hunt seems to speak with Ford, or to him, or against him. But this quality of woman using her feminine
wit and vitality to question and subvert male genius and authority is completely missing in the *1917 Diary*. She no longer organizes by picturesque impressions but tells a chilling, labored, daily tale of betrayal and suffering. Hunt writes as a woman badly bruised and conflicted about the man at the center of her experience.

In her obsession with Ford, Hunt includes his name or the initial F in nearly every entry, recording what he does, what others say about him, and her own depreciation or defense of him. She notes that Eleanor Jackson tries to disillusion her “about F telling me of all his inclinations to all my female friends (well favoured) attempted kissings and so on!” (44). She records Ford’s saying “You & Brigit will claw each other & either she will get me—or you. That’s life. Take what you can get” (52). And although she records many of these entries without commentary, sometimes her despair is all she writes: “Oh what is the good of my life, hanging in ribbons round a man who does not care for me!” (55). Occasionally she merely faces facts: “I am not F’s mistress. I can’t be his friend. I won’t be his wife” (70). Her resolve to confront the truth of his absence never lasts long, although she is brutally honest about her obsession. She writes in November: “But Ford dominates me to such an extent I can’t keep up an attitude” (83).

Hunt’s diary, “the wretched thing” (73), records entry after entry of a life consumed by the idea of Ford far more than by Ford himself. Hunt’s own persona surfaces only by inference, by what she says and how she says it. Her self-reflections center on Ford’s responses to her. Readers may feel sadness and impatience in reading this diary, whose bleak entries detail Hunt’s emptiness and heartbreak. She desperately clings to a man who plays her for a fool, who has nothing of substance left to give her. When Hunt met Ford, she had hoped for “a respectability thus far denied her and, perhaps, a last grand, passionate fling, if not marriage” (Belford 1990, 145). When the passion and the fling and the “marriage” evaporated, so did her self-worth. Her life seems wasted on a romantic conception of woman’s need for man.

Hunt’s frankness and self-justification about sex indicate that she either sees herself as sole audience or wishes for Ford’s occasional audience. Certainly the larger audiences of *Alien* no longer exert any kind of presence; the Ford of 1911 has become the Ford whose guilt is measured by sexual indifference, infidelity, and boredom. When Hunt speaks of sex she speaks to herself of her frustration, but she seems also to speak to Ford, fixing blame on him for her “loveless bed” (77). She writes: “I long to be able to tell him that I have not love for him enough and not even respect only an unholy passion that will last till I die” (61). She despairs that “He
has toothache adroitly every night at 10” (63). Given her constant chroni-
caling of her frustration due to Ford’s nights of refusal, her blunt critique
of him as a lover seems surprising: “The night he permits himself to be
passionate. He was not: only brutal and coarse” (71). Perhaps she address-
es this paradox of desire and disappointment when she tells him, and
records the telling, “We must be ineffectual lovers but lovers—or else
part” (72).

As time passes, Hunt records the increasingly bitter fluctuation
between desire and hatred, passion and indifference: “A row at night. F
has gone sick. His face is all scratched—by me” (74). The next day Hunt
records: “The awfallest day . . . mostly together, but dreary. F declares
himself ‘impotent’—This is the latest” (ibid.). These stark entries written
with poignancy, but without elaboration, expose Hunt’s thwarted sexual-
ity and its relationship to her troubled sense of identity. Without Ford’s
wanting her, without his desire, she cannot feel complete. Clearly it is not
Ford’s sexual ability that fanned Hunt’s desire, but his reluctance and his
cruel strategy of setting himself up as sexual prize to a woman who “can
give Ford what he wants, tho’ he can’t give me what I want” (83). Hunt
has reason to struggle with her own desire and his. He tells her and she
records: “If I could have another woman I might desire you. I was nice to
you in the Brigit time.” As Hunt says, “It seemed perverted, but F is so
queer. I took it calm” (80).

Hunt struggles between culturally embedded constructions of the
Victorian and Modern woman. “What did these Edwardian women
want? The vote . . . and personal autonomy, but especially ‘sexual free-
dom’” (Clausen 1996, 15). More tragically, many like Hunt longed for the
middle-class respectability of marriage—hence her malaise. Ford’s blatant
“double standard” of sexual relations ruptures Hunt’s sense of her freedom
and smashes a sexual liberation that was all the compensation she had.
“What the double standard hurts in women . . . is the animal center of
self-respect” (Dinnerstein 1976, 73). When Hunt fearlessly puts her sex-
uality in play and then is rejected as woman, wife, mistress—she turns her
rage inward.

Ford’s confessions and their combined failures flatten her sense of iden-
tity. The diary entries show a sexual malaise with astonishing destructive
capability. Hunt, a woman raised in Victorian England to define herself
in relation to men, seems left with nothing when she can neither arouse
nor reproduce. As she says at the end of the diary that marks the end of
their relationship together, “If he isn’t ravenous for me, then there is no
need to try & come together” (Secor and Secor 1983, 85). Throughout
the year Hunt looks for her failures, and Ford’s, to find the cause of the
collapse of their relationship. She derides Ford for his lack of sexual passion for her, but clearly she blames herself for Ford’s failure. In a bitterly acrimonious and physical argument, Ford tells Hunt, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. If I go away & have a quiet time for a couple of months . . . I’ll be able to make love to you.” As Hunt says, “That was the limit.” The following day Hunt records, “I wrote to F saying how deadly ashamed I was. I did not love him enough to preserve my self control when he tormented me” (81). These horrifying looks into the sexual dynamics of a “tormented” woman and a man who accuses her of having “‘a bed room mind’” (54) expose more than the lives of Hunt and Ford. These entries vibrate with the sexual dysfunction too typical in patriarchy.

No Longer an Audience: Ford’s Continued Economic, Erotic Manipulation

The conflict between economic and erotic power relations glaringly illumines the text of their lives and the diary itself. Hunt makes no attempt to soften the implications in her “factual” accounts, willingly portraying herself as the fool in order to paint Ford as the cad. Complicating an already complex relationship was Ford’s constant need for money. Though Hunt’s riches fluctuated wildly in their years together because of her own familial conflicts and the litigation brought about by her relationship with Ford, Hunt always had more money than Ford. From the start of their relationship she gave Ford large amounts to keep his children in private schools and to keep his wife at bay. In Alien she never mentions money, and the reader might erroneously assume that Ford’s larger fame and husbandly power meant he supported Hunt. Despite what Goldring calls “Ford’s magnificently ‘un-commercial’ attitude and his devotion to the ‘great abstractions’” (1943, 24), he needed money to live. In their early years together Hunt gave Ford without thought, noting only that she refused Ford money for “a pony and trap for the children to go to church in during the holidays” and “the deluge of words that followed, of cruel felicities of speech, apt verbal lunges—le mot juste . . . applied to a palpitating shrinking Mentor at home!” (1926, 173). But once Ford enlisted and it became clear that he no longer wanted to love or bed Hunt, the acrimony of a woman wronged both sexually and economically erupted from her diary pages. Hunt records without gloss Ford’s financial manipulations.

One Friday in June Hunt writes, “F kissed me. I lent him 18 lbs. for his mess bill . . . (Secor and Secor 1983, 64). In September Hunt tries to figure out how to pay a debt of Ford’s that she is not supposed to know about. After paying for a trip of his, “He had no money on him . . . he
was kinder than he has been for 5 weeks” (75). Three days later Hunt sends him a “10 lb. cheque to send Phillips. He will be enraged” (ibid.). In recording a quarrel in October, Hunt says, “Then I said bitterly that I had thought he had been different downstairs (at the moment I had promised to—give money). He raged” (81). Hunt’s generosity, increasingly scarce, demands payment in real affection, something Ford cannot quite return. The circumstances of their economic relationship clearly outrage Hunt and weaken Ford’s ability to loosen their entanglement.

The cultural mandate that gives men superiority so that they might protect and support the weaker sex obviously is not often borne out in Ford’s relationships. Ford’s sexual anxiety certainly rested in part on his dependence on a woman he no longer desired; Hunt was patron and lover, and he needed one without the other, an impossible feat. Goldring attempts to excuse Ford’s obvious and rather heartless monetary expectations from Hunt for the year of their break-up: “We can only guess that he felt that women owed him something and that, on various grounds, including his position as retiring warrior, he was entitled to take what he wanted from them when he could get it” (Goldring, quoted in Secor and Secor 1983, 25). The payment Ford extracted from Hunt for his “love” devastated her; she writes: “What is to become of me? I am ballotted by the caprice of one man—I, a genius as he says. Ruined” (61). As for Ford, “He paid as he went along: in caresses” (56).

Without Ford: Changing Subjectivity, Changing Audiences

Knowing Ford will leave, Hunt tries to halt his progress even as she readies herself, searching for a self on every page. Hunt, fifty-four when Ford leaves her, knows that “age will come” (Secor and Secor 1983, 64), that “people think our alliance has, too, gone the way of all (younger) flesh” (46). A friend tells her that Ford “asked for ‘something young’” (76). In all these entries she painfully ignores the “I,” underscoring the loss of her identity in losing her youth and desirability. Hunt exposes herself in each entry: when she was “drunk” (63), when she agonizes over her vain attempts to arouse him (75), when she commits her “first infidelity to F” (60).

Hunt writes in her own frailties, her inadequate coping mechanisms in the face of her despair. She mourns the loss of Ford but also the loss of youth, beauty, love, hope—in short, her culturally structured identity. “She was too old to apply the new doctrines [of sexual liberty] to her own heart-aches, too old, also, to eradicate her instinctive respect for the Victorian conventions she had defied” (Goldring 1943, 132). And thus she suffered a terrible sense of self-defilement along with a feminist fury
over what man, specifically Ford, could give her: “Love without breadth, depth, or thickness, without dimension. . . . For the object—set up like an ikon to be worshipped, perfunctorily, with genuflections and lip-service, a queen in the game of knights and castles” (1926, 220).

Intelligently aware of both the forces of ideology and her own willfulness, she uses her diary to record the struggle of a changing subjectivity. She knows she must forge an identity independent of Ford, but she deeply fears the loneliness and the loss of life’s purpose: “I am better but so lonely” (Secor and Secor 1983, 56). In some way her diary replaces the shared texts she wrote with Ford. In the diary she tries to construct a woman’s identity that can live without relation to a man, without marriage, but her prose betrays her loss of faith in this endeavor. She writes of events and conversations, leaving behind the fairy tales, the coy playing to audiences, the comic personas, the willing pretense of deference to masculine authority. Her diary reads as a blunt, naked document. Leaving behind her customary wit, she writes for a purpose other than publication, other than the need to record the circumstances of her life. She writes to explore new possibilities of being, to reify her worth.

For this year Hunt records a drama, a domestic tragedy. But she does not speak in a monotone or as one subject, one fallen heroine. All of the raw and fractured aspects of her subjectivity speak in the diary through abbreviated entries, informed by snatches of dialogue. Her shrewdness conflicts with her willingness to dream and idealize her relationship with Ford; her self-destructive anger conflicts with her feminist impulse to affirm herself as woman; her “dangerous frankness” conflicts with her desire to be accepted by “the upper-middle-class society whose approbation she craved” (Secor and Secor 1983, 9–10). Hunt seeks to understand how her love for Ford turns to fury at his weak betrayal of her. She relies on recording conversations and rendering events without comment to characterize her preference for “a natural ugliness to artificial sentimental beauty” (Sinclair 1922, 118).

Of course, Hunt’s vision is not that simple. At the heart of the diary is her unstated belief in the sanctity and beauty of love and the rage she feels in finding it all a sham. Her irony betrays her sadness, her sociability underscores her loneliness. Her entries in their entirety comprise not so much a “choral commentary” as a shattered soliloquy.

The 1917 Diary gains its power precisely because it speaks to Hunt herself, though she despairs that she cannot know who or what that self might be. She confronts her fractured identity as the “other” audience. Her audience may be warring selves, one of which is the culture embedded within her, theatrical and passively judging. Her agonizing self-analysis, one aspect of the self warring with another, parallels her
acute consciousness of a culture at war with itself, a culture where men and women viciously destroy each other, a culture where women inevitably play out lives of “rage” and “boredom” because their voices are stifled and dependent on the permission of men to become public.

Returning to the Public Eye: Hunt as Author

The 1917 Diary records the life of a woman who fears for her very survival, in her own eyes and in the eyes of others. But survive she did, moving beyond the deflating circumstances of a lost lover. After Ford left her she wrote five more books, all successfully received, all critiquing an aspect of the dominating masculine culture that she experienced so directly and insidiously. She wrote Their Hearts, an autobiographical tale of growing up with sisters; more Tales of the Uneasy; and The Last Ditch, a critique of the impact of the war. Even in 1932, at the age of sixty-nine, she published The Wife of Rosetti, a retelling of history showing the power of a man, Rosetti, to exploit a woman artist’s nature and ultimately destroy her. As the years passed she became “The brave old dear!” yet Hunt, still talented, still confrontive, certainly did more after Ford than “keep her end up!” (Secor and Secor 1983, 34–35).

The Flurried Years, released in England in 1926 and published in the United States as I Have This to Say, brought out the scorn of those who nevertheless honored Ford’s remaking of their lives in The Good Soldier and No More Parades. Even though The Flurried Years delineates her obsession over her loss of Love (her capital letter) and reputation, Hunt writes with wit and insight, clearly doing more than exposing Ford, really looking for answers to the questions about sexual relationships and culture asked implicitly in her 1917 Diary. The success of her cultural critique can be measured by the fury of the male critics: Goldring calls the book an “indiscreet, painful and pain-causing volume” written to “release her pent-up emotions and distraught nerves” (1943, 76). Bohum Lynch tells Goldring, who scrupulously retells, “From what I hear of it I imagine V. H. has cleaned up her mind once and for all of that topic: but, Lord, what a cat she is. (Most women are, really)” (ibid.). Hunt’s critique of man’s inhumanity to woman cuts deep.

If these telling novels, biographies, and autobiographies do nothing more, they do record “two subjects that obsessed her: the impact of war on the women left behind and the propensity of men, especially artists, to exploit women” (Secor and Secor 1983, 35). Hunt’s autobiographies and diaries expose a culture that can still reduce woman to “cat” and “old dear” and the rage that attends such subordination. Hunt took the raw
materials of her life and reformed them into sometimes witty, sometimes scathing penetrations into the darker side of masculine dominance and feminine acquiescence. But these rhetorical depictions cost her.

Circulating among Audiences: Having Her Say

Hunt’s intelligence, wit, and social acumen surface in her writing through the acuity with which she wields words to enchant those who read. Ford called Hunt a genius; Goldring, “a catfish in a decorous aquarium” (1948, 171). To Henry James, “Violet was ‘society,’ the ‘Improper Person of Babylon,’ ‘the lady about town,’ . . . the ‘great Devourer’” (Belford 1990, 128).

She aroused others with her awareness, and her ability to articulate that awareness made her both respected and feared. A gifted “plotter” with psychological acumen, an “emotional sensualist,” Hunt uses rhetorical maneuverability—learned during her years of collaboration with Ford—to satisfy diverse reading publics and, alas, her coauthor. Ford’s validation mattered all too much, and she endeavored to please him by pleasing their readers. She succeeded remarkably for a time.

“Too vivid to be quenched & too unique to be displaced,” as James called her, Hunt took years to recover from the loss of Ford’s adoring gaze and advising pen. Writing “Mon métier a disparu,” she connects the loss of self to a loss of the personae she constructed for him; she felt she could no longer write, could no longer create an adequate version of herself if she “can’t somehow write to Ford” (Secor and Secor 1983, 69). The sense of failure to “appear” properly and to gain her audience’s lasting affection and validation haunts Hunt’s last published diary as she rather bitterly searches for a way to reinscribe herself. In a later memoir she reflects, “[T]here comes, sooner or later, according to the sets and the entries and exits of other actors, one’s own supreme moment. One is on. And that entry, being but human, one may so easily muff. That moment, some will say, I did muff” (1926, 3). We can only decry a cultural system of values that encourages women to judge the performances of their lives through the gazes of masculine arbiters.