

# From Tricking the Protagonist to Tricking the Reader: Rationalization and Repression in Mansfield's "Bliss"

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**WRITER'S COMMENT:** *By the end of Spring Quarter 2006, I found myself in a bit of a pickle. I was enrolled in Comparative Literature 141, Introduction to Critical Theoretical Approaches to Literature and Culture, and I had yet to formulate my final project for the course. Fortunately (and rather miraculously), I stumbled upon an idea that, to this day, demands further reconsideration and*



*revision: a Freudian analysis of the trick ending in a Katherine Mansfield short story. Nearly one year after COM 141, the epic of this essay continues. After presenting my project at the 2007 Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities Conference, I renewed work on the essay as an Independent Study project under the guidance of Professor Neil Larsen. Over the course of the quarter, my argument found itself inverted, expanded, and utterly manipulated, before finally settling as the incarnation that follows. My work offers one understanding of how a trick ending works through a delicate interplay of processes made (in)famous by the work of Freud. In the future, I hope to further develop my ideas into a comparative senior honors thesis, and to forge on into the literary realm beyond as I anxiously await another random inspiration of critical insight.*

—Megan Macklin

**INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT:** *Megan Macklin's essay originated in 2006 as a final writing and research project for an undergraduate course on Critical Theory that I teach for the Comparative Literature and Critical Theory programs at UCD. One of the basic readings for that course is Freud's great essay on "The Uncanny," a text that always fascinates students, especially those reading Freud for the first time. I have received many final essays that, like*

*Megan's, take their inspiration and critical point of departure from Freudian theory and then attempt to think through its implications for a particular work of literature or other cultural text. But Megan's essay goes beyond a mere assessment of whether or not the primary work in question exhibits 'the uncanny' and marshals the concepts of psychoanalysis to think through, entirely on its own, a genuine literary problem. Many subsequent revisions and conversations have resulted in the final form of the work published here.*

—Neil Larsen, *Comparative Literature*



RENOWNED FOR THE CLARITY of her prose and her breathless poetic style, Katherine Mansfield remains a foremost figure in British modernist writing nearly a century after the appearance of her first publications. Though her life was cut short by illness, she nevertheless left her mark on the literary world through her prolific production of poetry and short stories. In addition to these achievements, Mansfield also succeeds in her rare ability to produce a true trick ending. The author's story "Bliss"<sup>1</sup> offers one such trick ending through the abrupt discovery, both on the part of the reader and on that of its protagonist, of an unanticipated affair. However, upon reconsideration, one can discern moments within the text where carefully placed clues could easily have given away the narrative's ending. How is it that despite these hints and intimations, neither the reader nor the narrative's main character are able to anticipate Mansfield's final revelation? In the end, the reader and the heroine find themselves completely in the dark, a phenomenon that is both perplexing and in need of further consideration.

Mansfield's short story "Bliss," first published in 1920 in a compilation of other narratives,<sup>2</sup> describes a day's events in the life of Bertha Young, a cheery woman preparing for a party she is to host later that night. Though thirty, married, and a mother to a young child, Bertha retains a youthful ignorance that contributes to both the bliss she reportedly feels and her inability to perceive the affair occurring between her husband Harry and her closest friend Pearl Fulton. The story opens with Bertha's airy exclamations of this joy, a stimulating affect which the char-

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<sup>1</sup>Mansfield, Katherine. "Bliss." *Stories*. 1st ed. New York: Vintage Classics, 1991. 143–156.

<sup>2</sup>Mansfield, Katherine. *Bliss, and Other Stories*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920.

acter likens to having been “overcome, suddenly, by a feeling of bliss—absolute bliss!—as though you’d suddenly swallowed a bright piece of that late afternoon sun and it burned in your bosom, sending a little shower of sparks into every particle, into every finger and toe” (143). Despite this exhilaration, Bertha feels somewhat stifled by the “idiotic” society of which she is a wary member, stating that behavior resulting from such bliss would probably be passed off by civilization as “drunk and disorderly” conduct (143). Though her delight leads her to find beauty and joy in everything around her, Bertha feels she must hide her feelings, however positive they may be, lest those around her consider her intoxicated.

As she readies herself for the party—arranging flowers, getting dressed, or simply taking time to visit her daughter—Bertha reminisces about her privileged and idealized life. She notes the relationship she shares with her husband and friends, pausing to notice the flowering pear tree outside in her garden. Bertha continues to dwell on both the blooming tree and her feeling of bliss throughout the evening. However, as conversation dwindles and the hostess bids her guests farewell, Bertha makes a shocking discovery. As she peers into the hall, she finds Harry and Pearl in a compromising position, whispering passionate words to one another as they secretly plan to meet again. With her friends gone and the makings of a marital scandal revealed, Bertha is suddenly jolted from the ideal life she thought she had. The break is instantaneous, its implications painful and deep, a sentiment Bertha wonderfully sums up as she utters, “Oh, what is going to happen now?” (156).

In addition to its stunning language and imagery, Mansfield’s story succeeds, as few narratives do, at tricking the reader, who is as unprepared as the protagonist for the final discovery of Harry and Pearl’s affair. One especially illuminating understanding of this effect might be derived from Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis. Though immensely complex, Freud’s work posits several particularly salient principles through which Mansfield’s trick ending can be better understood. Overall, “Bliss” poses a problem in that both the heroine and the reader are shocked with the discovery of Harry and Pearl’s affair. In attempting to explain this occurrence, I propose that the facilitating psychological trajectory of Mansfield’s trick ending can begin to be grasped through mimesis and subjectification, with an analogy to Freud’s theory of dream interpretation.

But first, a conceptual clarification is in order. Bertha Young's intimate relation to the narrative itself can easily be taken for granted given that she herself is the main character within the work. She is immediately entangled within Mansfield's literary web, and her inability to discern Harry's affair can readily be attributed to the fact that the person in question is her own husband. However, this intimacy with the narrative does not apply to the reader; rather than directly living the events, he or she simply reads about them, and, in the case of the modern reader, does so nearly a century after their initial publication. Nevertheless, despite this distance, the reader still finds him or herself deeply immersed within the story, a phenomenon that can be traced to processes of mimesis and subjectification. Mimesis, derived from the Greek word for imitation, indicates a reflective process on the part of a reader by which literature enters a tangible realm of self-representation.<sup>3</sup> Terry Eagleton, in his discussion of literary theory,<sup>4</sup> sums up subjectification in its relation to literature (and the entire world) by stating, "The world is what I posit or 'intend': it is to be grasped in relation to me, as a correlate of my consciousness" (50). In general, the processes of mimesis and subjectification ultimately facilitate one's overall reading of a narrative via the reader's personal relationship to and hence the subjectification of the literary object he or she reads. Everything becomes relative to the reader, and the literary text is essentially both a subject and an object at the same time.

Through mimesis and subjectification, the narrative and its perception come, in the end, to reflect the reader; in a sense, in reading a particular text, the reader creates an experience that is unique to the individual alone. For example, the way in which the reader perceives the text and analyzes its symbols and themes constitutes a truly subjective phenomenon. Though multiple readers often share surface-level reactions to a given text, such as the noting of a motif or narrative style, no individual has the same experience as other literary enthusiasts. Furthermore, an individual's personal reading reflects his or her subjective self in the end, and this differential literary treatment can be attributed to the imposition of the reader's own self onto the text. In the end, the work becomes a reflection of the reader, a unique dynamic that ultimately results in a

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<sup>3</sup>Larsen, Neil. "What is Critical Theory?" *Comparative Literature* 141. University of California. Davis, 30 March 2006.

<sup>4</sup>Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

phenomenon by which the object-narrative becomes indistinguishable from the subject-reader.

This point can best be exemplified through an analogy to the realm of dreams. Though dreams are the product of an individual's own psyche, they can nevertheless be analyzed as objects, a process paralleled in the creation of and reception of literature. The dream, like a narrative, represents both a subject and an object in one single entity. When the dreamer awakes, the dream is treated as an object, analyzed and interpreted in an external manner. However, the dream is simultaneously a subject as well; it ultimately expresses the dreamer, who is inherently present in the dream he or she has created. As a result, the dream allows the subject-dreamer to externalize him or herself onto the object-dream; it becomes a mirror of the self, which in turn facilitates its simultaneous objectification and subjectification. Likewise, the experience and interpretation of a literary narrative reflects a process by which the reader's subjective self is externalized onto the work, and the individual sees some part of him or herself in the text. Simply stated, because the text ultimately reflects the distinctiveness of every individual who approaches it, each reader has a unique experience with a literary narrative.

In addition to becoming a subject within Mansfield's mimetic text, the reader also comes to identify, in the Freudian sense, with the story's main character. In his *Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*,<sup>5</sup> Freud refers to identification as "the assimilation of one ego to another" so that they come to resemble one another, "as a result of which the first ego behaves like the second in certain respects, imitates it and in a sense takes it up itself" (527). This typically arises in childhood as the young individual begins to develop his or her own identity. Under these circumstances, the child tends to identify with the parent, and comes to assimilate his or her characteristics into its developing personality. In "Bliss," identification bridges the gap between reader and character, as the former begins to identify with Bertha Young as he or she progresses through Mansfield's text. Though the reader's ego as such may not be transformed as a result of encountering this fictional character, his or her reading of and reaction to the story are nevertheless influenced by the heroine. The reader experiences the text through Bertha, and in doing so, develops an affinity with the character that impacts his or her understanding of the

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<sup>5</sup>Freud, Sigmund. *Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Oxford, Alden & Mowbray Ltd., 1971.

text in all its aspects. In his discussion of projection, identification, and projective identification,<sup>6</sup> Joseph Sandler defines one sense of the term identification as “an expression of ‘empathy with’” another, “of knowing how the other person feels” (125). In this sense, the reader identifies with the heroine, developing an interpersonal understanding with her, which, in addition to the processes of mimesis and subjectification, means both Bertha and the reader have a personal stake in what happens within Mansfield’s story.

Mimesis, subjectification, and identification are not, however, the only means by which Mansfield’s trick ending works. Rather, the success of the ending also relies on deeper, less apparent processes. While mimesis, subjectification, and identification may prompt the subjective presence of *both* the reader and Bertha Young within Mansfield’s narrative, they cannot explain the phenomenon by which each comes to ignore the textual clues that potentially hint towards Harry’s affair with Pearl. Both reader and character ignore the true nature of these implications, something that might be explained by the concept of rationalization. In Freud’s discussion of the interpretation of dreams, as found in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*,<sup>7</sup> rationalization designates a process by which “we try to fill in the gaps, we add connecting links, and often enough we let ourselves in for some serious misunderstandings” as we aim to provide a “smooth façade” (34) to the dream or perception we are considering. In other words, rationalization attempts to explain away the unsettling aspects of a particular perception by creating a coherent, understandable entity from a previously fragmented and disjointed thought.

According to Laplanche and Pontalis in their dissection of the psychoanalytic language,<sup>8</sup> rationalization reflects a “process whereby the subject attempts to present an explanation that is either logically consistent or ethically acceptable for attitudes, actions, ideas, feelings, etc., whose true motives are not perceived” (375). In this sense, rationalization serves

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<sup>6</sup>Sandler, Joseph. “Discussion of Otto Kernberg’s Paper.” *Projection, Identification, Projective Identification*. Joseph Sandler, ed. Madison: International Universities Press, Inc., 1987. 117–31.

<sup>7</sup>Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1933.

<sup>8</sup>Laplanche, J. and J.-B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973.

to assign an acceptable explanation to a perception whose true nature may prove troubling. Laplanche and Pontalis note that this process represents what Freud refers to as defense, one that “[*aims*] at the reduction and elimination of any change liable to threaten the integrity and stability of the bio-psychological individual” (103, emphasis in original). Additionally, “as the ego is constituted as an agency which embodies this stability and strives to maintain it, it may be considered as both the *stake* and the *agent* of these operations” (103, emphasis in original). However, though the conscious ego may be the instigating agent, Freud emphasizes that rationalization occurs at the preconscious level,<sup>9</sup> thereby adding to the complexity of this phenomenon. In other words, the process of defense through rationalization is by nature a preconscious occurrence initiated by the conscious ego in an attempt to salvage itself from instability.

In the case of “Bliss,” rationalization draws attention away from the clues that could implicate Harry as an adulterer, by causing Bertha and the reader to focus instead on analyzing the text’s symbols and themes. These rationalizations occur throughout the work, and often serve as primary subjects for analysis. For example, the text gains its succinct name from Bertha’s overwhelming feeling of bliss, as is emphasized throughout the narrative. Because of the stress placed upon it, this affect and its implications frequently preoccupy the protagonist and the reader. Because of the intensity and novelty of this sentiment, both Bertha and the reader exhibit a tendency to focus on this aspect of the story, and as a result, may overlook the clues that could give away its trick ending.

Bertha and the reader also rationalize Harry’s blatant disdain for Pearl as the result of a purported bias against fair women. Harry, for example, goes out of his way to emphasize this aversion when he rather crudely remarks that Pearl is “dullish and ‘cold . . . with a touch, perhaps, of anæmia of the brain” (146). Harry also observes that her frequent use

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<sup>9</sup>Though the preconscious is technically a part of the unconscious, Freud distinguishes between the two with respect to the issue of latency, or the ease of accessibility by the conscious, in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. The preconscious represents the part of the unconscious “which is *only* latent” and “which is transformed into conscious material easily and under conditions which frequently occur” (101, emphasis added). In this sense, it can be assumed that rationalizations by the ego, though in themselves not entirely conscious, can nevertheless enter consciousness by mere attention or motivation.

of taxis will “run [her] to fat” (150), and that her tendency of slightly cocking her head to one side most likely results from “a good stomach” and healthy digestion (147). Because of this rough humor, both Bertha and the reader assume that Harry detests Pearl Fulton, when in fact, as revealed later, she is the very object of his affection. In these instances, both Bertha and the reader fail to recognize that Harry’s harsh comments are efforts to distract us from the feelings he actually possesses. Clearly, such rude statements indicate that more is afoot than either previously assumed. Nevertheless, both Bertha and the reader come to rationalize the unsettling implications of such asides, and thereby fail to fully recognize their deeper implications.

In addition to rationalizing Harry’s self-reported dislike of Pearl, Bertha and the reader also attempt to explain away the fact that Harry and Pearl arrive late to the party. In fact, Harry actually phones ahead of time to inform his wife of his tardiness, but the heroine and the reader simply accept it (though Harry, incidentally, never accounts for it) in order to avoid the psychological instability that questioning might threaten to produce. Moreover, Mansfield *overtly* emphasizes the fact that Pearl does not arrive along with the other guests, implying that Bertha does not even realize her absence until Harry himself shows up. Just as Bertha worriedly wonders if her friend has forgotten about the party, a taxi pulls up and Pearl steps out. Pearl even mocks Bertha’s ignorance, nonchalantly asking, “Am I late?” (150), as if to make her tardiness seem accidental. Incidentally, the process of rationalization aims to explain away any possible questioning of these occurrences, thereby maintaining the stability of the individual while also masking the story’s trick ending.

Mansfield also emphasizes the changing figure of the pear tree in Bertha’s garden, an object with well-studied symbolic significance. Prior to the discovery of the affair, the pear tree represents a kind of ideal for Bertha. It is a symbol of femininity, luminous and blooming in its creation of new life. Bertha actually matches her appearance, though perhaps unconsciously, to that of the pear tree, mirroring its green and white color scheme. Like the tree, which she describes as being “a symbol of her own life,” Bertha believes herself to be in the “fullest, richest bloom” (147). In her opinion, both are flawless, possessing “everything,” whether beautiful, pearl-like blossoms or a perfect and satisfying marriage. However, once Harry’s adultery is revealed, one could argue that the pear tree in fact symbolizes not Bertha, but rather her rival Pearl. In

fact, the name “Pearl” shares four letters with the word “pear.”<sup>10</sup> And as the evening wears on, Pearl mimics the tree in appearance, her silver attire reflecting the shadows and moonlight that the night sky brings. In the end, it is Pearl who resembles the pear tree, not Bertha, a fact that parallels Pearl’s intrusion into Bertha’s private life. In fact, Pearl’s final words—“your lovely pear tree” (156)—as she departs are in reference to the tree. In any case, whether these analogies are coincidental, deliberate, or simply an attempt by Mansfield to amuse the reader with symbolism, analyzing them allows both Bertha and the reader to rationalize their significance, thereby reinforcing the success of the trick ending.

The thematic content in “Bliss” also leads the rationalization-prone reader to focus on aspects of the narrative that could detract from the story’s ending. For example, one could argue that Mansfield’s text serves as a cultural criticism of the stuffy English society of her time. Evidence for this can be found in Mansfield’s treatment of Bertha’s dinner guests, especially the Norman Knights, who represent a rather unbecoming caricature of a typical high society couple. This affluent pair, with their cheeky pet names and witty remarks, represent the utter insignificance of many upper class individuals. Their conversation is painfully shallow, highlighted in a discussion of the “procession of black monkeys round the hem and up the fronts” of Mrs. Norman Knight’s coat (148). Overall, the Norman Knights appear both bored and boring, lacking any substance or significance. Despite the illusion of cosmopolitanism, they, along with all the other dinner guests, are simply ordinary, a quality perfectly summed up by Eddie Warren’s poetic profession, “Why Must it Always be Tomato Soup?” (155). Just like the cuisine he references, the Norman Knights are “so dreadfully eternal” (155), unrepresentative of change and devoid of anything novel or interesting.

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<sup>10</sup>Incidentally, this semantic parallel serves as a perfect example of what Freud refers to as displacement in his theory of dreams. In his *Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud explains displacement as a phenomenon that “manifests itself in two ways: in the first, a latent element [of a dream] is replaced not by a component of itself but by something more remote—that is, by an allusion; and in the second, the psychical accent is shifted from an important element on to another which is unimportant, so that the dream appears differently centered and strange” (174). In the example of “Pearl” and “pear,” Pearl would represent the latent content of Bertha’s dream-work, and the pear tree would serve as the manifestation thereof.

Ironically, Mrs. Norman Knight remains oblivious to the hypocrisy of her supposed sophistication. Upon arriving at the Young residence, she complains that “the middle-class [is] so stodgy—so utterly without a sense of humour” (148), when she herself represents the very dullness she attributes to her inferiors. The character of Eddie Warren also invites criticism, as he preoccupies himself with trivial matters such as socks and the discussion of bad literature, all the while exhibiting a tendency to over-enunciate. And Bertha, too, praises the petty perfections of her own life, citing everything from her financial security to her cook’s “most superb omelettes” (148). However, though these implicit social criticisms may have been in keeping with Mansfield’s intention, analyzing them ultimately detracts from our ability to anticipate her ending.

This critique of upper class relationships in early twentieth-century Britain can also be found in Bertha’s confessions regarding her husband. Though Bertha describes her marriage as satisfying and “modern,” her account of it seems somewhat lacking. In fact, the only sentiment of love that Bertha expresses is directed towards Pearl. Like the Norman Knights, the Youngs share a relationship in which they are primarily “really good pals” (147). Despite having a daughter, Bertha avoids sexuality in her marriage, as is evident in her admittance to being “cold” and her reluctance to “be alone together in the dark room—the warm bed” (154). However, as the story nears its end, Bertha is overwhelmed with sudden yearning for her husband. For the first time, she “ardently” feels attraction towards Harry, a sexual desire she previously lacked and even feared. But her erotic awakening comes too late, appearing immediately before she finds Harry and Pearl in each other’s arms. In this sense, this marital dynamic can be regarded as a critical account of the consequences of societal conventions. Overall, though these issues may be interesting, the symbolic and thematic elements in Mansfield’s story really do nothing more than constitute a would-be literary discussion, and actually *detract* from her trick ending as a result of the parallel processes of rationalization experienced by both Bertha and the reader.

Rationalization does not constitute the sole preconscious/unconscious process at work in Mansfield’s trick ending. Rather, there may be still another underlying process that distracts Bertha and the reader from both the hints pointing at the affair and the process of rationalization by which they avoid such clues. I would argue that the psychological phenomenon that culminates in the success of Mansfield’s trick

ending ultimately derives from the primordial process of repression. In my view, the preconscious rationalization of the author's symbols and themes reflects an *unconscious* predisposition to divert attention from the actual content of the story. According to Freud, the "essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness"<sup>11</sup> by pushing it away into the unconscious. In Laplanche and Pontalis's concise definition, repression "occurs when to satisfy an instinct—though likely to be pleasurable in itself—would incur the risk of provoking unpleasure because of other requirements" (390). In fact, as Freud states in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, "the task of avoiding unpleasure turns out to be as important as that of obtaining pleasure" (357). Furthermore, according to Eagleton in his discussion of psychoanalytic literary theory (131–168), repression frequently occurs when the respective interests of the so-called pleasure and reality principles collide. In modern society, this manifests itself in the common conflict between work and play: in order for an individual to move past the immediate instinct for gratification, one which would prevent him or her from working and thereby lead to society's ruin, this bias towards pleasure must somehow be repressed. Overall, repression strives to keep reality and one's unconscious aims in check, thereby attempting to shield the repressing individual from the "unpleasure" that would result were these two entities to clash.

In considering Mansfield's text, I propose that the process of repression is the final factor necessary to explain the success of her trick ending. Specifically, I suggest that repression can also be extended to include the process whereby things or ideas the knowledge of which would prove unpalatable to the conscious self are repressed into the unconscious. In this sense, the process of repression arguably reflects a reaction to the tendency towards curiosity and the attainment of knowledge,<sup>12</sup> which could, if realized, produce a wealth of negative effects in the knowledge-

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<sup>11</sup>Freud, Sigmund. "Repression." *The Major Works of Sigmund Freud*. Robert Maynard Hutchins, ed. London: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1952. 422.

<sup>12</sup>Though Freud does not explicitly name an instinct towards curiosity and knowledge, it can nevertheless be derived from his theory of the instinct to master. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, the instinct to master aims "to dominate [an] object by force" (217). From this idea, the instinct towards curiosity and knowledge could reflect the goal of dominating mental objects and ideas via the forces of recognition and understanding.

seeking individual. As in the case of the pleasure principle, certain bits of information could in fact harm the individual as a whole if allowed to come into consciousness, and thereby must be kept locked within the unconscious.

In the case of Bertha Young, for example, repression might explain her inability to perceive the clues hinting at her husband's affair with Pearl Fulton. Because of the negative consequences that this shocking discovery would entail, as is evident in her subsequently desperate reaction to the liaison, Bertha comes to repress any pieces of information that might disclose the adulterous relationship. Were Bertha privy to Harry's affair, her marriage, family, and her entire view of life would be jeopardized. Throughout the narrative, Bertha prides herself in what she envisions as a perfect marriage, which serves as the defining feature of her entire life, however false this vision may be. Additionally, Bertha's view of Pearl would also be challenged if she were to learn that the woman she prizes as her dearest friend is in fact the seductress threatening to break apart her idealized existence. In discovering the true nature of the relationship between Harry and Pearl, Bertha comes to realize that her life has been a complete and utter lie. Thus far, she has overwhelmingly failed to assess the actions of those around her correctly, repressing any clues in an attempt to avoid the harsh reality behind her perfect world. As a result of the rationalization and repression she experiences, both (pre)consciously and unconsciously, Bertha only succeeds in tricking herself in the end.

Additionally, though certainly not a character within the work, the reader and his or her experience of "Bliss" are shaped by repression as well. This same psychological process ultimately facilitates his or her *own* failure of perception, and thereby the overall success of Mansfield's trick ending. Not only does the reader experience a bias as a result of identifying with Bertha as a character, but the reader also reinforces his or her unconscious prejudices as a result of having a subjective stake in the work. Like Bertha, the reader rationalizes away the hints implicating Harry and Pearl's affair in an attempt to repress the knowledge that the instinct towards curiosity would elicit. In fact, Freud himself makes the link between (pre)conscious rationalization and unconscious repression in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. In reference to the reality principle, Freud here states, "In the [ego's] attempt to mediate between the id and reality, it is often forced to clothe the [unconscious] commands of the id with its own [preconscious] rationalizations, to gloss

over the conflicts between the id and reality” (109) in order to avoid the “unpleasure” of a potential clash between the two. In this sense, rationalization and repression are complementary processes, and together, they finalize the delicate interplay necessary for Mansfield to achieve her trick ending.

In conclusion, one can ultimately attribute the success of the trick ending in “Bliss” to a complex psychological progression that extends beyond consciousness into the recesses of the human psyche. In becoming a subject within the mimetic text and identifying with its heroine, the reader undergoes forms of rationalization and repression that parallel those experienced by the protagonist. Like Bertha, the reader’s focus on the symbolic and thematic aspects of the narrative leads to rationalizations thereof, which divert attention from the story’s deeper implications. Additionally, both heroine and reader come to repress the clues hinting at Harry and Pearl’s affair, lest they incur the consequences that their detection might entail were the instinctual omnipotence of curiosity given free reign. Thus, because of the reader’s mimetic and subjective relation to the literary narrative, which facilitates his or her own experiences of identification, rationalization, and repression, Mansfield not only manages to trick her protagonist with her ending, but also succeeds in tricking us, her readers, as well.

