

The War is Over, But The Battle is Not: A Grief Adventure

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The War is Over, But The Battle is Not: A Grief Adventure

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of grief and recovery in *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. I will analyze the transformation of trauma expressed by Woolf's characters and their embodiment of post-war, post-pandemic English society and consider Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler's theory 'The Five Stages of Grief' as a guide to understanding the effects of individual and communal trauma. Woolf effectively narrativizes controversial political topics of her time, uses memory to interrupt the stream of consciousness, and questions the consequences of the repression of grief in 1920's English society. The act of grieving in *Mrs. Dalloway* falls on two very different sides of the trauma spectrum. It can be a battle for life, or a surrender through death in an attempt to reach a final place of acceptance or healing. Moreover, this dissertation aims to show the validity of grief in literature, as a transitioning stage, and as an adventure rather than just a state of mourning or pain.

Dedication

To my Mom,

Because I know you're always with me.

To my many other family members,

Because I know you're always with me.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the English, and Creative Writing departments for being there to support me through my four-year journey in Rome and for awarding me with the Academic Excellence Award for Creative Writing this semester, it was truly an honor.

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The Shadow Man

May 21st, 2012.

That night I felt my essence being called from my sleeping body, eased carefully up and out like a butterfly, through the roof of a house that was not my own.

The warm May breeze floated me back to my neighborhood where I watched my home shift into view, grow larger, and then smaller as I crossed over it to continue on my journey. I saw the rope and duct tape on my brother's car, I saw the light go out in my mother's bedroom, I saw my father stand in front of the garage door as it closed like a barrier in front of him.

I was silent. I was powerless. I had no substance. In my disembodied state I could neither speak, taste, grasp, nor smell— all I could do was watch.

I flowed against the winds of time. Across the Pacific, across Asia, Africa, Europe, and finally back to America. Around, and around, and around I went. And though I could not move, I could see it all. The cycle of life deviated perversely from its path as grown men and women returned to adolescence, childhood, infancy until they all vanished into the world of non-existence. Houses shrank, and rooftops dissolved exposing the broken skeletons of iron and brick that had once risen up to meet the sky before they too collapsed into the past. The ground shook and groaned where they had stood, pavement dissolved into endless grass now only littered with the faint touch of man and machine. Discarded lumber sprung back into trees, yellowed leaves flew up, greened, and instantaneously shrank to meet the branches that had already begun to retreat inside the trees core. The trunks shriveled down into the earth again and the sprouts became the seeds of their origin. The sun rose in the west and set in the east faster and faster exposing flash after flash of places and times I had never been, but somehow knew.

Until all was not.

A hand reached out in the distant nothing and expanded around me, slow, dark, undefined. An arm followed suit, then a shoulder, a neck, and finally I saw the outline of a faceless head.

Extending from the tips of its fingers the figure was a grey silhouette, but the rest of the body was obscured by the blackness— like a shadow melting into the night. The silence was deafening and echoed off the nothingness. I was encircled in the fist; it closed around me.

Darkness.

I awoke with a start and sat up quickly letting my eyes adjust before moving again. I was in a bit of a daze when I finally stood in what I realized was a dark corridor, but I noticed a layer of clear liquid a few inches deep covering the floor around my ankles just a few millimeters from my skin. I thought it odd that the short unfamiliar white dress I wore, my bare feet, and my long brown hair were all dry though I had been lying in the center of this dim lamp-less hallway just moments before. I bent down to immerse my hand but the liquid silently shifted away from me as if it had a mind of its own, making room for my touch. The floor where I pressed my palm was black yet somehow warm, reacting to my movement; it seemed to emanate heat from somewhere deep inside.

Everything felt as though it were buzzing. The walls shimmered dark blue with iridescent sparks flashing in and out of view, extending to the space above me. Mesmerized, I reached my hand up, stretching my finger tips as far as they could go to grasp at something, anything. My fingers met with no resistance but, for just a split second, there was a flash and I swore I saw the night sky.

Behind me existed only an inky blackness that swelled up and around the back of the hallway, extinguishing the light of the ever-changing ceiling and walls. In the distance in front of me above a set of two stairs, I saw a large door imprinted with strange symbols from top to bottom. The door was softly illuminated by a light that seeped in through the cracks from the other side and dim colors shown from the center of the door, dancing off the liquid floor even from this distance. A chill ran up my spine as if someone were blowing cold air on my neck and the darkness shifted around me— the only way to go was forward.

I took a hesitant step. Again, the liquid stirred, the ground exposed itself, and everywhere my toes touched was dry. With each step the darkness swallowed the iridescent walls behind me

until the only light that remained was from the door itself. I walked up the first step where the liquid floor didn't reach and gazed up. It was bigger than most normal doors and had been sculpted out of a white and grey stone that I could only compare to marble or granite. There was uneven gold trim around the sides of the door and the symbols I saw before, both familiar and not, covered its entirety like Egyptian hieroglyphs.

The largest of the engravings was a closed book. It was decorated with five gem stones of all different shapes and colors that were arranged in the form of a compass on the center of the stone cover. Each gem was about the size of my thumb, placed at perfect distances apart around the fifth gem. The outer four connected to the center with lines carved on the surface. The center gem was a swirling aquamarine as if it held a clear blue flame. The gem in the South was the same tone of blue as the center but neither light nor fire came from within it. Similar to the South, the North gem lacked signs of life but was a dull green peridot. The West gem was an emerald that glimmered a deep vivid green, and in the East a white opal gem flashed rainbow colors. I ran my fingers over the lifeless gems. They were cold, and for a moment I felt sad; it seemed to me that even the dead gems had once shone bright.

I focused my attention back on the door because I couldn't make sense of the other symbols. I knocked, but the door made no sound. No echo, no tap, no nothing. Strangely, I also found there was no door knob leaving me with one option. Push.

The door opened with ease but the light on the other side blinded me while I stepped into the unknown. The edge of the door slipped from my fingers to close behind me, sealing with the wall before I could stop it. When I turned around, I was awestruck.

I was in an enormous room of books, each different than the last, some moving on their own. Bookshelves filled with books of all colors, shapes, sizes and loose papers began to fill the wall that had closed behind me, until every conceivable crack or crevice disappeared. Again, nothing made a sound, and again nothing moved. All was perfectly still and silent, even when the

wooden shelves had been shifting along the floor, and the loose papers between the books that should have at least crinkled with the wind, did not.

It must have been a sort of library, but it was unlike any I had ever seen. The air was fresh, bright, and warm, although I was inside and there were no lamps, heaters, or windows. Everywhere I looked was covered in books, from the floor, to the ceiling that stretched high into the sky, to the spaces in between. The bookshelves were crammed so tightly they seemed to groan from the weight of the words. A barrier of the same clear liquid from the floor of the hallway stood as a stagnant waterfall protecting the books like glass. There were no chairs, no trolleys, no stairs to reach the higher shelves. There were no other people.

I reached out to grab a book from the nearest shelf and the liquid wall solidified into ice where my hand made contact, making it impossible to break through. Removing my hand from the cold surface I watched the icy print linger a few seconds before melting again. When it did I peered past the transparent surface to look at the words on the binding of a few books. There were strange markings in a language I had never seen, etched into the surface just like the hieroglyphs on the door. The bindings were all old and dull as if they had been here a very long time, but they were not worn or dusty.

Dejected, but convinced I was not alone, I turned and walked for what seemed like hours. Initially I had been dragging my hand along the liquid to ice barrier in case I found a weak spot, but after a while with no luck, I dropped it back down to my side. I began to think about the Shadow Man again. Who was he? Where had he gone?

I also worried at the lack of life around me. I was alone. I wanted to go home. Where was home? Where was I?

The deeper I went, the brighter and newer the books became, until some were moving again. Books of all shades of gold, purple, blue, magenta, and more, flew, opened, closed, shelved, and wrote stories with gold tipped quill pens all by their own accord. I saw that I had reached the end of the room, but it was not an exit.

The room was alive. Slowly expanding, growing, changing it seemed to breathe as it pushed to make room for the books to shelve themselves when they closed. The wall of water rose, fell, and shifted to allow books to nestle behind its protective shields.

I turned to walk from the far wall that I had been examining, toward the center of the room. It had been empty apart from the books until a few moments before. There now stood a table, a large white arm chair on either side, and a tall black podium to the right of the table facing away from me. On the table there lay three closed books. The first book was very old, the colors had almost completely faded to brown, but I could make out bits of yellows, blues, and an image of a very old house or cottage on the front. The second book was a bit newer; all red, only a few pieces of paint flaked off here and there, with a large white circle in the center, divided in half by a long black line. In comparison to the first and third book, however, which were about the same size and width, the middle book was a bit smaller and much thinner. The back cover of the second book was missing as if it had been ripped off—the final pages stolen along with it. The third book was violet with a family crest I did not recognize, with small cursive writing that was too faded to read.

The tall black podium exposed only the tip of a quill pen as it wrote away on something unseen. I thought to investigate but, when I was about to take my first step, the temperature of the room dropped a few degrees, and something appeared in the corner of my vision.

There he stood—the Shadow Man.

He had materialized behind the brown book. Was materialized the right word? Or had he always been there? Odd how he had no face, but I wasn't afraid. Odder still was the way somehow even without eyes, he watched me. A living silhouette who held the brown book so gently though he seemed to be made of dark nimbus clouds.

With one finger he gestured toward the chair next to me, I sat. The Shadow Man watched, waited until I was settled, and then moved to sit as well. When he had distanced himself from the table I could finally see what the rest of his body looked like. His legs merged with the shadows that lined the chair and lurked in the spaces we cannot see. Tendrils of smoke branched out from

underneath him in all directions as if connected to the entire library, until finally disappearing into the dark.

He sat and opened the book. The pages turned silently, sporadically, haunted, finally stopping on a page a little less than halfway through the volume. Words appeared, shining gold before settling into a dark gray cursive. He looked at me again. I stared back. And he began to communicate:

I am going to tell you four stories. The first is a story about patience and second chances. The second is a story of many people swallowed by an island at sea. The third is a story filled with flames and rebirth. And the fourth is a story of familiarity and insight— disaster and transformation.

The Shadow Man spoke without words, and yet, I could hear him.

I opened my mouth to ask what he meant, but still I could say nothing. I thought that maybe I was only meant to listen.

Then he read from the brown book— still open in his arms:

Once upon a time in a rural town in England, there lived a boy named William. William had lived most of his life as an orphan with his little sister Annie. He had brown hair, brown eyes, a big heart, and a quick tongue. Annie was his mirror image but with longer hair and daintier features.

On May 21st, 1637, William turned sixteen. He had dreaded when this day would come.

After being moved from one home to the next their entire lives, he and his sister had finally settled just a few months before into an orphanage an hour or so from London. When they arrived the woman of the house told him that the purpose of their orphanage served to raise the children and then send them to permanent homes when they came of age so that they could be educated and find work. The age chosen was sixteen.

Annie was five years younger than William but a bit more headstrong and fierce. She loved the idea of adventure and saw this orphanage as an opportunity for a new life as she longed for a stable home. William on the other hand simply wanted to care for his sister. He didn't mind moving

around as long as they could stay together. Neither one really remembered their parents, so the image they associated with family was each other.

That day William's birthday presents consisted of five children, including his sister, asking for a taste of his sweet tea and biscuit breakfast, a new uniform for work, and a small suitcase for any other personal belongings. He was allowed to stay with his sister until noon— still she did not know she would be left behind. Since William was the oldest when they arrived, no one else had been sent away yet.

When the clock struck, the house of opportunity quickly became one of horror.

The carriage soon arrived and William was told to lace up his shoes and grab his things.

He had never gotten along with the lady of the orphanage, not because she mistreated him or the other children— she simply did not care. Her goal was to sell off the children when they were too old to manage and keep the money for herself.

Annie announced she would go grab their bags and her bonnet, rushing up the stairs faster than William could tell her to stop.

When she returned, he told her that she could not come because she wasn't yet old enough. She cried because it hurt.

The carriage arrived, tears were shed, and he was swept away in a cloud of dust.

The pages of the book in the Shadow Man's arms turned again.

William worked hard for the next five years until he turned twenty-one on May 21st, 1642. Not once was he permitted to see or hear from Annie during this time. For a while, he was angry and resented the family that had taken him in. He stole food, let the chickens from their pens while the masters of the house slept, and replaced the sugar with salt before afternoon tea. Often, he was beat until he bled.

Overtime he learned to swallow his pride, prayers, and tears. His scars healed, and he was eventually educated, learned to read and write, wash properly, cook, keep stables, and farm the fields. The work was hard, but he began to thrive.

On the day of his twenty-first birthday he received a letter from Annie. She told him that she had just been informed of where she would go when she too turned sixteen. Annie would be sent to live with a family that lived in the same town William was staying in, and although they would not be in the same household they would finally be close enough to see each other. He only had to wait a few more months...

The Shadow Man closed the book and put it down. He said nothing, I said nothing.

The way he read the story reminded me of the way my mother used to read— soft and soothing. When I was younger my mom made up a story about a princess named Lainey Jainey. I wanted so badly to be the princess that whatever princess Lainey Jainey did, I would do also. This included eating vegetables, taking baths, and cleaning my room.

I used to tell her, “Mom, of course I am the princess. My middle name is Layne and her name is Lainey Jainey. It’s me.”

She would just smile, never revealing the truth.

A tear slid from my eye and I quickly wiped it away before it could fall. Why was I crying?

The Shadow Man stood, set down the first book and took the red one. Then he sat again. The back page of the red book fluttered in the wind like a flag saluting the sky. I nodded, ready. He opened the book gently, the words appeared in symbols filing down the pages, the same red as the cover. He read:

Many boys and girls grew up on the island of Kyushu, Japan. It was a time of western influence and manga. Since the Tokugawa family had come into power and united the nation, they were prospering. They were a proud people.

Ukiyo-e art, from geishas in colorful kimonos and sumo wrestlers, to scenes of landscapes covered the walls of the homes of many young adults. Ukiyo means pictures of the floating world. They celebrated their wealth, culture, and artistic capabilities.

It was also a time of Samurai and a code of conduct called Bushido, which comes from the word bushi, meaning warrior. However, the job of a Samurai was a dangerous one and many were

injured and killed in battle. Martial arts were a practice taught to children from the time they were old enough to hold a bokken— a wooden kendo stick.

The special few Samurai lived in large homes called Castle homes, but most lived in small, minimalistic houses. Almost all preserved shrines in their back yards to protect and pray to the local deities.

The Japanese respected nature, especially the cherry tree, and they gardened for many of their vegetables or farmed in rice fields. But Japan is also a very dangerous place. Japan lies on what is known as the Pacific ring of fire. 108 of the 1500 active volcanoes in the world are found along that small stretch of land and sea.

Despite the danger, they were surrounded by beauty. Life sprung up through the fertile soil, blessed them with its fruits, and they were grateful. Hot springs ran under many homes, and often they were used to create bathhouses. Yet, as fortunate as they were, they worried.

The day was May 21st, 1792. It had been about a month since the last major eruption and the lava was not flowing. All was normal, people milled about living their everyday lives working, grocery shopping, cleaning.

Birds flew up and away in all directions scattering feathers and caws with every flap of their wings. Then there was a rumble that shook the earth. It grew from a whispered boom to a cacophony so immense it could be heard far away on the mainland. Mount Unzen had erupted.

An earthquake was triggered by the explosion causing houses, people, everything to shake. The lava dome collapsed into a landslide that continued on into the sea. Boulders and dust were all pushed down the mountain swallowing everything in sight. The eruption from the sea was even more violent than the crash of earth that had avalanched down the side of the mountain. There was nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. A giant wave of a tsunami was coming to swallow them whole. It reached a height of more than one-hundred meters rendering the ashy sky even darker by blocking out the sun. It was them against the forces of nature, standing on the edge of the abyss.

Around 15,000 people would die that day. They lost everything, from their homes, to their families, to their lives. On this day many didn't make it past the age of sixteen, or even past May 21st for that matter.

They were an abandoned people left alone to burn or drown.

The Shadow Man paused.

I wondered if anyone would remember me when I died. What was the point of all this suffering, all of this pain? A hand came from the shadows to rest on my shoulder. The Shadow Man grieved for the forgotten.

He flipped the book over to show me the page where the back cover should have been. He handed it to me and I watched as red ink moved across the page to rearrange in a language I could read.

Since the beginning of time, man has suffered, but has persevered. Records of war, famine, plagues, peace, and discovery litter the past. They could have been born in any place at any time, from the fall of Syracuse to the Muslim sultan in 878 AD, to the height of genocide in Nazi Germany in 1939— but they were sent here.

People near and far suffered from psychological distress for a long time after their disasters. The communities involved struggled for a while because much of the affected area where they had been living became uninhabitable. Those who were able to evacuate were forced to relocate and begin new lives since their homes had been destroyed. It is hard to lose a loved one, it is even harder to lose many.

Overtime the survivors forgot their anger and guilt because they learned to accept death as a part of life. They rebuilt their families, their homes, their culture.

The sadness was left in the past.

The Shadow Man took the book from my hands and put it back in the center of the table. He grabbed the third and reseated himself.

He opened it and the pages turned, wildly. The edges were singed, and the words glowed like fire. I was ready to hear more.

Genevieve rose from her soft off-white colored bed and looked in the mirror. Long dark brown hair braided down her back by her maid, Juliette, the night before pressed taut against her shoulder. She had pale skin with freckles, a feminine, straight nose, and large piercing green eyes that sat above high cheek bones.

Genevieve was French from a suburb of Paris where she lived in a villa with her parents. Her father, Clause, was a large dark haired man, employed as a general in Napoleon's army. Clause tended to be away at work for days at a time because the army base was a half day ride by horse from where they lived. He had been gone for the past three days and her mother, Eloisa stayed home to take care of Genevieve but she worried about her husband's safety. Eloisa was tall with light features and dark eyes. She suffered from a strange rash on her hands and scratched it often out of nervous habit.

Genevieve was sixteen and loved to ride her horse, Blanche, when she could get away from her lessons on becoming a young lady. She had a six-year-old dog named Pepite that Genevieve found when she was just a pup. And Tuna, the stray black and brown cat that roamed the land surrounding her home was her third and final friend. Her lessons were all taught at home and she had little contact with other boys and girls growing up.

It was a time for learning and manners—of which she had few. She was stubborn and caused many problems for her mother because she preferred to spend time outdoors instead of on books or which fork to use during a meal.

Her dresses were made from only the finest of fabrics. She hated the long dresses of all colors and patterns that lined the walls of her closet, but she was only permitted to wear trousers while riding Blanche.

She had three young men asking for her hand in marriage. In her diary she referred to them as her knights. They were the Green knight, the Red knight, and the Blue knight. However, her

parents were anxious for her to choose one. She had heard them speaking before her father left about how she had until May 21st or he would make the decision for her. May 21st was the night of annual summer dance because the weather was finally getting warmer.

Genevieve was afraid of Clause's temper because he wanted her to marry for money since she was a woman and could not own land by herself. But the rich knight was the Red knight and Genevieve did not love him.

She called him the Red knight because his families coat of arms was the image of a dark crimson horse bowing to its master. They offered a considerable amount to her family, but there was something about him that made her uneasy. He had long black hair, tied back with a black ribbon, and an angular face. His cheeks were always a soft shade of pink to match his mouth and he would watch a crowd with his black eyes narrowed in two un-approving slits. Not even his house servants liked to be around him. Genevieve noticed that they watched the floor or looked straight ahead when he passed by—but perhaps that was out of respect.

The Blue knight would have also been a satisfactory choice of husband by her father's standards because his family made their wealth through the many vineyards passed down to the oldest son of every generation—the Blue knight had an older sister. He was well dressed, well built, and well bred. He had never said a cross word to Genevieve, but they had also never met in private. Clause or a maid had always been there to accompany her—even when they would stroll about the garden behind the villa. The Blue knight seemed to be the perfect gentleman. He gave his arm, never over stepped his boundaries and Clause even favored his manners to those of the others.

Yet, the knight she wanted to marry was timid and gentle. He reminded her of nature and thus was dubbed Green. He had soft brown hair that hung about his face like the feathers of a bird, chocolate brown eyes and a warm smile. But the Green knight's family did not have as much to offer as the other two and, for Clause, that was unacceptable. The Green knight had worked his way up from middle class to own land and have a small amount of wealth.

Clause would be back a few hours before the dance, Genevieve was running out of time.

She was unbraiding her hair and brushing out the kinks of sleep when her maid, Juliette, knocked and came in. It was time for Genevieve to get ready.

Juliette always wore a long black dress that wrapped around her ankles as she walked, exposing the small black shoes on her dainty feet. And a clean white apron clung to the thick black fabric.

Genevieve stood and moved to the center of the room where she waited for Juliette to help her out of her thin night gown, Pepite slept at the foot of her bed. She picked a light blue frock with small yellow flowers littering the bottom near the hem knowing she would have to change again before the evening anyway. Juliette had been her maid as long as she could remember, and she was Genevieve's only friend that didn't walk on four legs. Their relationship consisted of knowing glances and secret conversations— they both knew Juliette would be replaced if she was seen as a distraction for Genevieve during this time.

Juliette handed her a robe and took her to bathe since she would need to be fresh for the party.

After getting dressed, Genevieve went into the dining room for breakfast, a few small tomatoes, one egg, tea, and bread rolls. When she finished eating she had lessons. She had two private tutors teaching her manners, piano, singing, classic literature, and language courses, of which she spoke three fluently, including Russian.

Her house felt too large and empty as she went about her day. Everything was too clean, and uninviting. Perfection reeked from every corner, opposite of the warm, fresh, smell of hay that greeted her when she fed her horse. But today she was not permitted since she needed to prepare for later.

Genevieve's father returned after the party had already begun.

The festivities were held at a neighbor's house not far from their own, allowing him to walk over. When he came in, between the Green knight and Eloisa stood Genevieve. She wore a light pink gown, tight in the torso, loose in the hips, that rippled in waves behind and around her when

she walked. Genevieve had shimmer on her cheek bones, gloss on her lips, and her hair half plaited up, half cascading down her back. She was smiling.

He saw that she had made her decision.

They didn't speak for the rest of the party. Everyone ate, danced, and laughed for a few more hours before slowly sauntering out into the night.

Genevieve walked next to the Green knight with her parents a few paces ahead. They spoke in hushed voices. Clause was visibly upset, and Genevieve felt guilty.

The family smelled smoke before they arrived back at their villa.

Dark black clouds billowed from behind the house; the stables were on fire. The scent of burning wood and hair charred the air as they rounded the side of the house.

Genevieve ran toward the closed stable door but was stopped by the Green knight. The fire had consumed the dry hay covering the floor in minutes. They stood a few feet away but could see bright red flames licking the air like tongues through the cracks in the wooden walls as they ate away at the night. The horses were eerily silent.

The servants and Clause had begun to move anything flammable away from the stable walls while the maids drew water. Eloisa stood in a motionless panic and scratched at her hands unsure of what to do. The Green knight held onto Genevieve while she cried over Blanche, who had been trapped inside with the others. She struggled to catch her breath.

Genevieve tried to break free, convinced they were still alive but her vision was blurred by tears and she tripped over a clod of dirt when she darted for the door. Genevieve stumbled toward the glowing wall, barely able to catch herself with her forearms as she slammed into the side. The skin was burned, and the heat singed the ends of her hair as well as part of her dress.

Genevieve passed out and was carried to the house by the Green knight.

The Shadow man paused, and pages turned to the next chapter:

After the incident the Red knight came forward and told them the fire had been started by the Blue knight. He was drunk and enraged at not being chosen, deciding to get back at her when he left the dance.

She was married to the Green knight as soon as her arms were better. They would never be the same.

They moved into a small cottage on his parent's property with her dog and cat. There, they adopted two new horses for the stable built nearby as a gift from Clause. He worked less after that night.

The Shadow Man put the third book on the table and stood. I looked at my own forearms, I had a few white marks of my own peeking out here and there.

He moved to walk in front of the podium. The Shadow Man picked something up from next to where the quill pen wrote. Against his grey hand he held a blue and gold hourglass. He maneuvered it to swing softly between two fingers, the colors shimmered and danced. The glass glowed, and grains of sand crashed down one by one like shooting stars. Suddenly, he tipped it sideways setting it on the table next to the purple book.

A blue hue chilled what was once a warm inviting space and the liquid walls turned to ice. All floating pens and books, open and closed, fell lifeless to the floor. I did not move. Time had stopped. The entire room froze.

The Shadow Man then took what was concealed behind the podium. My heart skipped a beat. A fourth book. The cover was white and gray, like the marble or granite door and it had five gems placed in the form of a compass on the cover, with black lines connecting the directions to the center gem.

The hour glass lay still, sideways on the table.

The Shadow Man spoke.

I will take great care in telling you these stories. It's time to remember the first chapter.

I understood and we began the last story.

On May 21st, 2012, you awoke to a loud crash. Your younger sister, Maddie, sat crying in her bunk bed above you. You sat up and moved to look at her.

You asked her what was wrong. You seemed confused, sleepy.

Her reply wavered, and she seemed out of breath as tears streamed down her face.

She cried to you that she didn't know what was happening.

It was around midnight— just barely past the 20th. You looked at the frightened eleven-year-old little girl above you, and then down to Spike, your dog, who was stirring at the end of the bed. You thought to yourself that she was overreacting, and it was probably only the television.

Looking back up to Maddie you told her you would check it out and be right back. You got up, carefully avoiding the piles of unfolded clothes and scattered toys left on the floor, and walked towards your mother's room. The sounds rose in volume as soon as you opened your door, but you couldn't make out any words.

You froze; you had just taken your hand off of your doorknob.

Please?

That must be what you'd heard, but who was talking? Your brother Trei's room was directly across from yours, and your mother's room was next to his to the right. You pressed your ear to his door and, after hearing nothing inside, turned to your mom's room. Switching on her light you saw her there, just inside the doorway, laying in a pool of crimson and struggling to cry out for help. The rusty copper smell of blood was smothering, and you struggled not to gag. You realized then that she must have fallen and that noise was what had woken you up.

Your eyes watered, your voice caught in your throat and a strangled sound escaped. You could barely choke out the word "mom."

She pleaded for your help, for God's help. But the voice that came out wasn't hers, it was strained and soft. Her body, her head, her hands were unmoving. She shuddered softly as she coughed, her blonde hair stained red, and her bright green eyes a glassy grey. You turned and ran back to your room where Maddie sat still crying.

You told yourself you could not cry. You could not cry until you knew Maddie was safe.

You grabbed your cell phone, looked up at her since she was still on her bunk, and in a strict voice you said, “Maddie, you need to come down here and sit with Spike, you will not move, you will not get up. I do not care what you hear or what you think you hear, you will not leave this bedroom and you will not open this door. Do you understand me?”

You could see the fear in her small round face as her wet eyes searched yours; she was just a child—yet so were you, only sixteen.

You closed the door behind you and went back toward the sounds. You did not know it then, but she was drowning in her blood. Every breath was killing her.

Your fingers shook and your eyes blurred. You froze in a panic that felt like an eternity.

“911 what is your emergency?” asked the emergency operator finally.

Your words trembled as you spoke and the reality of it all finally hit you,

“1432 NW Grant Avenue, I need an ambulance, my mom...” your words cut off.

“What happened to your mom?” asked the woman.

“I don’t know, I don’t know!” you began to sob, “I found her on the floor... there’s blood... there’s blood everywhere...”

Your sister’s sobs grew louder. You knew she could hear your words.

This was when Trei came out of his bedroom.

Turning to look at him you could not even say his name.

“What happened??” he exclaimed when he saw the blood-stained floor. He grabbed you into his arms taking your cell phone.

“But you were supposed to be at Kasin’s!” you gasped between choking sobs.

“I never went because we got too high smoking in the backyard...” he told you in an almost inaudible whisper. “I’m so sorry I didn’t wake up.”

The woman was still on the line trying to speak now to your brother.

Trei ignored her and yelled at your mother whose raspy cries for help were getting weaker and weaker.

“You can’t leave them! Your daughters need you! You’re supposed to be their mother!” he cried out.

Her reply was small and pained, “I can’t... I can’t stay...”

Those words cut you like a knife. Bile rose in your throat and you thought you would faint.

Then there was a sharp knock at the door.

“Police, open up!” someone called out.

Trei told you to run to open the door and so you did. Men in uniforms, paramedic gear, and grave knowing expressions poured into your home.

One officer hustled you back into your room where you held your inconsolable sister and tried to shield her from the pain and havoc going on just outside your closed door.

Since your mom’s room was small they put her on the stretcher and moved her to the living room. The officer, who was still with you, addressed your sister, asking what she had seen and heard but you listened past the officer into the front room. The old paper thin-walls of the house your mother grew up in were far from sound proof.

“We are going to need to life flight her,” one paramedics voice drifted in from the living room.

“But we are already losing her,” said another.

Your body went cold and your brain felt numb. “This isn’t happening, this *can*’t happen,” you wanted to scream, “I can’t lose my mom... It will be like the movies won’t it? They will save her! I will wake up tomorrow and she will still be here.” But your thoughts did not reassure you.

The officer asked you to pack a small bag of clothes and toiletries for your sister and yourself.

“Why? Where are we going?” you whispered in fear as visions of foster homes, police stations, and hospitals rooms filled your head.

“Do you have any family in the area?” he asked.

“Yes, I... I have a few aunts and uncles who live here,” you choked out between tears.

The officer got down on one knee in front of you and put one hand on your shoulder; it was warm. You looked like a ghost, pale face, large petrified blue eyes, and dark hair still messy from the little sleep you’d gotten.

He stared you in the eyes and searched your face.

“Look,” he started, “you have a little sister here who needs you to be strong for her, do you think you can do that?”

You thought back to all of the bruised knees, fevers, and tears you had overcome together and you nodded while you tried to blink back the remaining tears.

You packed your bags, taking special care to bring both of your baby blankets and her favorite sweater.

Maddie was put on the right side of the officer as you left your room to hide her from your mother’s bedroom, where the blood still covered the floor. You were walked outside where your brother stood alone in tears.

It wasn’t cold, or maybe you were so numb that you could not feel the chill. Your fingers moved on their own and you quickly dialled your aunt Rachel and uncle Brian first because they lived the closest, but they didn’t respond. Next you dialled your aunt Carrie, then her husband Jeff, and finally their house phone, but nothing.

“Why was no one answering?” your inner voice cried. Your panic had returned as you tried one more number, Brendan, your aunt Carrie’s son about your same age.

“Hello? Aubrey? It’s late why are you calling me?” his voice croaked angrily on the other end.

“Brendan!” your heart skipped a beat and in a rush you exclaimed, “listen to me I need your parents to come over here quickly, my mom... She had an accident and we need them.”

As soon as they arrived the police officers had you pile into the car and you waited in silence watching the coroner speak to your aunt. At first she seemed normal, listening intently, arms crossed over her chest, her right foot slightly tapping from impatience, but as the minutes passed her demeanour changed, her arms fell and her shoulders dropped. She raised one hand to her mouth and her entire body began to tremor. The coroner looked down, patted her shoulder once and your Aunt Carrie composed herself quickly, turning to silently walk to the car. Getting in she stared through the windshield and said under her breath, “Jeff, let’s go home.”

The coroner followed you in his car and when you arrived at their house you all went inside. Piling on the couch, the coroner sat across from you on the large gray armchair, his right hand pinching his nose as if he had a headache. You all waited in a deafening silence for him to open his mouth and say something, anything.

When he finally removed his hand from the bridge of his nose, he breathed out a pained sound and said, “I don’t know how to tell you kids this, but your mother has passed away and we are looking for your father.”

Your mind reeled with questions. You cried out, shot up, and moved towards the bathroom. Your world was spinning. You felt like you were going to throw up, pass out, and die all at the same time. Aunt Carrie grabbed you in her arms mid-stumble and held you while you sobbed.

Brendan had been waiting for you on the couch when you all arrived but Megan, his younger sister, came downstairs when she heard all the commotion. Megan was ten years old and usually it was she who cried. But on this particular night Megan was silent, she was the only one who refused to give in to the tears. She called you back over to the couch, eyes filled with concern, and asked you so tenderly if she could give you a hug. You collapsed onto this little girl who had enough strength and love in her heart to understand that she needed to be the strong one for you all in your time of need.

There you remained in her arms as she shushed you, and stroked your hair, telling you everything would be all right.

Until the coroner got a phone call.

He left the house and came back inside with a gray look on his face. He sat back down on the same chair and he just stared at you.

There you were, three terrified children, still in pajamas, tears still steaming your tired faces, and with questions still filling your heads.

“I don’t know how to tell you kids this,” he ran a hand through his thinning black and gray hair, took a breath, and said, “They have just found your father, he was in his truck on the highway going towards Banks when he pulled over and committed suicide. I am so sorry, but you have lost both your parents.”

Orphans. The word orphans reverberated through every crevice of your mind.

The coroner eventually left but your brain felt as if it would burst. You looked forward to nothing but the dark emptiness that sleep brings.

I sat motionless, listening in my giant armchair. The tears that fell from my eyes stained my white dress black as if I were crying ink. I couldn’t believe I had forgotten.

The Shadow Man was patient. When I had finally dried my face, I let out a sigh and nodded.

On May 21st, 2017, you will wake up but there will be no crash. You will always and forever be an orphan, but that is okay. You will learn to live with it. The emptiness that seems to swirl around inside you will be filled with new faces and memories.

You will begin to write letters to your mom because it won’t always be easy, but you won’t always suffer either. This year you will write this:

Dear Mom,

And just when I think the stream of tears will never end I reach the bottom of the well. It’s times like these when I need you the most and I feel you slipping farther and farther away. I don’t know what to do right now nor who to talk to because the words never come out the way I want them to. I am trying to be strong for others and myself but sometimes I still feel small and insignificant in an immense world full of big ambitions and bigger fears. I wish you were here to

see my grades for college this semester because these were the best ones I've had in a while. I'm 21 now and I'm graduating next year, isn't that great? I miss your face and your hugs. It's been five years now since I lost you both. Miss you daily, I'll write again soon.

Love,

Aubrey

When you begin to feel lost you will look for your mother. She will become the north star of the compass tattoo you will get on your back. Your father will be south because you will understand that he has finally found peace. And your brother and sister will be your east and west, living different lives that will continue to intertwine with yours.

You will walk around a living work of art. Your clothing will be black, but your stories will color your body.

It will take years for you to feel alright again, but you will. The point of your journey is not the destination, it's the places you will see and the people you will meet that will take you where you need to go.

I touched the space at the top of my back, between my shoulder blades, just under my neck. The skin there was still white, the needles had yet to stain my flesh.

The Shadow Man turned the hourglass right side up and the room became warm again. Pens and books stirred from their slumber and returned to filling the library with their stories.

In that moment I realized who the shadow man was. He was not evil; he was not good. He had no face, no real body, no one else. He was the overseer of our lives. Writing down our dreams as well as our nightmares— powerless to our pain, all he could do was remember. Our births, deaths, marriages, hardships, all of it is recorded right here in the Shadow Man's library.

He was the truth.

The last grain of sand fell through the hourglass and a clock chimed. I jumped. The clock chimed again, and again louder and closer. The bookshelves started to fall. I could finally hear the

writing of the pens and the sounds of turning pages, but I could also hear the thuds of faraway books while they tumbled.

The clock chimed for the eighth time.

A book fell into my lap. My book.

The ninth time.

Down around me fell the words, ripping holes in the floor and continuing to descent down into the darkness. The ceiling had collapsed but instead of the sky there was only a distant nothingness.

The tenth time.

A large bookshelf crashed through the ground next to me, taking me with it.

The eleventh time.

Everything grew dark as I tried to reach out toward the library, but it grew smaller and smaller with every passing second. I was surrounded by the blackness. The library was in a place that didn't exist, somewhere between our world and the next.

The twelfth time.

My eyes closed. Everything faded to black.

Introduction

I write this introduction to the research portion of my thesis on *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf in order to frame my argument and its focus on pain, trauma, and the necessity of grieving and coping mechanisms. The concept of grief has been recognized throughout history, but the importance of accepting grief and learning how to recover have only been recently acknowledged as critical aspects of the healing process. The creative aspect of my thesis is structured around one day across time— May 21st. I researched what happened historically on that date to create characters that could have lived and died during those times. I chose this date because on May 21st of 2012 my parents died. In fact, I included my story as the last part of my creative piece as an anchor connecting the grief of the lives I imagined, to my actual life and transformation. I wanted to show a few of the many ways that one can experience trauma, grieve, and also how grief changes the survivors. It took years to overcome my loss and I am different yet stronger than I was before it happened. Pain changes us inside and out; some need professional treatment, medicine, lifestyle changes, or family help as a support system, and others need all of the above to overcome it. You cannot tell someone how to hurt, but you can help them learn how to heal.

When I was ten years old the book *Fig Pudding* by Ralph Fletcher was a big influence on my life. At the time I had not experienced loss, however, my childhood memories are littered with paternal abuse. The novel is written about a family who must overcome the loss of one of their six children, but also the way each of them suffers and heals in their own way. The eldest brother, Cliff, cannot come to terms with his pain because he does not understand his own emotions. One night his Uncle Billy comes in to tell him a story about his navy days and the way they would use the ocean to soften up the the hard military grade jeans supplied to the soldiers. That story is a metaphor for grieving. He says:

“The last couple days I’ve felt a little like those blue jeans must’ve felt, dragged through the ocean, night and day.” He sighed. “Something like this really softens you up. But you can’t let it break you apart, either.”

I thought about that. I asked, “Think there’s something wrong with me—that I haven’t cried?”

“Hell, no!” He let out a short laugh. “During the war the hospitals had certain guys they called ‘walking wounded.’ These were men who had been through combat, but they looked fine, most of them. They could walk around, eat, and talk pretty regular. Didn’t look like there was anything wrong with them, and there wasn’t anything wrong—on the outside. But on the inside they were all twisted up. Their thoughts, feelings. They couldn’t function. I knew guys like that.” He took a deep breath. “Now that Brad’s been taken from us I guess we’re all walking wounded: you, me, all of us.”

I nodded.

“Everybody reacts different to something like this—some people cry buckets, other folks store it up inside. When someone you love dies, you get a big bowl of sadness put down in front of you, steaming hot. You can start eating now, or you can let it cool and eat it bit by bit later on. Either way, you end up eating the whole thing. There’s really no way around it.” (Fletcher, 150-1)

Virginia Woolf

My experience with literature and personal loss have changed the way I look at life. *Fig Pudding* was the first to influence the way I grieve and how I view the grieving process. The representation of pain and loss in literature is not imagined, all fiction contains truth to some extent. Life, death, accident, illness, and/or natural disaster play a part in many peoples every day lives—but this does not mean it is easy to overcome grief. According to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler the affect of trauma is expressed through their theory of ‘The Five Stages of Grief.’ These stages are, “denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—[and] are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost [and other pain].” (Kübler-Ross 36). The theory can be expanded as well to account for more than just the sadness and guilt of surviving a death because one does not necessarily need to lose a loved one in order to grieve. I am going to examine the reaction to diverse traumas represented and reinterpreted through the imagined characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf. I will do this by following the theory of The Five Stages of Grief, questioning the meaning of acceptance, and analyzing Woolf’s literary innovation.

Therefore, although the theory states that there are five stages recognized in grief, these are not the only emotions that one might experience because there are infinite causes of trauma. According to the Kübler Ross theory, denial, bargaining, depression, anger and acceptance are the most common and recognizable aspects associated with grief. However, our experience with trauma and how each of us processes grief is as individual as the loss or cause of pain itself. In fact, Kübler-Ross states that there is no specific order to experiencing pain or healing because of how personal the trauma is. Therefore, there is no “linear timeline in grief” since there is no guarantee that the theory will be a perfect fit for everyone. An individual may completely skip a stage, go back and forth between stages, or identify with an emotion that is not outlined in the theory. Kübler-Ross writes, “Our hope is that with these stages comes the knowledge of grief’s terrain, making us better equipped to cope with life and loss.” (31) The theory is not a guide to healing but a

“framework” to teach us how to live with grief and understand *what* and *why* we feel the way we do, to prepare us for loss. They also outline the differences and similarities between communal and individual grief without simplifying the effects of trauma, but by giving us a better grasp on the concept and connection to pain.

Although Woolf did not have access to this theory during her lifetime, she understood these emotions because of war, loss, and her personal journey with grief. She incorporates aspects from the changed world around her, what I refer to as trauma specific triggers, and the stream of consciousness to construct, and narrativize grief in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Trauma specific triggers are conscious, or unconscious, emotional responses to objects, people, sounds, or places that remind ones subconscious of a traumatic or significantly painful event. Woolf is able to, “[Reproduce] the operation of the consciousness, the chatter of the inner voice that propels us through the day, the voice in which we understand and explain our own lives to ourselves [with literature]” (Prose 53). *Mrs. Dalloway* is a fictional novel that connects the individual, and communal traumas of multiple consciousness’ observed and reinterpreted by Woolf. This allows the reader to investigate the central workings of the grieving “private mind” versus the acceptable “public self,” while Woolf recreates her perspective of the reaction to trauma created by the post-war, post-pandemic 1920’s English society.

A combination of Woolf’s childhood traumas and exposure to loss subjected her to a life of many grievances that ultimately ended in her tragic suicide. When the reality one lives in causes so much pain, it is scary to live outside of the fictional realm. Similarly, Woolf’s idea of pain manifests in her novels, diaries, and letters, leading critics to see her literature as a response to grief in the form of art. Caramagno argues that Woolf hides from reality through literature saying, “... her fiction functioned as a defense mechanism against grieving, against confronting unresolved feelings of guilt, defilement, anger, and loss,” since ultimately she does not move on and she takes her own life (10). However, Caramagno also agrees that grief and loss can be used as what Jahan Ramazani acknowledges as “the fuel of poetic mourning.” (10). Woolf was held hostage by her pain and

anguish that would manifest with “wavelike symptoms” causing her to drift in and out of insanity because she had “lost her sense of self” (15 16). When dealing with blocked emotions, writing about trauma can be both painful and therapeutic because it provides a personal place for self-reflection and expression. In fact, even Caramagno admits, “Biographers value continuity in the inconvenient anarchy of an artist's life, and so Woolf's death is viewed almost as a creative act and her novels as elaborate drafts of a suicide note” (10). If she found that the only ways to recover from the pain were by writing until she could hurt no longer, and by taking her own life to stop the suffering, she is validating both literature and death as their own forms of acceptance.

Woolf grew up surrounded by death, abuse, and war. Considering the effect of childhood trauma, her style of writing could have developed due to her experiences with pain and loss. This is based on what experts refer to as, “Early life exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACE), like trauma, abuse or maltreatment in childhood had been linked to alteration of the brain structure and the neurobiological stress-response systems which have consequences for health and emotional well-being” (Adverse Childhood Experiences 721). Critics wonder if her childhood trauma led her to literature because she suffered from social anxiety, chronic depression, and expressed manic-depressive disorder. Thomas Caramagno agrees, arguing that she was, “Voluntarily giving voice to her illness,” that originated from, “The untimely death of her mother, the tyranny of her father, [and] the sexual abuse inflicted by her half brothers.” (22 10). While these aspects could have contributed to her debilitated mental state, and depression, I argue that Woolf finds an outlet for her inability to mourn through the world of illusion by turning to literature as a form of therapeutic, artistic reflection, and not an escape for mental disease. Traumatic loss during childhood affects the mental health of the child as well as the development of social skills. Studies prove that trauma is toxic to mental health and if it is left unaddressed, it can lead to “chronic diseases,” and, “alterations to various biological systems,” and Woolf realizes that trauma has an effect on mental health because she too struggled (ACE 727). In fact, Woolf questions the capacity one has to overcome

immense sadness and grief caused by trauma and uses it as a central theme in many of her novels, including *The Waves*, *Orlando*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Nevertheless, critics argue there is evidence found in Woolf's literature that leads them to believe that she too contemplated whether her literature developed from an unknown mental disease rather than an understanding of grief. Caramagno writes, "She was already exploring her illness through her fiction, seeing provocative connections between madness and modernism," however, her novels are not a simple product of her mental illness (11). Woolf's exposure to trauma provides her with the necessary experience to understand the phenomena of loss, though there is no way to measure the way pain and grief will effect someone's emotional state, nor can we estimate who can, or cannot, grow from loss. She is able to narrativize and reject the undesirable aspects of her reality by questioning the meaning of life, death, tragedy, and acceptance in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Kübler- Ross theorizes that, "We learn to live with [grief]. It is the new norm with which we must learn to live. This is where our final healing and adjustment can take a firm hold, despite the fact that healing often looks and feels like an unattainable state." (67). Acceptance, for this theory, is a mindset achieved after one has moved on from pain. The Kübler-Ross theory acknowledges that the emotions involved in the way we grieve are essential to understanding and reaching this place of acceptance, yet while the theory does not explore suicide as its own form of healing, Woolf does. I think suicide is a recognition of pain but also a way to refuse to continue to suffer from grief. Pain causes many types of change to the mental state of the survivor but it is necessary to grieve, or escape from grief, in order to survive. Perhaps there is more than one way to find relief from the pain if the "bowl of sadness" is unique and must be confronted, and eaten by everyone. Woolf, and Septimus liberate themselves from grief through the finality of death and Clarissa learns how to survive by accepting the tragedies of life.

Clarissa Dalloway

The Plunge

Woolf gives the reader almost complete access to the inner and outer workings of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith's minds. She does this with the help of the vulnerability of internal monologue, free indirect discourse, and the seemingly omniscient third person narrator. The narrator introduces Clarissa Dalloway, a high-class woman in her fifties, to the reader with the phrase, "What a lark! What a plunge!" as she opens the door and allows the reader to "plunge" with her into the beginning of her grief adventure (3). The sublime feeling inspired by the fresh morning air makes Clarissa reminisce on her past. She finds herself unable to correctly reconstruct the conversation and emotions from thirty-three years before with Peter Walsh, as she stood in front of "the French window." (3). She remembers being eighteen and in love with Peter, but she connects this memory with fear as well. Clarissa's inability to correctly remember what Peter says, allows the reader to see how the passage of time has effected her mind and memory, while also inferring a strong emotional attachment to Peter since that particular day still weighs on her mind more than three decades later. Her memory is related in a poetic form of self reflection on a past self as she stands feeling old, and alone.

Clarissa creates a parallel between her past and present self but keeps the two separate because of the unconscious association of dread and anger in her memory, "Solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen..." (MD 3). This anxiety, although completely rational, forces her to reflect on her young adult years and acts as an elegy to a past self that no longer exists. Deborah Guth claims the, "Imaginative duplicity [of the] ... privacy of the soul... enables her to prepare her party while elegiacally reliving Bourton in her mind, to be safely married to Richard while entwining her thoughts with Peter, to live one life and yet carry around an alternative destiny, not chosen yet not given up." (22). In doing so, Woolf is showing how the stream of consciousness is not linear; Clarissa's thoughts and feelings are

interrupted by an involuntary reaction to a trauma specific trigger even though the memory is not inherently traumatic.

Considering Clarissa has just gotten over her battle with influenza, this hesitation and reflection are quite understandable because of what Kübler-Ross refers to as “anticipatory grief,” which is a common symptom of near death experiences. Kübler-Ross writes, “In childhood we realize at some point that we will die, and not only will we die but those around us will die someday too. That is our beginning of anticipatory grief: fear of the unknown, the pain we will someday experience.” (28) Clarissa’s brush with death is likely the cause of her fear of life, as well as her fear of death, and yet, she loved it all, “she loved life.” (4) Clarissa’s character embodies the trauma experienced by both the individual and the community of lucky survivors of the influenza pandemic of 1918. The first step she takes out the door can be seen as a metaphor for rebirth demonstrating her will to survive and overcome both influenza, which is an illness that effects the body, and emotional trauma, which effects the mind.

Likewise, negative or distressing experiences have a more pressing effect on memory than positive because they require more effort to process. Kensinger agrees saying studies show, “The valence of an event (i.e., whether it is pleasurable or adverse) seems to be a critical determinant of the accuracy with which the event is remembered, with negative events being remembered in greater detail than positive ones.” (214). Clarissa’s encounter with childhood friend Hugh allows her to, “remember scene after scene at Bourton—Peter furious; Hugh not,” until she remembers the day Peter asks her to marry him (MD 6). No matter how much time passes, the memory of Clarissa refusing Peter’s hand in marriage sticks out in her mind like a sore thumb. In contrast to her inability to put together the details of the first memory, this scene is very clear, full of vivid emotion, specific literary authors, and a recollection of dialogue. She made him cry but he insulted her back and this caused a change in her. Clarissa reassures herself that she made the right decision when she chose Richard, and yet she is angry still at Richard because, “his whole life had been a failure.” (MD 7). Kübler- Ross write, “It is important to remember that the anger surfaces once you

are feeling safe enough to know you will probably survive whatever comes.” (44). Clarissa knows she will survive because the experience has already happened and it will remain tucked away in her memories but this reflection causes Clarissa to feel disconnected to reality. She feels both very young and very old, unable to distinguish herself in the “sea” of taxi cabs. Clarissa has the opportunity to contemplate the importance of her life and comes to a realization—all people are connected through life and perpetual death. She survives in Peter, as he survives in her, through memory. Clarissa uncovers an emotional link she has with nature that reaches to, “[the parts] of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best.” (MD 8). This passage allows Woolf to allude to one the influence Septimus’ death will have on her life without ever physically meeting her.

Clarissa’s “Public Self”

Woolf uses secondary characters to give the reader insight on Clarissa’s hidden emotional response to grief and the extent to which her “public self” is known. Scope Purvis, Clarissa’s neighbor of twenty years, is observing her actions when she first leaves her house though she is too lost in thought to notice him. It seems odd that after being neighbors for such an extensive period of time he does not have much to say about Clarissa. Purvis puts distance between the two by describing her with impersonal, subjective details, “Bird[like]... perched... white since her illness... [and] very upright.” (3). Her mind is deep in thought but she stands as if she knew she was being watched. She seems guarded, which could be due to her role in society as a politician’s wife, or a repercussion of her encounter with influenza. This does not seem like the woman who moments before thought of the morning air as “fresh as if issued to children on a beach” (3). Already, the reader has a preconceived idea of how Clarissa desires to be perceived by the public because of the discrepancies in her physical body language, and the artistic language that flows in her internal monologues.

This leads critics to wonder, “is Mrs. Dalloway’s inner life ‘private’ — only available to herself, an implied author, and an implied reader? If so, why is Mrs. Dalloway’s subjective response

to seeing her sister killed by a falling tree — a major, traumatic event from her past — conspicuously absent from the text?” (Edmondson 18). Clarissa’s mind might be too preoccupied by her party to think about and notice triggers that could cause an outburst because of that tragic day. It is also possible that she is not ready to face the reality of her sister’s death. However, while Clarissa may not be outwardly suffering, it is clear she was changed by the ordeal because the idea of death often invades her thoughts. Considering Peter and Clarissa’s emotional connection, Edmondson writes, “Peter creates a version of Mrs. Dalloway’s mind in his own through the use of inflected third-person, past-tense narration. In other words, he imagines her inner life as if he were writing free indirect discourse.” (21). The relationship they share throughout the novel extends over time and validates Peter’s theory on her emotional transformation due to the death of her sister. Peter claims, “Her emotions were always on the surface,” (64) but even he is only able to speculate on how she must have felt losing her sister.

Regardless, “privacy of the soul” is crucial for Clarissa, it protects her like a shield from society, and poses as a safe haven. It is the reason she Richard though she admits she is in love with Peter. She exclaims, “[with Peter] everything had to be shared; everything gone into... she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed,” because she is terrified that she will lose a piece of her soul if she gives him herself completely (MD 7). Clarissa sees her soul as a web of connections made by the people who influence, and add to her life, but she realizes that there is something missing in her relationship with Richard—passion. In the novel they do not discuss the absent romantic love with each other, rather they internalize the idea and Clarissa retreats more fully behind her private self. Clarissa feels she lost her sense of self when she married Richard because of the necessity of her social mask. “This being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway,” makes her feel that her true identity is, “invisible; unseen; unknown,” (9). Clarissa wishes she could have more influence on those around her like Lady Bruton, a woman of the previous generation, “interested in politics,” in control of those around her.

In comparison to the esteemed Lady Bruton, Clarissa feels incredibly old, depressed, and jealous of both her social status and invitation for lunch that only Richard received.

The Attic

The reader would expect the interior of Clarissa's home to mirror the grandness and beauty of the exterior but, "the hall of the house was cool as a vault." (MD 25). Woolf attempts to animate Clarissa's mental state in order to focus on the importance of this concept. She is unable to relax in her own home because she is still under the watchful eyes of the cook, her maid Lucy, and Richard, who is currently away, because he is "foundation" of their home and memories. Clarissa comes to understand that there are many times in life when one finds themselves alone, such as when she battles with influenza or the loss of her sister. She finds comfort in isolation because it provides her with the freedom to interact with and take proper care for her mental state without the pressure of the outside world.

Woolf creates a safe space for Clarissa in the attic. Shalom Rachman agrees stating, "Only in her attic can she let herself truly be, truly be Clarissa that is, or in other words, eliminate momentarily the censor that keeps the real Clarissa repressed and for a moment feel whole before assembling and composing herself for the world." (10). Her need of privacy and isolation was validated in Woolf's writing; mental health was left to the individual then but this is a genuine example of how it would be handled. Woolf's writing symbolizes Kübler-Ross's idea of isolation being a physical room through Clarissa and her attachment to the attic because it is the only place she can completely disconnect from society. It fronts as a storage place for Clarissa's most personal memories since only she has access and only she can enter within. A simple room, the attic, a safe haven for Clarissa and Woolf. The attic allows them to release opinions of controversial topics unchallenged, they are alone with their truths.

Woolf also experiments between a questionably intimate same-sex friendship narrative and homosexual temptation. Homosexual relationships were not socially acceptable in Woolf's lifetime. Sally's "charm" makes Clarissa feel, "a kind of ecstasy... [but] the words means absolutely nothing

to her now. She could not even get an echo of her old emotion.” (29). This change in character/perspective is never mentioned by Clarissa verbally, she was in denial?

Her epiphany affirming the memory is not new, she finally admitted she is attracted to woman more than men. Sally challenges the social norm, her bravery excites Clarissa because she embodies everything that Clarissa isn't. She changes the meaning of a once traditionally feminine symbol by cutting the heads off of flowers that Clarissa finds irresistible. Woolf uses Clarissa to critique socially imposed gender roles; highlighting the happiest moment in Clarissa's life as the day Sally decided to kiss her. When the memory is interrupted by Peter, a man, her first thought is, “It was shocking; it was horrible!” (30), and yet Clarissa claims she knew something would happen to ruin the moment. Clarissa found new meaning in life with Sally, she was adventurous by nature accordingly Clarissa feared about the trouble they might face as homosexual lovers.

Sally's adventurous spirit gave meaning to Clarissa's life yet her fears about for their safety because she believes everything she loves about Sally will one day get her into trouble. Consequently, Clarissa's memory ends when Sally too grows up and time forces them to grow apart and do the very thing they despised the most—marry. The memory cease to replay when Clarissa and her happiness and love of life are forgotten in the past but Clarissa is has found herself again and she sees life in her mirror, “the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party...Clarissa Dalloway.” (31)

Septimus

The Car

Woolf uses places and symbols to connect Clarissa and Septimus who observe the same motifs but interpret them in different ways. Woolf transitions the focus of the story from Clarissa to Septimus, she does this by introducing “the violent explosion” as a distraction shifting to a new focal point. The loud noise causes the reader and observers to jump, look and concentrate their attention on who could be inside. The car itself is not what is important, it is the way this object is perceived and interpreted by the witnesses, that project individual meaning onto an object, image, or place. “The onlookers also contribute their feelings to the perceived object, so that when the stalled motor car draws the attention of the citizens on a London street, they are united not just in a moment of perception but of shared sentiment.” (Mackin 125). In this instance all citizens are unified, stripped of gender, social class, and level of education. This allows Woolf to expand from the consciousness of one, to the consciousness of many in order to create a valid comparison between the idea of the individual versus of community.

The car “backfires” literally and figuratively and the emotional reaction to trauma differs from consciousness to consciousness based on perspective. It causes Clarissa to jump in surprise but Septimus reacts in fear and his flashbacks of the war return to haunt him. This is another example of a trauma specific trigger, Septimus is convinced the car backfire is an explosion and he makes an unconscious association between the sound and war. He is afraid he will lose himself to insanity because no one can understand his ailment. While no one can figure out exactly who is inside, Mackin claims “The car serves as a locus of national movement” (125) but the car is not moving, it’s stopped, a spectacle, in the middle of the road. Traumatized, Septimus cannot come to grips the the public world since his private thoughts prevent him from getting back in touch with reality by continuing to interfere. Septimus’ paranoia manifests and, in his confused state he believes, “It is [he] who [is] blocking the way” (MD 13). His reaction to this traumatic moment is not wrong but the reader can see a drastic difference between the sane and the insane mind. The individuals are

completely focused on discovering who is in the car that no one is able to hear Septimus say he wants to kill himself. It is plausible Septimus feels he is a burden because both the Empire and the public are trying to recover from the tragedies of the war yet he is unable to free himself from his physical position in the street, his insanity, and undiagnosed PTSD.

Woolf shows how her society is controlled but not significantly influenced by the idea of royalty, dead tradition, and the illusion of the British empire by adding a new distraction. The gaze now shifts from the car to the plane in the sky showing that society doesn't actually associate any value with these symbols. The plane symbolizes a leap into the modern age as a reminder of technological advancements. Septimus thinks the "smoke words" are "unimaginably beaut[iful]" (19). He finds beauty in his connection with nature and has a moment of clarity, until Lucrezia puts her hand on his knee. This gesture of physical touch brings Septimus back and grounds him to his twisted reality by preventing his reconnection with the communal experiences of nature, the plane, life. Septimus wishes he could be free from his disease, able to fly through the sky like the plane. He concludes that the emotional tie was found in nature and exclaims, "leaves [are] alive; trees [are] alive...connected by millions of fibres with his own body...men must not cut down trees." (19 21).

Another symbol of social control is portrayed by Dr. Holmes and Sir Bradshaw. Dr. Holmes is Septimus' general care doctor who refuses to address the idea of madness. He claims, "[Septimus has nothing whatsoever seriously the matter with him but he was a little out of sorts." (18). This is a direct denial of emotion and mental disease because Septimus clearly expresses his suffering with severe cases of manic fits and depression, such as his public outbursts, obsession with writing, and constant state of irritation and paranoia. Holmes is all too ready to ignore and treat the case of Septimus as if he were one of the many soldiers without identity or individual recognition who were killed in battle or returned home expressing emotions of the guilty survivor because he follows a set of dead rules.

They hold power over Lucrezia and Septimus as symbols of societal influence and authority, and the embodiment of the greedy evils of "Human nature." Bradshaw is the epitome of

British upper class power. He is obviously rich and obsessed with money and power, only working only for the time he is paid, checking the authenticity of the paintings at Clarissa's house to estimate value, and claiming his remedy will cure Septimus completely. Bradshaw sees the madness disregarded by Holmes and is under the impression that he can "convert" his patient back to "balance" by prescribing his cure for proportion.

"Human nature" was after Septimus, or so he thought, and is so traumatized he opts for suicide to avoid spending time in one of Sir Bradshaw's psychiatric homes. When Septimus commits suicide to escape from them both, Holmes refers to him as a "coward" (127) but it is them and British culture that have failed Septimus. No matter how evil these men they are perceived as being, they are victims of their own privilege and as punishment will perish when the old society is finally rejected by the masses.

The War

Woolf was never a combatant but she is nonetheless angered by the war. She watched the way World War I became the bloodiest, most gruesome war to date due to technological advancements in modern weaponry. WWI wiped out an entire generation of capable young men and devastated the survivors, while the previous generation of Englishmen, i.e. the gentleman portrayed through Hugh and Mr. Brewer, considered fighting for one's country to be a noble gesture—though they were too old to go themselves. Men refused to grieve outwardly until eventually their symptoms manifested as social and mental disorders. This was a consequence of the then social normalization of unfeeling because it was not socially acceptable to be seen as weak or mentally unstable. Society idolized the "manly man" because it was a symbol of strength and unity simply thanks to tradition. Soldiers suffering from shell-shock experienced varying degrees of the disease. "The chronic form of shell shock was expressed by medically unexplained symptoms, in particular tics, paresis, tremor, contractures, fatigue, headache, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, memory loss, poor concentration together with aches and pains," whereas, the lesser variations were harder to diagnose because they manifested in more discrete ways (Jones 357).

We now identify shell shock as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or (PTSD). It is, “An emotional disorder in which a person suffers from re-experiencing the horrific event through hyperarousal and extreme anxiety; intrusive thoughts and memories, or flashbacks; and emotional numbing.” (Kübler Ross, 330-1) Newly defined mental illness, PTSD, is a consequence of the war that forces the existing social order to change. Society is a unified consciousness fundamental to shaping the current reality since it is operated by collective awareness. It is operated by a collective awareness that is constantly adjusting to make room for variation. War is a disaster that combines “personal and community grief” because the survivors are mourning the death of their loved ones and the reality that existed before the trauma induced pain.

Some critics claim that Septimus’s isolation and death signify the decline of PTSD and other war related disorders. However, I believe Woolf uses Septimus’ confusion to further alienate him from the crowd as a rejection to the English society as a social critique. He is overly expressive in thought and emotion, rendering both ineffective forms of communication and ridding him of the privacy of self. Septimus embodies the theme of the “walking wounded” and while no one denies him his right to emotion, his outburst for attention or recognition is neglected. During this time, the acknowledgment of shell-shock was, “Perceived as a form of war resistance and a deliberate retreat from masculine duty, traumatized soldiers were often ignored, denied adequate psychological treatment, and ridiculed as cowards” (Carr 54). This extreme denial of emotion is detrimental to the health of the combatants because it created social alienation that led many to choose suicide over professional care.

Literature

Septimus simultaneously loves, and is haunted by literature. He respects Shakespeare as a symbol of the English patriarch and he loves a woman named Isabel Pole. Septimus’ low class birth makes him turn toward the war in order to prove that he is good enough for Isabel and his worth for society. But the war has adverse effects on his mind and he turns to literature and writing for comfort when he suffers from manic fits and hallucinations of Evans. Through Shakespeare’s

Antony and Cleopatra, Septimus realizes “the message hidden in the beauty of words.” (75).

Septimus uses the information he interprets to comprehend the changed world around him. In fact, when Rezia mentions she wants a baby, his true thoughts about England and the effect of war are expressed to the reader through his rhythmical internal monologue. Septimus’s response to his wife is, “one cannot perpetrate suffering, or increase the breed of those lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them not this way, now that.” (Woolf 76). Septimus’s exposure to the true evil in “Human nature” causes him to drastically change his view on the world because he begins to believe there is no good due to the war. His madness also leads him to believe that, “Love between a man and a woman was repulsive to Shakespeare,” because the torch that is passed from generation to generation is soaked in, “loathing, hatred, despair.” (75) In turn, he loses touch with himself, stops trusting his wife among others, and is unable to let the memory of his dead best friend and possible lover rest. Words had never hurt him, literature had always been a dear friend to Septimus, it was people who had hurt him, had killed Evans, had caused his insanity.

Through *Dante’s Inferno* Woolf frames Septimus’s inability to feel. *Dante’s Inferno* is the epic poem of Dante’s journey through hell—a perfect parallel to describe his current mental battle. (“Septimus, do put your book,’ said Rezia, gently shutting the *Inferno**), he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect, it must be the fault of the world then— that he could not feel.” (Woolf 75). Pain and suffering are not his fault after all, but the fault of mankind and its evils since he could function perfectly and there was nothing physically wrong with him. Woolf, makes it clear that Lucrezia’s closing of the book is a metaphor for the rejection of mourning and the affect that this has on the body and mind. He uses an elegiac form of poetry to reflect on the war, saying, “the War had taught him...He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. Thee last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference.” (73) Septimus through the guidance of literature, analyzes the effect war has on him and realizes that it was the war that taught him how to

reject his feelings. Even so, he felt as though he were falling deeper and deeper into the “flames,” (119) ever closer to the devil himself, Holmes. This acts as a metaphor for his figurative proximity to the devil and the pits of hell because of his insanity.

Conclusion

The parallel lives of Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway never physically intertwine but they share many of the same experiences. They both give something back at the end of the novel, for Clarissa it was her party, and for Septimus—his life. The evils of “Human nature” teach Septimus that he must learn how to live, or not live, in a world that may not be ready to understand or accept him. His death is a symbol of “defiance,” rejecting the normalized idea of what it means to come back a war hero and the ‘one size fits all’ prescription for mental healthcare. The moment Septimus decides to commit suicide is when he accepts his fate and what may come with dying because he does not want to be “the eternal sufferer” (22). Acceptance is not the same for all, maybe not all can heal in the conventional way and indeed he is not admitting defeat in life but escape through death. There is no more pain, or grief, no more denial, or anger, or bargaining, or depression—death is its own safe haven. All in all, Septimus learns to, “Fear no more the heat of the sun,” and gives himself back to nature in a last attempt at freedom. He realizes that even if he doesn’t necessarily want to die, he needs to escape from the pain of his existence and for him, suicide is the only way.

Clarissa chooses to embrace the pain of life rather than deny it. She finds herself by remembering who she was, understanding the woman she became, reminiscing on the past, and accepting the journey of life. For Clarissa, death is a place of true identity and connection with those around her. Woolf ends her novel by introducing Septimus’ death to Clarissa at her party—a place where she brings people together to celebrate life. She wonders if Septimus died “holding his treasure,” (156) or his sanity/dignity, and realizes that at one point in her life, she too could have died truly happy. She declares, “Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone.” (MD 156). For Clarissa, this meant that through death she would all be connected with nature again—she is no longer afraid to live. While contemplating death she watches the old woman in the house next to her own when suddenly it seems they are

looking straight at each other. She sees the separation between her inner and outer worlds reflected back to her and realizes the necessity of both. There is a sad loneliness in Clarissa's private world, but her public self is loved and adored by many. This is confirmed at the end of the novel when Sally and Peter talk about how they see Clarissa as a "snob" but also the way they loved her through it all. As seen in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the reality we perceive around us is in a constant state of change, therefore, we too must learn to grow and evolve. Death is the finally resting place for all humanity and whether we like it or not, many of us will go on our own grief adventures.

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