

A PLACE OF ONE'S OWN: SPACE, TRAUMA, AND SEXUALITY  
IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS. DALLOWAY*

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Christopher B. Rutledge, and my mother, Katia Freitas. Their love, support, and constant encouragement in achieving my academic dreams have been the driving force behind my work. I love you both very much.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In her groundbreaking work *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf transforms the art of the novel with her intricate narrative style as she places a number of complex characters within the same textual space and, through her use of stream-of-consciousness and free indirect style, gives readers access to characters' personal thoughts, memories, and overall states of mind. In her nearly contemporaneous 1925 essay "Modern Fiction," Woolf indicates that "the modern practice of the art is somehow an improvement upon the old" (1). As she contemplates the state of fiction at the time, Woolf refers to writers as "materialists," since they portray the trivial day-to-day routine of their characters (1). Woolf's essay, which serves as a critique, as well as a recognition, of authors and literature before the modern period, urges modern writers to have "the courage to say that what interests [them] is no longer 'this' but 'that'" (4). "That," the place of interest, for modern writers, "lies very likely in the dark places of psychology," according to Woolf (4). Indeed, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf is most interested in the relationship between the human mind, with its thoughts, memories, and desires, and the social order in general. Woolf's narrative provides readers with its characters' itineraries through various parts of London on a given day, making visible the characters' states of mind with respect to different locations or types of space, whether public or private, for example. That is, Woolf maps her characters' thoughts and movements throughout the real and imagined spaces of her contemporary London.

In this thesis, I explore the relationship between the mental states of individual characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* and the social spaces, broadly conceived, that shape them, paying particular attention to the way that Woolf addresses issues of psychology, trauma,

memory, and sexuality in producing a literary cartography of London in the 1920s. I argue that the two key characters, Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway, are each subject to severe spatial anxiety by being, respectively, “displaced” or too restrictively “placed” within the social order of the time. Thus, I am interested in performing a spatial analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which also pays close attention to the effects of spatiality on mental health and happiness. Following Woolf’s evocative concept of “a room of one’s own,” I argue that Septimus and Clarissa are victims of a system that has hindered their ability to create a space of liberty, a place of one’s own, in which to be free of the rigid, yet sometimes subtle, strictures of post-Victorian British society.

This thesis follows from and contributes to a recent “spatial turn” in literary and cultural studies. That is, a number of scholars, critics, and theorists have paid greater attention to matters of space, place, and mapping in literature, and this shift in emphasis has produced new ways of looking at both real and imaginary places as these are depicted in literary texts. According to Robert T. Tally Jr., “The spatial turn in literary and cultural studies is both a reasonable response to the perplexities of this [postmodern] condition and a tentative exploration of new spaces and representation” (*Spatiality* 43). Indeed, as writers try and capture one’s sense of “being-in-the-world” in their works, new spaces are figuratively formed through their narratives (43). Additionally, narrative creates psychological spaces that correspond, more or less effectively, to the mental states of its characters. The relationship among such psychological spaces, exterior spaces (such as the physical geography of London or the architecture of a building), and literary



cartography more generally, which imagines the writer as a kind of mapmaker, is the main topic of this thesis.

Keeping these ideas in mind, I will analyze the comportment of these characters throughout the novel, examining how Woolf's narrative style creates disparate spaces and places coinciding, or sometimes clashing, with each character's behavior and state of mind. In his discussion of what he terms "literary cartography," Tally asserts that

Narrative [...] is a form of world-making. As narrators or writers survey the territory they wish to describe, they weave together disparate elements in order to produce the narrative, and these elements may include scraps of other narratives, descriptions of people or places, images, derived from first-hand observation as well as from secondary reports, legends, myths and inventions of the imagination. In producing this patchwork representation of a world (that is, the narrative itself), the narrator also invents or discovers the world represented in the narrative. (*Spatiality* 49)

This sort of literary cartography is equally effective in representing so-called "real" places, such as Bond Street in London (the site of Woolf's original idea for *Mrs. Dalloway*), or completely imaginary places, such a Utopia or the realms of fantasy literature. Indeed, as Woolf herself has pointed out in an early essay titled "Literary Geography," "A writer's country is a territory within his own brain; and we run the risk of disillusionment if we try to turn such phantom cities into tangible brick and mortar" (161). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf simultaneously represents the "real" places of Clarissa's and Septimus's experience and projects an imaginary space in which readers track their

motions, as well as their emotions, thoughts, memories, and desires. Woolf *maps* this world even as she creates it.

With its mobile characters and vivid descriptions of specific parts of London, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* has long attracted interest as a distinctively spatial novel. Many recent critics, including modernism scholars Andrew Thacker and Eric Bulson, have explored questions of space and place in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *Moving through Modernity*, Andrew Thacker uses the spatial theories of Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau in order to "explore how a text represents space" (3). Thacker examines narrative in a few modern masterpieces to show how such historical phenomena as World War I, imperialism, and industrialization impacts modern literature. According to Thacker, in representing such events and aspects of the modern world, modernist texts "creat[ed] metaphorical spaces that try to make sense of the material world of modernity" (3). Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* explores such spaces through its complex narrative, which makes use of the stylistically innovative "stream of consciousness" narration in order to more effectively depict the experience of modern life. In Thacker's view, stream of consciousness

represents a model to explore the psychic spaces of character. Narrative techniques such as interior monologue thus offer a method for moving between inner thoughts and outer reality, an approach requiring another sense of spatial terms: *inner*, *outer* and the *boundary* between these. We also need to consider how the interiority of psychic space is often profoundly informed by exterior social spaces. (5)

As Thacker suggests, the distinct line between inner (or psychological) and outer (or physical, social) spaces cannot be strictly maintained, as the individual's experience of space and place affects the ways that they are perceived, and, alternatively, the spaces and places themselves affect the mental states of the individual subject.

While Thacker looks at how narrative distinguishes between historical events and at how it creates metaphorical spaces, Bulson, in "Mrs. Dalloway, Here, There, Everywhere," examines the physical movements of the character through the streets of London itself. Bulson claims that, even though readers may "carefully" map Clarissa's route, we still do not know exactly where she is, since most of the time "she has her head in the clouds" (133). Bulson is interested in Woolf's attempt to "represent consciousness" in the spaces of London, where the historical events of the time, which I mentioned above, force one to cope with modernity's vast, seemingly unrepresentable spatial experiences (134). As Bulson puts it, referring to Woolf's narrative techniques,

Interior monologue, with its representation of the internal and external, certainly made the representation of urban distraction possible for the modernist novel, but it was, in Woolf's case, also a way to capture in narrative form what the scale of empire could feel like, and it was an experience that would involve coming up with ways to represent the strange sensation of being here and there, two places at once, at home and abroad, in the streets and somewhere else. (134)

Indeed, Woolf's narrative not only captures a character's inability to be fully present in their spaces, but it creates a narrative that depicts two versions of London: one comprised of "street signs" and another where we see London through a character's memories of the

past (136). Both of these registers inform the way in which the reader understands *Mrs. Dalloway*, in its complex play of narrative and space.

Focusing on Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway, I will perform a reading of the novel highlighting the relationship between these characters' mental states and the spaces and places they occupy. Although these characters reside in London's geographical space, they spend most of their time reminiscing about the past, thus causing a disjunction between the spaces they inhabit and the psychological spaces created by Woolf's narrative. I do not want to limit my attention to a single space or place mentioned in the text. Rather, for example, I want to examine how Septimus's traumatic experiences at war and his return to London afterwards inform his sense of place, with respect to both his interior or mental space and his exterior spaces (e.g., his home, the park, etc.). When writing about Clarissa, along with such related characters as Sally and Peter, I plan to discuss both their placement and disorientation within their social spaces. As with Woolf's presentation of Septimus, they, too, spend most of their time within their inner, psychological space while ruminating about their past, a past that never erases itself from their memories.

Trauma and sexuality are other two major themes examined in this thesis. Trauma is portrayed most vividly through Septimus Warren Smith's severe shell-shock, which he suffers from based on his experiences as a soldier in the first World War. War has changed him; he does not "feel" the once familiar spaces of London that he had known before (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 88; hereinafter *MD*). My purpose in discussing trauma is to emphasize a couple of key facts. First that *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel that deals with trauma and its impact upon a human being; what is more, such theme captures "that"

specific interest urged by Woolf to modern writers in her essay “Modern Fiction.” In addition, the novel, through narrative, explores “the dark places of psychology” as Woolf so desired. Second, that the medical establishment in the early twentieth century was ill-prepared to deal with psychological illnesses, and the doctors’ unfamiliarity with proper treatment for individuals who suffered from such conditions often exacerbated the problem (152). Woolf’s skepticism toward and critique of psychiatry as a whole was partly due to the fact that, as an intellectual and novelist, she had herself delved deeply into meditations over the causes and effects of mental maladies. Indeed, according to Karen Demeester “Modernist Literature . . . [g]ave form and representation to a psychological condition that psychiatrists would not understand for another fifty years” (77). My research then becomes a way to understand, historically, the main reasons for Septimus’s lack of treatment, but also, a way to navigate the traumatic spaces depicted in Woolf’s narrative. Woolf demonstrates not only how Septimus’s war trauma, his “shell-shock” or post-traumatic stress disorder (as it would today be diagnosed), has made him feel “out of place” in postwar England, but also how the ineffective treatment of his doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw, who are representative of a broader “medical gaze” (to use Foucault’s term), *displace* Septimus in such a way as to lead to his eventual suicide.

As I will discuss it in this thesis, the issue of sexuality is portrayed through Clarissa Dalloway, particularly with respect to her memories and (perhaps unconscious) desires. Although Clarissa marries Richard Dalloway, she constantly thinks of a past where Peter Walsh, an old flame, and Sally Seton, a close friend and would-be lover, are present. Clarissa, one could say, conforms to the social norms of her social class and era, even if that means repressing her desires. We must not forget, however, that Clarissa

marries a man who can take care of her; after all, she likes being taken care of and acting the part in her society. She “married well,” and lives among the wealthy and powerful in London’s high society. But Clarissa’s happiness is unclear, since she constantly thinks of the love she once felt for Sally. Additionally, as she walks the streets of London, Clarissa ponders upon what life with Peter, had she stayed with him. What interests me the most about the motif of sexuality is Clarissa’s hidden sexual desire for women, something that gave her pleasure, even true happiness, at some point in time. One could say that Clarissa’s conformity to social norms of her society requires that she maintains a heterosexual relationship, although the example of Peter shows that Clarissa was almost equally concerned with class and propriety. In depicting these repressed desires and paths not taken, Woolf demonstrates the degree to which the social mores shape the individual consciousness, and Clarissa’s vague sense of unhappiness appears to be rooted in these unfulfilled desires.

My thesis focuses on these character and themes, as well as on Woolf’s own style in representing them. In Chapter One, I perform a reading of the novel highlighting Septimus’s relationship to space and place in order to show the disjunction between his interior and exterior spaces, as they have been shaped by his experience of war and his return to London afterwards. Drawing upon Ted Bogacz’s study “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock’,” I discuss the social and medical perception of shell-shock during the period in which Woolf was writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. The article uses a wealth of information retrieved from the *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell Shock*, issued in 1922. Woolf, herself, read the report; in fact, according to Sue

Thomas, her “development and treatment of Septimus Smith may . . . be read as a topical reflection of her angry response to” the *Report* (Thomas 49). As Woolf indicates in her depiction of Septimus and his interactions with his doctors, the medical established remained ignorant about shell-shock, its indications, effects, and treatment, which ultimately leads to their inability to help Septimus. Following the brief historical view on shell-shock, I use Sigmund Freud’s concept of the *uncanny* in order to discuss the uncanny spaces created by the disjunction between Septimus’s interior and exterior spaces. Performing a formal analysis of key passages in the text, I examine moments where we see the disjunction experienced by Septimus between his ability to navigate his inner, mental spaces and his disorientation in moving through outer or social spaces. I argue that Septimus has been “displaced” by the power of what Foucault has referred to as “the medical gaze,” and Septimus’s decision to commit suicide is a result of this displacement. Dr. Bradshaw, for example, could be said to represent that invisible “disciplinary power” Foucault speaks of in *Discipline and Punish*, and Bradshaw’s decision to place Septimus into an asylum for rest and observation is also suggestive of the panoptic disciplinary practices described by Foucault. The “delightful home” Bradshaw describes is like the Panopticon, a space where Septimus will be observed from every angle and be subject to “the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, *Discipline* 201). Consequently, Septimus’s decision to commit suicide is a way to fight against the disciplinary practices of the medical gaze. Death, then, is “power’s limit” as Foucault says (*History of Sexuality* 138).

In Chapter Two, I argue that the disjunction between Clarissa's interior and exterior spaces is caused by her constant reflection upon the past and her decision to conform to the social norms of her society. I will begin by examining Clarissa's walk through her familiar social spaces of London, Bourton Street, and her home, and I will especially pay attention to how such places inform her psychological spaces or mental states. Then, I will explore Clarissa's home life and her decision to marry for the sake of being taken care of. Clarissa conforms to the social expectations of her class during this period, which require her to maintain a heterosexual relationship, to "marry well," and to keep up appearances in London's high society. However, her nearly constant remembrances of what might have been, whether with Peter (who has traveled the world and just returned from India) or Sally (who remains, perhaps, Clarissa's true love), suggest that her "proper" place in society is not necessarily the place in which she would truly feel most at home.

Chapter Three will focus on Septimus's and Clarissa's need for "a place of one's own," a sort of utopian place where both may be free from society's constraints. Drawing upon both Woolf's argument in *A Room of One's Own* and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, I will argue that Septimus and Clarissa need a place or a space where they can be liberated from social norms, if only temporarily. I will reiterate Septimus's and Clarissa's respective situations, which helps to explain their inability to create or find a "place of one's own." Unable to create a space or to find a place where he could, at least, try and cope with social pressures, Septimus chooses to take his own life, an act of both defiance and escape. Clarissa, too, could have lived the life she thinks of so much



with Sally, the only person she thinks of while pondering on the subject of true love. She cannot see herself in a place where such illicit happiness is possible.

Instead of creating a “place of their own,” Septimus and Clarissa capitulate to the social order that has located them so rigidly in its spatial and social hierarchy. In suicide, Septimus escapes, and Clarissa even seems to admire him for it when she hears the news, but this escape is not into a place of freedom. Clarissa remains within her gilded panoptic order, which accentuates the degree to which her “place” is not truly “her own.” I will discuss Woolf’s conception of a woman’s need of a room in order to write, to be creative. Although neither Clarissa nor Septimus need a room to create, I believe they need a place where they can actually dream of a past that live in their memory. Then, I will bring Bachelard’s concept of “the house” as a place of imagination in order to show that, even if the space Clarissa and Septimus need does not exist within their social spaces, the house in which Bachelard speaks of is a place where Clarissa and Septimus may imagine a life without the social norms present in their society (*The Poetics of Space* viii). This way, they might be able to reconcile the conflict between their inner, mental states and the outer, physical spaces of their social spheres, thus making them better able to make sense of, or to map, their worlds.

Overall, I not only establish the idea that there is a disjunction between inner and outer, or psychological and physical spaces, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, but I prove that, in her work, Woolf achieves the ultimate goal of “criticiz[ing] the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense” when writing her novel (*A Writer’s Diary* 57). That is, by placing complex characters in one social space and providing their innermost thoughts,

Woolf, masterfully, shows how difficult life can be, but most important, she gets to the core of what it means to be human, love, and desire.

## II. DISPLACING SEPTIMUS:

### TRAUMA, SPATIAL NARRATIVE, AND THE MEDICAL GAZE

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith thinks, "[i]t must be the fault of the world then—that he could not feel" (*MD* 88). This is just one of many examples of Woolf's intricate narrative style as she places complex characters within the same space and, through her use of stream-of-consciousness and free indirect style, gives readers direct access to characters' personal thoughts. In a diary entry referring to the novel, Woolf wrote, "In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticize the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense" (*A Writer's Diary* 57). Although *Mrs. Dalloway* depicts a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, I believe that the novel is just as much about a day in Septimus's life. By looking at trauma, the uncanny, and the medical gaze, I will perform a spatial reading of the novel highlighting Septimus's relationship to space and place. My reading is not limited to a single space or place (e.g., Bond Street in London), but rather, I want to examine how Septimus's traumatic experiences of war and his return to London afterwards inform his interior and exterior spaces.

In *Moving through Modernity*, Andrew Thacker pursues "an investigation into the spatial history of modernism, an account of the precise historical fashion in which particular spaces and places were conceptualized" (4). Historical events such as the rise of industrialism, the Great War, and others impacted a writer's physical world. Writers, then, talked about these events in their work. More important, their narratives represented the clash between the physical and metaphorical spaces created by such incidents. These

new experiences called for new narrative techniques. For instance, according to Thacker, stream-of-consciousness

represents a model to explore the psychic spaces of character. Narrative techniques such as interior monologue thus offer a method for moving between inner thoughts and outer reality, an approach requiring another sense of spatial terms: *inner*, *outer* and the *boundary* between these. We also need to consider how the interiority of psychic space is often profoundly informed by exterior social spaces. (5)

While in London, for example, Septimus observes his exterior spaces, that is, the places he encounters in the city, and his inability to communicate with others causes him to dwell almost exclusively within his interior space, that is to say, his mind.

After the war, Septimus returns home to England and, suffering from shell-shock, he is unable to connect with the world and with those who try to help him. As Karen Demeester has observed in “Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Obstacles to Postwar Recovery in *Mrs. Dalloway*,” “Modernist literature is a literature of trauma. In the 1920s, it gave form and representation to a psychological condition that psychiatrists would not understand for another fifty years” (77). Indeed, modernist literature depicts cultural and historical events of the time, and according to Morag Shiach, “gives expression to historical changes or historical traumas (such as the First World War)” (4). Trauma, then, becomes a predominant motif present in modernist novels; it gives writers like Woolf an opportunity to discuss the impact of trauma within a society as well as upon the individual itself. In her 1925 essay “Modern Fiction,” Woolf defines modern art as “an improvement upon the old”; she encourages her fellow writers to write about

“what interests and move them” (150). This interest, Woolf indicates, “lies very likely in *the dark places of psychology*” (152; my emphasis). Woolf’s characterization of Septimus Smith gives way to the exploration of these “dark places of psychology,” providing readers with direct access to this character’s thoughts and emotions.

### **“Shell-Shock,” Society, and the Problem of Psychology**

Although the focus of this chapter is on the displacement of Septimus, a brief discussion on how society perceived such an illness as shell-shock will help us understand Septimus’s situation. Many of the soldiers who served during the First World War returned home suffering from shell-shock. As Ted Bogacz explains in “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock,’” “[c]oncussion from exploding shells was the earliest remarked cause of war neurosis, hence the name ‘shell-shock.’ Of far greater consequence, however, was the strain of serving in the inhuman conditions of trench warfare and exhaustion which followed from the soldier’s inability to obtain sleep in the line” (233). In addition to these “inhuman” conditions, many soldiers witnessed the mutilations and annihilations of comrades, while society’s and doctors’ perceptions vis-à-vis shell-shock did not necessarily recognize the seriousness of the condition. According to Bogacz, it is not until 1914 that the attitude towards mental illness shifts. Before 1914, shell-shock, in the eyes of English society, “was a legal, medical and moral half-way house in a society used to clear division between the mad and the sane” (229). Soldiers were looked down upon by society and mistreated by doctors, the very individuals in

charge of helping them overcome the traumatic experience of war. Psychologists had total control of those who suffered from shell-shock. Proper treatment, if there was one, seemed nonexistent. According to Bogacz, “There was widespread acceptance among English psychologists ‘that insanity was a disorder of the mind’ resulting from a structural or functional lesion of the ‘organ of the mind,’ that is, ‘the brain’” (229-230). Psychologists therefore ignored any “irrational” mental symptoms and only focused on the physical conditions of their patients (230). What’s more, those who suffered from shell-shock “were seen as morally depraved, willful and egotistic” (231). Today, it is difficult for one to accept and understand the fact that doctors, instead of showing sympathy for the soldiers, actually regarded them as egotists, even cowards.

Society’s and doctors’ ignorance about mental illness and their indifference for the soldiers was so pronounced that the British parliament intervened. Lord Southborough, a member of parliament, was the first to assemble a motion so that parliament could address the hitherto unacknowledged condition that was shell-shock. In an address to the House of Lords on April 28, 1920, Lord Southborough moved for the establishment of a committee to investigate the mental disease, stating that:

The subject of shell-shock cannot be referred to with any pleasure. All would desire to forget it – to forget . . . the roll of insanity, suicide, and death; to bury our recollections of the horrible disorder . . . But, my Lords, we cannot do this, because a great number of cases of those who suffer from shell-shock and its allied disorders are still upon our hands and they deserve our sympathy and care. (qtd. in Bogacz 227; first ellipses in original)

The committee, which was comprised of doctors, former soldiers, and medical officers, met for eight months to discuss shell-shock and those wrongfully put to death because of cowardice. One of the medical officers recounted a major breakdown “after a series of shock had warned him that he was near breaking-point, it was the sight of a line of horses belonging to dead comrades which had lead him to crack” (Bogacz 247). This testimony, along with that of many others, helped create the *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock* in 1922 (227). The *Report* helped many understand the mysterious mental illness; more important, it attempted to find proper treatment for shell-shock. Although doctors rejected Freudian psychoanalysis, many “supporte[d] a therapy which was ‘both physical and mental in its aims’” (242).

The *Report* also placed doctors in complete control over their patients. Doctors, according to the *Report*, must employ “six forms of simplified ‘psychotherapeutic treatment’ often used in the war: (1) persuasion; (2) explanation; (3) suggestion; (4) analysis; (5) re-education; (6) occupation” (qtd. in Bogacz 243). In addition to these six steps, which assured a doctor’s control over patients, the members of the committee believed “rest of mind and body [was] essential in all cases” (242). Rest, just as those who were part of the committee on the *Report*, is exactly what Bradshaw suggests Septimus needs. Bradshaw says, “It was merely a question of rest . . . of rest, rest, rest; a ling rest in bed” (*MD* 96). Rest will allow doctors and nurses to “re-educate” Septimus and place him in a position where, one day, he may be allowed to enjoy the spaces of London. The decision to place Septimus in a home will allow doctors to “analy[ze]” him and his condition. Other steps described in the report is similar to the treatment Sir William Bradshaw plans to use on Septimus. While he talks to Septimus, Bradshaw

employs other steps involved in the “simplified psychotherapeutic treatment.” Bradshaw tries to persuade Septimus to stop thinking of himself,

“Try to think as little about yourself as possible,” said Sir William kindly. Really he was not fit to be about. Was there anything they wished to ask him? Sir William would make all arrangements (he muttered to Rezia) and he would let her know between five and six that evening he murmured. “Trust everything to me,” he said, and dismissed them. Never, never had Rezia felt such agony in her life! She had asked for help and been deserted! He had failed them! Sir William was not a nice man. (*MD* 98)

From the moment the conversation begins, Bradshaw uses step one of the “psychotherapeutic treatment,” persuasion. As he tells the frantic Septimus to think of himself “as little as possible.” The chances of Septimus has to “think” about himself are very slim, since he senses that “human nature is on [him]” (98). Although Septimus suffers from severe shell-shock, he is uncomfortable around Bradshaw. He knows that the place in which Bradshaw wishes to place him will not ameliorate the situation. It is no surprise to see Septimus feel so uneasy around Bradshaw; after all, he has no chance to communicate or express what he feels. Even when he tries to speak, “I—I—’,” Septimus is stopped short by Bradshaw, who tells him not to “think.” Woolf’s use of indirect discourse displays step number 2, explanation, when exposing Bradshaw’s thoughts regarding Septimus, “Really, he was not fit to be about.” Notice that such explanation is neither given to Septimus nor Rezia, Bradshaw thinks this to himself, as he rushes along to make the, proper or best, arrangements to help Septimus mental condition. The third step, suggestion, is seen when Bradshaw suggest to “make all of the arrangements” and to



“trust everything to [him].” These explanations, which sound more like a manipulation are the short answers given to Rezia. She remains uneasy because she knows Septimus dislikes doctors, but most important, she is not pleased with Bradshaw’s curt answers. Instead of help, Rezia feels “deserted,” helpless. Additionally, the more questions Rezia asks, the more Bradshaw dismisses her; he simply asks her to “trust” all of the arrangements to him, the doctor. The scene is a great example of the steps taken by the doctors who put the *Report* together. They vehemently believed that such treatment was, in fact, the proper treatment and were placed in complete control of the patient. Septimus, while at the “delightful home down in the country,” would be subject the rest cure. He would have almost no communication with the outside world and under complete control of doctors and nurses. This compulsory “rest” was an element of psychiatric treatment that Woolf herself would find particularly odious.

Sue Thomas, in “Virginia Woolf’s Septimus Smith and Contemporary Perceptions of Shell-Shock,” discusses Woolf’s knowledge of the *Report* and claims that Septimus Smith may be read as “a topical reflection of her angry response to *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-shock’*” (49). Thomas indicates that sections of the *Report*, especially those dealing with proper treatment and the relationship between doctor and patient, “informs Woolf’s characterization and development of Septimus” (49). Woolf’s “habitual” reading of the *Report* familiarized her with the values and findings of the War office Committee (51). Therefore, when writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf has the chance to criticize the committee’s decision on how to treat individuals like Septimus. In addition, Woolf unapologetically criticizes the institution of medicine and those in charge of patients. The doctors’ complete control over those who suffered

from mental illness created a toxic atmosphere where sympathy for a patient was nonexistent. We see an example of control and lack of sympathy in Septimus's doctors, Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw; they represent the psychiatrists who, in lieu of compassion, patience, understanding, and a respect for personal space, vital criteria for a successful recovery, attempt to isolate and confine Septimus. Bradshaw is a significant character in *Mrs. Dalloway*, as he represents the institution of medicine, but most important, he is the figure of reason and power. In her novel, Woolf delineates the power relationship between Bradshaw and Septimus. In the eyes of British society, Bradshaw represents sanity. Septimus, on the other hand, embodies insanity; any attempt to express an opinion about his condition is ignored. Bradshaw makes decisions for Septimus and never takes a moment to listen to him.

Woolf, like her fictional character, suffered from mental illness and depression. In addition to medication, Woolf was subject to the rest cure "during her own mental breakdowns in 1913 and 1915" (Thomas 49). During such time, Woolf was placed in a nursing home and was under the supervision of nurses and psychologists, who dictated her daily activities, which were close to none. Woolf had limited time for writing and no direct access to family or friends. In a letter to E. M. Forster, Woolf writes, "I should like to growl to you about all this damned lying in bed and doing nothing, and getting up and writing half a page and going to bed again" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. II* 499). Because of the motifs present in her personal letters and diary entries, I think that when writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf criticizes the institution of psychiatric medicine and the contemporary attitude towards mental illness. The author's intricate narrative style creates an explicit distinction between interior and exterior spaces, and a spatial approach

to the novel reveals the psychological disjunction between Septimus's interior and exterior spaces. I argue that Septimus's inability to connect with the exterior spaces or fully to recover is a result of the endless pressure he receives from doctors; thus he distances himself from the world and later commits suicide.

### **Uncanny Spaces**

The similarities between shell shock and spatial disorientation can be perceived in the disjunction between Septimus's experience of his interior and exterior spaces. Septimus's comportment varies throughout the novel as Woolf's narrative style creates disparate spaces and places coinciding with the character's behavior and state of mind. In his discussion of "literary cartography," Robert T. Tally Jr. has argued that narrative is a form of "world-making":

As narrators or writers survey the territory they wish to describe, they weave together disparate elements in order to produce the narrative, and these elements may include scraps of other narratives, descriptions of people or places, images derived from first-hand observation as well as from secondary reports, legends, myths, and inventions of the imagination. In producing this patchwork representation of a world (that is, the narrative itself), the narrator also invents or discovers the world represented in the narrative. (49)

Woolf, therefore, is a sort of mapmaker. She uses stream-of-consciousness and free indirect discourse to provide readers with direct access to a given character's thoughts,

and these narrative tools help to “form” the world that the character and the reader sees. In this way, one detects the interior and exterior spaces Thacker speaks of in *Moving through Modernity*.

When discussing interior and exterior spaces, I am referring to the inner, psychological spaces of a character’s mind and the physical, outer spaces of the environment in which the character inhabits as each of these are created by, and represented in, Woolf’s narrative. Thus Tally’s statement about the writer as a mapmaker pertains to Woolf’s depiction of how Septimus sees and feels the spaces around him. Even though he spends time in exterior, physical places such as Regent’s Park, Septimus feels *some* comfort within the confines of his psychological, interior space, where he can be left alone with his thoughts. When he spends time in public, Septimus does not socialize much, if at all. While at Regent’s park, Septimus hallucinates about Evans, a dead friend from the war: “There was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings!” (*MD* 25). In this specific passage, we see Woolf combine stream of consciousness and free indirect discourse in order to emphasize Septimus’s inability to acclimatize himself to the world around him. He is haunted by these memories and hallucinations, which interfere with his own sense of place in the landscape of London. Stream of consciousness places us inside Septimus’s interior space thus allowing to read his thoughts, while free indirect discourse, indicated by the exclamation point, reveals the urgency with which the thought affects him. The narrative tools reveal Septimus’s perturbed psychological condition. What is more, it illustrates the character’s anxiety and inability to make sense of this, now, strange world.

Septimus's inability to "feel" the world around him and his difficulty in reintegrating into the once, familiar spaces of London calls to mind Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny. In "The Uncanny," Freud draws on the linguistic underpinnings of the German words *unheimlich* (translated "uncanny") and *heimlich* ("homely"), stating, "The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich* meaning 'familiar,' 'native,' 'belonging to the home'; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar" (219). In this sense, the uncanny can pertain to a place, thing, even a novel experience unknown to us. For example, the home, for Freud, is a familiar place, while the uncanny or unfamiliar, is something that should have been kept a secret but is revealed. Freud continues, "We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening or uncanny" (220).

Tally in *Spatiality* tackles the uncanny while exploring literary cartography and the theory of "the writer as a mapmaker" (46). As he draws upon the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, George Lukács, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and others, Tally suggests that the novel is a form of "literary cartography" (47). That is, writers, especially the modernists, portray the ongoing changes within their world in their narratives. According to Tally, "the novel is a response to a condition of 'transcendental homelessness,'" Lukács's term, and as a writer depicts these new spaces and places in his narrative, he "make[s] his own existence intelligible and meaningful" (47). This feeling of transcendental homelessness is somewhat like that which Heidegger perceives as an existential condition of one's being in the world. As Tally continues, "In Heidegger's view, the experience of being in the world is occasioned by an intense anxiety and a sense of the uncanny" (47). Citing Heidegger rather than Freud, Tally observes that the

*unheimlich* “actually suggests an ‘unhomeliness,’ and Heidegger writes that the feeling of anxiety (or, in German, *angst*) is fundamentally a sense of not being ‘at home’ in the world” (47). This profound anxiety, a generalized feeling of “not-being-at-home,” seems manifest in Septimus, who can no longer feel comfortable and safe in London.

As Woolf’s characterization of Septimus progresses, the disjunction between the interior and exterior spaces becomes clear. Stream-of-consciousness allows us to witness Septimus’s thoughts:

He looked at people outside; happy they seemed. . . . But he could not taste, he could not feel. In the teashop among the tables and the chattering waiters the appalling fear came over him—he could not feel. He could reason; he could read, Dante for example, quite easily . . . he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world he could not feel. (*MD* 87-88)

This is an important moment as the reader witnesses an instant of lucidity for Septimus, though brief. Septimus realizes the significant distance between him, the people, and exterior spaces around him. Notice, however, how he observes people’s emotions and admits his inability to “taste” and “feel.” He is aware of what he sees, but he questions his *inability* to feel. At this moment, Septimus experiences his “being in the world . . . occasioned by an intense anxiety and a sense of the uncanny” as Tally had characterized it (47).

In addition to not feeling, the “appalling fear” that comes over Septimus correlates to the feeling of not being at home in the world. According to Demeester, “During combat, indifference is a survival tool that protects the psyche from being

overwhelmed by war's horrifying assault upon the senses" (82). Demeester makes an important observation; however, I find it difficult to believe that he feels indifference towards people and things all around him. The passage clearly indicates the doubts and questions looming Septimus's mind. Although he notices everything around him, Septimus remains within the confines of his own mind and connection between him and others is nonexistent.

### **The Medical Gaze**

This disjunction between Septimus's interior and exterior spaces also affects his relationships with those in charge of treatment, Dr. Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw. Septimus knows he can reason, but in the eyes of others, he is not fit for society. Holmes and Bradshaw are among those who believe Septimus does not belong in the exterior, physical spaces of London, even his own home, a safe exterior space. Indeed, Dr. Holmes and Bradshaw use their knowledge as doctors to *produce* Septimus as a madman because he threatens to kill himself. Exerting their power over the patient, these medical practitioners effectively "place" Septimus where they think he belongs, in terms both of his place in the madness-to-sanity spectrum and of his location in England (by assigning him to a mental asylum or rest home).

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault examines power relations in modern societies. As Foucault puts it, "power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organizations" (92). The "multiplicity of force relations

immanent to” the sphere of psychiatric medicine, in this case, determines the “truth” of Septimus’s madness. One sees an example of what Foucault describes when Dr. Holmes visits Septimus at his home, an exterior, safe space. As he examines the young man, Holmes says, “So you’re in a funk” (*MD* 92). Notice the insensitive tone in which doctor addresses patient as he enters the room. Instead of showing sympathy towards Septimus’s sensitive condition, Dr. Holmes makes it sound as though feeling “in a funk” is unacceptable. Such callousness proves a doctor’s ignorance about mental illness during this era. Dr. Holmes’s insensitive attitude will only exacerbate Septimus’s condition and expand the disjunction between interior and exterior spaces even more.

Woolf’s critique of the institution of psychiatric medicine manifests itself clearly when Dr. Holmes appears in the novel. During his visit to Septimus’s home, Dr. Holmes asks many questions and shows no compassion: “Didn’t one owe perhaps a duty to one’s wife? Wouldn’t it be better to do something instead of lying in bed? For he had had forty years’ experience behind him; and Septimus could take Dr. Holmes for it—there was nothing whatever the matter with him” (*MD* 92). Septimus’s exterior spaces do not necessarily have a negative impact on him; however, those who are part of these spaces do. According to Bogacz, “doctors agreed that all cases of shell-shock ‘should be viewed with suspicion’” (244). Holmes, in this scene, does not ask *how* can he help or *why* Septimus feels “in a funk.” Instead, he treats Septimus as though he is suspicious of his condition and as if he is a child; the behavior indicates the spatial hierarchy between doctor and patient. Such attitude displays the inegalitarian power relation between Septimus and Holmes. Holmes’s visit to Septimus’s home can be perceived as an invasion of Septimus’s private space and the doctor’s presence has a negative impact in



Septimus's already damaged psychological state. Woolf's narrative provides access to his thoughts: "So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot" (*MD* 92). Woolf's use of free indirect discourse indicates several things. The first is that although mentally ill, Septimus realizes no one fully understands him; the second is the pressure "to do something"; and last, such pressure causes Septimus to feel as though he is a burden to those around him. Septimus, who has been to battle, finds himself in another war against the individuals who are part of his social space, particularly Holmes and Bradshaw.

Holmes's presence, as we know, has a negative impact on Septimus. Sir William Bradshaw's, however, becomes the death of Septimus. Woolf's narrative style allows her to criticize established structures of authority, and it becomes clear her target is the medical institutions and those in charge of treatment. Bradshaw's character represents control and social order, and he might well have been typical of his time. As Bogacz points out in his study of "shell-shock" and its treatment, "physicians felt obliged to assert their authority over the 'deluded' . . . patient" (230). As a well-known psychiatrist, Bradshaw inspires the respect of his colleagues, the fear of his patients and subordinates, and is praised for his achievements (DiBattista 47). I am not saying that he uses his power as a doctor to suppress Septimus, but I think power, in this sense, allows him to keep individuals like Septimus and the experiences of trauma away from the eyes of society. Woolf's rhetoric proves it, as may be seen in the following passage:

Health we must have; and health is proportion; so that when a man comes into your room and says he is Christ (a common delusion), and has a

message as they mostly have, and threatens, as they often do, to kill himself, you invoke proportion; order rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends; without books, without messages; six month's rest. (*MD* 99)

As a physician, Bradshaw feels it is his responsibility to maintain “proportion” in British society. Woolf’s narrative places us inside Bradshaw’s mind, and we are thereby able to witness Bradshaw’s conviction that rest cure is the only treatment for mental illness. As Demeester points out: “‘Proportion’ is the rhetoric of the dominant culture, and Bradshaw silences or converts those who threaten Proportion or an England prospering under its auspices” (86). Bradshaw, then, defends the social order; he is part of England’s social forces that “secludes her lunatics . . . penalizes despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they too, shared his sense of proportion” (*MD* 99). Woolf’s social commentary shines through her rhetoric and establishes opinions about psychology and Europe’s social system, a critique she maintains in other works throughout her career.

While at Septimus’s home, Bradshaw converses with the young man’s wife. Unlike Holmes, Bradshaw neither speaks to nor approaches Septimus until he makes a decision regarding treatment. As he talks to Rezia, Bradshaw exercises his medical powers and indicates that Septimus is “not fit to be about” (*MD* 98). Bradshaw is adamant about where Septimus must go: “There was a delightful home down in the country where her husband would be perfectly looked after. Away from her? she asked. But he was not mad, was he? Sir William said he never spoke of ‘madness’; he called it not having a sense of proportion” (*MD* 96). The “delightful home,” in this case, is an

asylum, a social institution maintained in order to treat mental illness. I would argue that by displacing Septimus from his *own* home, Bradshaw will cause additional damage to his already chaotic state of mind.

Septimus's psychological state of mind deteriorates when he discovers Bradshaw's decision. As if awakened by the tumult of war, Septimus realizes the severity and the likely consequences of his commitment to a mental asylum. Free indirect discourse indicates Septimus's anger: "'Must,' 'must,' *why* 'must'? *what power* had Bradshaw over him? 'What right has Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?'" (*MD* 147; emphasis added). While in his home, a homely space, Septimus no longer hallucinates. He actively thinks and is furious when realizing he is "in their power" (*MD* 147). Bradshaw could be said to represent that invisible "disciplinary power" Foucault speaks of in *Discipline and Punish*, and Bradshaw specifically tells Rezia that the country home is a place where Septimus may be observed (*MD* 96), which is also suggestive of the panoptic disciplinary practices described by Foucault. The "delightful home" Bradshaw describes is like the Panopticon, a space where Septimus will be observed from every angle and be subject to "the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, *Discipline* 201).

## **Conclusion**

Although he realizes Bradshaw's intention, Septimus never has a chance to express himself to anyone. Suicide then, I would argue, is a form of communication, the only one that Septimus feels is still available to him. Free indirect discourse provides us with Septimus's last thoughts:

There remained only the window, the large Bloomsbury-lodging house window, the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). . . . He *did not want to die. Life was good.* The sun was hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it to you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings. (*MD* 149; emphasis added, except for "they")

Woolf, at this moment, accomplishes her goal: to "show the social system at work" (57). The author places doctor and patient together to emphasize the fatal impact of society's social structures upon her character and those like him. Free indirect discourse and stream-of-consciousness displays a moment of courage and, in a way, enlightenment. That is, Septimus is fully aware of the doctor's decision to displace him from his home, an exterior, homely space. Septimus decision to commit suicide becomes an act of resistance to the power of London's social system; but most important, it is a protest against it. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault says, "Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most 'private'" (138). In his final moment, Septimus arguably creates for himself the small space of freedom, a "room of one's own" in a way, that he was unable to find in a world transformed both by his own traumas and by the medical-political system in which he is

placed. In his ultimate *displacement*, he discovers, perhaps too late, a space in which his inner and outer experiences align to his satisfaction.

### **III. PLACING CLARISSA: IDEOLOGY, SEXUALITY, AND MEMORY**

Whereas Septimus, as we already have seen, is “displaced” by the power of what Foucault has referred to as “the medical gaze,” Clarissa is all too narrowly “placed” in an acceptable space, as per London’s social norms. In other words, Clarissa’s situation in both the social space of London and, more metaphorically, in her role in the society as a woman of a certain class is strictly circumscribed by the conventions of that society. Alex Zwerdling, in “*Mrs. Dalloway* and the Social System,” has observed that, “In novels like *Night and Day*, *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Years*, and *Between the Acts*, Woolf is deeply engaged by the question of how the individual is shaped (or deformed) by his social environment . . . by how class, wealth, and sex help determine his fate” (69). Woolf’s novel is set in “a day in June 1923, five years after the First World War” (70), and each individual who lives in Woolf’s London at the time experiences such spaces in a different way. In this chapter, I will examine Clarissa’s place within the social spaces of London, as well as her own states of mind which sheds light on her interior or mental spaces.

Clarissa is a woman who, one could say, acts the part. She is married to a distinguished politician, the conservative Member of Parliament Richard Dalloway; she throws parties and invites the most prominent figures of London’s high society; she dresses well; she has servants, a fine home, and just about everything that a woman who enjoys the lifestyle of the rich and famous might desire or need. However, although she is married and well taken care of, Clarissa’s freedom is limited. The way she carries herself, not to mention what she thinks to herself in her constant reflections throughout the novel,

does not reveal what she thinks of within the interior spaces of her mind. She, rather, acts and behaves in a way that is acceptable to those other members of the upper class in England during that era. One might say that Clarissa acts the part of the wealthy, upper-class, elite wife and mother by keeping up appearances. Clarissa's happiness is a different matter. While she is not always certain about whether she is unhappy or not, she constantly thinks about the past, reflecting upon chances not taken, irreversible decisions, among other questions.

### **Ideologies of Marriage and Compulsory Heterosexuality**

In this past that so occupies Clarissa's mental activities in the novel, Peter Walsh and Sally Seton loom large, as they seem to represent alternative lives Clarissa may have led, which in turn might have been happier outcomes. But, in her own view, she seems to think these options were not really available. One could say that Clarissa's conformity to the social norms of her society requires that she "marry well" and maintain a heterosexual relationship, such that Peter's unsuitability and Sally's gender made them equally out of the question, even if each represents, in Clarissa's memories, a potential lover or companion. Clarissa is revealed by Woolf to be a slave of social convention, who was almost equally concerned with class and propriety even to the detriment of her own self and happiness. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf critiques and challenges the prevalent ideology within the social spaces of her own society (which is to say, Clarissa's society as well). Gender, marriage, women's education, and heterosexuality are the main topics Woolf

examines in that text. When talking about women that have been raised to remain within the interior, physical spaces of the home, Woolf says,

It was with a view to marriage that her mind was taught. It was with a view to marriage that she tinkled on the piano, but was not allowed to join an orchestra; sketched innocent domestic scenes, but was not all allowed to study from the nude; read this book, but was not allowed to read that, charmed, and talked. It was with a view to marriage that her body was educated; a maid was provided for her; that the streets were shut to her; that the fields were shut to her; that solitude was denied to her—all this was enforced upon her in order that she might preserve her body intact for her husband. In short, the thought of marriage influenced what she said, what she thought, what she did. How could it be otherwise? Marriage was the only profession open to her. (48)

If we apply Woolf's feminist observation of a woman's place according to society, we clearly see that her characterizations of Clarissa correlates to social expectations. That is, a woman, since birth, was, indeed, raised to marry a man that could take care of her, financially and otherwise. Such man, according to these social norms, must have a respectable job and financial means to take care of his wife. The woman of this class, on the other hand, must serve her husband, children, and be what society expects her to be. She has no physical space, where she can be truly alone; rather, her "privacy" is carefully monitored by matrons, servants, instructors, and other aides, who operate as if in a conspiracy to ensure that the young woman grows up to be properly marriageable.



When thinking about Clarissa, we could see that she is raised to be married. Although she had an eligible candidate in her childhood friend Peter Walsh, Clarissa chooses to marry Richard Dalloway. The main reason Clarissa chooses Richard over Peter is because of Peter's needy personality. For she believes that "in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in and day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him" (*MD* 8). Indeed, Clarissa's relationship with Richard is more mature, if one may say, than the one she once had with Peter. Peter's personality, his neediness, and his constant arguments become a nuisance to Clarissa. Peter is financially stable and could have taken care of Clarissa, but his personality negatively impacts Clarissa's perceptions of him. For example, when remembering Peter, Clarissa thinks,

But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break up with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced; though she had borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief. (*MD* 8)

When she thinks of Peter, Clarissa recalls aspects of his personality that annoy her. What is more, notice the frustration Clarissa feels when she remembers that "with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into." Clarissa knows that, had she stayed with Peter, she might have been financially secure, but with no time for herself as she does while married to Richard. As she thinks of Peter, Clarissa feels nostalgic, but soon realizes that the decision she had made is best, as she knows "they would have been destroyed," had they remained together.

Clarissa's decision to marry, in general, is because she is part of a society that enforces heterosexuality upon an individual. Adrienne Rich, in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," points out that

Women have married because it was necessary, in order, to survive economically, in order to have children would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to do what was expected of women . . . and because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment.  
(654)

Indeed, Clarissa does what she needs to do for survival, at least in terms of what is acceptable for a woman of her rank and class. Along these lines, more importantly, her sexual preference is dictated by the norms of her society. Clarissa, therefore, is a victim of compulsory heterosexuality and "the social institutions that oppresses women" (Barrett 1). Compulsory heterosexuality, in this case, is the ideology within a society that women must only have heterosexual relationships. Thus, Clarissa must marry, but in order to remain "respectable," she must marry a man, not a woman. (Of course, same sex marriage was not legal at this time, but even more informal homosexual relationships were generally prohibited or forced to remain hidden, the subject of rumor or scandal.) Any erotic feelings towards women on Clarissa's part were not to be acted upon in real life. I am not saying that the relationships between women did not exist in twentieth-century London, but, because of the ideology of compulsory heterosexuality, it was difficult for them to have an open relationship with a woman. The ideology and "the cluster of forces within it" help to shape the social spaces in which Clarissa lives and

moves, and these forces convince her that a heterosexual relationship is the only acceptable option (Rich 640).

Clarissa continues to mediate upon marriage and her own place in society as she walks towards Bond Street. The “blasé urbanite,” as Eric Bulson indicates, does not feel the direct effects of the war, as some might; rather, she ponders decisions she has made based on the values created, nourished, and sustained by the social class of which she is a part (133). She thinks,

Much rather would she have been one of those people like Richard who did things for themselves, whereas, she thought, waiting to cross, half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that; perfect idiocy she knew (and now the policeman held up his hand) for no one was ever for a second taken in. Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently! (*MD* 10).

As Clarissa walks the exterior spaces of London, she thinks of Richard and, in a way, envies his ability to see “things” for what they are. The disjunction between Clarissa’s inner and outer spaces is clear as she realizes, while walking on Bond Street that, unlike Richard, she cannot be herself in these places. She is fully aware, and a bit ashamed, of her conformity and her inability to do “things” because *she* wants to. Woolf’s use of stream of consciousness at the end of the passage reveals Clarissa’s personal thoughts about her decisions. Significantly, the moment is one of self-confession: “she thought, waiting to cross, half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that.” Indeed, even though we could agree that Clarissa appears

happy and comfortable, it is evident in this particular passage, which shows Clarissa going on about her day that she contemplates past decisions with some measure of anxiety or regret.

In “Mrs. Dalloway, Here, There, Everywhere,” Bulson observes that Clarissa “retreats from the hustle and bustle of the physical environment by turning inwards for protection” (133). Although Bulson makes a good observation, I do not necessarily think Clarissa turns inwards for protection; rather, this “turning inwards” is a way to evaluate her own life and, possibly, for Clarissa to dream of what life would be like had she not conformed to social norms. Everything she thinks of in this passage indicates the constant state of contemplation in which Clarissa finds herself. As Bulson continues, “Taken on its own, Clarissa’s mediation . . . is highly personalized and very much bound up with existential questions involving [her] life” (138). Indeed, Clarissa questions her decisions, and Woolf’s use of free indirect discourse emphasizes her unhappiness, as the reader is able to experience Clarissa’s feelings when she thinks about the possibility of “hav[ing] her life over again!” The urgency of such thought presents itself as an epiphanic moment for Clarissa. It is perhaps ironic that, as she walks to buy flowers for the party, a happy gathering for all involved, one would assume, Clarissa realizes how unhappy she truly is. In addition, this passage raises the question of marriage and one’s identity. As she walks through her exterior spaces, Clarissa realizes that her decision to marry Richard has, in some ways, caused her to forfeit her own identity. In giving us access to Clarissa’s inmost thoughts, Woolf demonstrates how the social convention of taking one’s husband’s name at marriage symbolically effaces the personal identity of the bride:

She had the oddest sense of being *herself invisible, unseen; unknown*; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; *this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway*. (MD 11; my emphasis).

The passage addresses the social norms, which continue to predominate in certain societies today. According to these norms, women must marry, have children, and adopt a persona associated with this role of wife and mother as her chief attributes. As Thomas Peels indicates in *Queering Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa “is a practical girl . . . she recognizes that her future and her financial well being are predicated on attachment to a man who can provide things for her” (208). Although we are aware that Clarissa enjoys being taken care of, it does not necessarily mean she is a happy woman.

As she advances through Bond Street, Clarissa no longer thinks of the present. The walk to the flower shop, even though she sees and talks to people along the way, is constantly being disrupted by Clarissa’s thoughts about the past. The conversation between Clarissa and Hugh seems rather short, for example, because as he talks to him, Peter Walsh comes to mind. She thinks, “If he were here with me right now what would he say?—some days, some nights, bring him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness. . . . It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope’s poetry, people’s characters eternally, and the defects of her own soul. How he scolded her! How they argued!” (MD 7). Hugh, even though he is close to Clarissa, seems to disappear as she thinks of Peter. We are once again placed in the interior spaces of Clarissa’s mind, as she ponders upon Peter’s character. Clearly, she recognizes Peter as a good person; at the

same time however, Clarissa recalls Peter's unpleasant qualities. In addition, Clarissa still upset at the thought of Peter's constant judgment of her own character, which was the cause of much of their arguments.

### **Domestic Space, Memory, and Sexuality**

The friction between Clarissa's interior and exterior spaces become more visible as soon as she arrives in the physical spaces of her home. Clarissa's reaction upon entering the house is not one of relief, but one who enters a space of restriction. One's home is normally associated with warm feelings of familiarity and security, but Clarissa's sensations upon returning to her house reveal an uncanny (or perhaps *unheimlich*, or "unhomely," in the Freudian sense) attitude toward this domestic space. Walking through her own home, "she felt like a nun who has left the world and feels fold around her the familiar veils and the response to old devotions" (*MD* 29). Clarissa's perception of her own house is as though it is another space, a bleak sanctuary apart from "the world." That is, even though the house belongs to physical spaces among London, it is perceived as separate from the other physical spaces of the city. Upon her entrance, the gloomy, cold atmosphere of the house impacts Clarissa's mental state, and she describes the hall as "cool as a vault" (*MD* 29). Clarissa's perception of her house sounds as though the house is dark, lifeless, lonely place. No longer do we see the excited, happy individual who "lov[es] walking in London!" (*MD* 6). Rather, we see someone who understands that the space in which she enters is one of seclusion. Clarissa, when at home, feels as though she is a nun, someone who lives away from civilization and follows "old devotions" present

in her society. (The image of the nun is suggestive, not only of seclusion and order but of privation and sacrifice, in particular the vow of celibacy.) The “old devotions” here be interpreted as ideas correlating to social ideas to which Clarissa conforms. Notice how Clarissa’s thoughts return to her present situation when she arrives to her house, another indication of her unhappiness. Although she prepares for a party at her home, Clarissa does not immerse herself in the preparations. Instead she goes up to a room where she can think to herself, thinking of the present moment, but especially of the past and of the roads not taken in it.

Earlier, I examined Clarissa’s thoughts as she walks on Bond Street. During such walk, Clarissa thinks of her present condition as Mrs. Richard Dalloway and of the possibility to have her life over again. Upon her arrival to the house, Clarissa locks herself in a secluded space. There she continues to think of her present situation; soon after, however, her insistent memories place her, once again, in the past, a time where Sally Seton is present. The narrator describes the moment when Clarissa walks upstairs,

Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. There was an emptiness about the heart of a life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday they must disrobe. She pierced the pincushion and laid her feathered yellow hat on the bed. The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be. (*MD* 31)

Again we see Clarissa being compared to a nun, someone who does not have much contact with the outside world and who is not permitted to be sexual once in such

secluded space. The room, little better than an attic, is the only space where Clarissa can think freely about herself, past, and present. The language used to describe the room highlights Clarissa's loneliness. What is more, the emptiness of the room correlates to the emptiness Clarissa truly feels, even though she has everything she wants. The space she chooses to be alone with her thoughts is akin to how little space Clarissa has for herself or to *be* her true self. "The room was an attic; the bed narrow"; this indicates that the narrative voice, here Clarissa's indirect voice, observes as well as realizes that the spaces she has for herself in fact limit her abilities to be her true self (*MD* 32). Notice Woolf's commentary on Clarissa's social ideas on women: "Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday they must disrobe." Indeed, here Clarissa is doing exactly what the social ideologies expect of women, even if it is simply a moment of rest. While Richard works, Clarissa is in her "attic room" resting (*MD* 31). She is not in *their* bedroom resting; she is in a room that correlates to the loneliness she feels.

Clarissa's sexuality is explored through her friendship with Sally Seton. While still in her "attic" space, Clarissa thinks of Sally. As she is changing clothes and thinking of a humorous incident with her husband Richard, she suddenly interrupts herself with this thought: "But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seaton. Had not that, after all, been love?" (*MD* 32). In turning her thoughts toward Sally, Clarissa implicitly registers the degree to which this private domestic place (the "attic" room) offers a slight freedom, if only the freedom of thought, by which she can consider the homosexual desire that would normally be repressed or kept hidden.



The relationship between Sally and Clarissa resembles much of what Woolf, herself, experienced in her own friendships with a number of women she knew when she was young. Sally Seton's character, in fact, echoes that of Madge Symonds, the daughter of writer John Addington Symonds. According to Hermione Lee, in her biography of Woolf, "Madge was a romantic figure. She was beautiful, intense, unconventional, dashing, sympathetic, and with ambitions as a writer" (159). Like Madge for Virginia, Sally is the unconventional, beautiful, excited, and "adventurous woman" who plays a crucial role in Clarissa's past (Lee 159). Clarissa's character, one could say, partially resembles that of the young, shy, and inexperienced Woolf. Just as Woolf grew apart from the women she admired or loved in her life, Clarissa and Sally grow apart from one another. Even though both Clarissa and Sally grow older, marry, have children, Clarissa still thinks of Sally as a would-be (or would-have-been) lover. In a sense, Clarissa, in rejecting the potentially fulfilling relationship with another woman and marrying a man, not only conforms to the social ideologies of her society, but she represses her homosexual desires for women.

In order to understand Woolf's characterization of Clarissa, I find it valuable to look into Woolf's own life. Like many women who lived during the late Victorian Era and its aftermath, Woolf did not attend college or university; she remained at home and, unlike her brothers, "had no schoolfriends to confide in, no college girls to become intimate with" (Lee 157). Although one could argue that Vanessa Bell was Woolf's closest friend during this period, their relationship suffered as Bell formed her own circle of friends. Lee says, "Many female relationships in the late nineteenth century, evolved in distinction to the segregated educational world of male companionship, were closed and

emotional without any self-consciousness or feeling of shame” (158). While men had the privilege to get out of the private, homely spaces of the home, women remained behind with parents and other female family members. The women whom Woolf tended to befriend were older, independent, and intelligent. These included Emma Vaughan, Madge Symonds, Nelly Cecil, and Violet Dickinson. According to Lee, “The women were all unusual, and they were all older. . . . Their effect on Virginia was consolatory and educative, and it would also be erotic” (158). These women, we could assume, were the first to have an impact on Woolf’s own sexuality. Such relationships provided her an emotional and imaginative space akin to those that the men found while at boarding schools or colleges. She was able to be among her own sex; she was able to be herself; and she enjoyed the company of other women.

Such a space of feminine fellowship became the private and intimate place she did not have at home. As Lee writes,

When Virginia told Violet Dickinson . . . she preferred women, she [was] speaking of the free, private, playful behaviour which such relationships allowed her, as well as of her erotic feelings. Here she could be flirtatious, whimsical, physically demonstrative, demanding hugs, and pettings. . . . And she could speak her mind and show off and talk about herself as she could not with her father or brothers. (158)

Woolf felt there was competition between her and Vanessa Bell; she was also jealous of Bell’s new friends, and often felt lonely. Therefore, with her new friends, Woolf not only finds a space where she could be the center of attention, but she could also be her playful self. They talked about literature, wrote letters to one another, even gave each other nick

names. Dickinson was “a well-connected, benevolent, and helpful single-gentlewoman” (162). What is more, Violet’s patience and kindness was key to Woolf’s mental recovery after Leslie’s death; most important, Violet “played a crucial enabling part in [Woolf’s] early writing” (163). Violet’s support and recognition of Woolf’s talent is important to the young Woolf. I am not saying that Woolf was not encouraged to write by her parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen, only that an encouragement from a person outside of the family reassures Woolf of her talent.

Even though Woolf’s relationships with Violet Dickinson and all the other women do not last a lifetime, she frequently writes about them and mentions women’s attraction to one another in her works. For example, although *A Room of One’s Own* is primarily a feminist essay, which emphasizes the importance of having both money and a room in order to write, Woolf there touches on the subject of lesbianism. As she describes her day at the library where she reads works written by women, Woolf notices that the author Mary Carmichael does something never done before in her reading: she writes about women’s attraction to one another. Woolf says, “Then I must tell you that the very next words I read were these—‘Chloe liked Olivia . . .’ Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women” (89). Woolf, frankly and directly, addresses her audience and asks them to admit that women, in fact, enjoy each other’s company.

Woolf’s own sexuality has been significant topic in literary studies today, as she addresses the taboo directly. As Suzan Harrison states in “Playing with Fire: Women’s sexuality and Artistry in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and Eudora Welty’s *The Golden Apples*,” “Virginia Woolf is a writer in whose work sexuality is, and has been for

over two decades, a major critical concern” (290). In her works, Woolf constantly exposes her readers to the love, friendship, and attraction women feel towards one another. As someone who, in fact, joined the lesbian feminist movement in the nineteenth and twentieth century, Woolf referred to herself as “the mouthpiece of Sapphism” (*Letters* 530). Indeed, according to Eileen Barrett in “Unmasking Lesbian Passion: The Inverted World of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf becomes an advocate to women’s sexual liberation and “spend[s] the last decade of her life immersed in the history of the [feminist] movement” (146). Woolf’s experience in the feminist movement provides her with the opportunity to meet many lesbian feminists who fought for women’s rights and who critiqued both marriage and compulsory heterosexuality.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf explores women’s relationships through Sally Seton and Clarissa. Such a relationship, according to Barrett “exemplifies the kinds of romantic friendships between women that were thriving at the turn-of-the century” (147). Undoubtedly, because of the social ideologies present in her society, Clarissa cannot talk about the intimacy she once had with a woman. The only place she can think about homosexual desire, love, and Sally is in the “attic room”; a secluded space where Clarissa may think of what she pleases (*MD* 31). In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf states, “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (2). Of course, for the purposes of this chapter, I will not bother with the question of writing fiction, as Clarissa does not seem to aspire to becoming a novelist. However, I think that the prerequisites of money and a private space apply to Clarissa. The privilege of being married to an upper-class gentleman such as Richard Dalloway provides her with both

the leisure and a private space, in which to think somewhat freely, includes thinking about her homosexual desire for women. As Clarissa muses to herself,

yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty . . . she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! (31–32)

While in “the attic,” a physical, exterior space, Clarissa thinks of her attraction to women (*MD* 31). The disjunction in Clarissa spaces begin when she thinks of the past while in the room, the only physical space where Clarissa can be herself. What is more, the room is a safe space away from the ideological constraints of her society. The moment unveils Clarissa most personal feelings, emotions, and desires. As she sits alone, Clarissa admits to herself that “she could not resist” a woman’s charm. It seems that only in women does Clarissa find what lacks in her life—passion, desire, even true love. The language in the passage is extremely erotic as Clarissa “blushes,” “quiver[s],” “spread[s],” “yield[s]” to her erotic thoughts. The passage reads as though Clarissa has an orgasm, as she thinks of women. Clarissa feel a desire akin to what men feel towards women, as the thought of women together comes to mind. Such moment, too, is one of self-evaluation, even of

realization for Clarissa, as she admits to herself she “could not resist yielding to the charm of a woman.” We could assume, indeed, that such sexual arousal seldom happens during Clarissa’s day-to-day routine. There is no other moment in the novel where we witness Clarissa feel such longing for anyone, especially Richard. Undeniably, Clarissa questions her position as a married woman who lives in a social space that force women to repress homosexual desires.

Thomas Peele, in “Queering *Mrs. Dalloway*, writes that,

The experience of homosexual desire in Western Culture is often accompanied, at least initially, by a sense of self-alienation. That is, individuals who experience sexual desire for members of their own sex are generally aware, to a greater or lesser extent, that those desires run contrary to the juridical, religious, and social institutions through which [their] culture operates. (205)

Because of the “juridical, religious, and social institutions” present in her social milieu, Clarissa, in a way, leads a lonely, married life. There is no way that she and Sally would be able to have the sort of relationship they once had at this present moment in Clarissa’s life. Although there were homosexuals who built a life together in nineteenth- and twentieth-century England, they had to keep their sexual orientation a secret since “the homosexual person—at least the male—had become the subject of legal, medical, and psychological categorization” (qtd. in Barrett 148). Clarissa must hide her desires for women through marriage and lead a life that correlates to the social norms of her time and place. One could say that such a restrictive ideological and social system is the main reason Clarissa chooses to seclude herself in a room, a place where she could appear to

be herself. Of course, Clarissa's "attic room" in her dour domestic space is not exactly the utopian space imagines as "a room of one's own." But it is a place where, if only briefly and at times, she could think freely of women; it is a place where she can think of the love and emotions she feels for women. Unfortunately, the emotions Clarissa feels must be repressed and remain only in her inner spaces of her mind.

### **Love, Death, and a Room of One's Own**

As noted above, Clarissa thinks of her love for Sally while sitting in this room: "But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?" (*MD* 32). Woolf's use of free indirect discourse indicates Clarissa's doubt, as she questions an emotion that seems unfamiliar to her. One might notice that Richard does not come to mind when she thinks of love, but rather Sally. While she reminiscing about Sally, Clarissa does not hesitate to wonder how she might have "failed" her, and she reflects on the sincerity of her feelings for her would-be lover (*MD* 31). She thinks,

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense in being in league together, a presentiment of

something bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe) which led to this protective feeling. (*MD* 34)

As Clarissa continues to immerse herself in the past, the memories of love and friendship between Sally and her create a disjunction between her inner thoughts and the norms of her social environment. Clarissa realizes that the connection she had with Sally long ago was more meaningful than her relationship with men; it has more depth; it is secure; it is real and “disinterested.”

Peele, when talking about the relationship between Sally and Clarissa, declares, “her interest in Sally is, among other things, erotic” (209). Clarissa’s emotions for Sally are unlike anything she has ever felt for anyone. Clarissa is married to Richard, but the way she thinks of him is completely different from her contemplations on Sally. Clarissa’s memory of Sally reveals something other than just love, whether erotic or platonic; it reveals the camaraderie she and Sally once had. They loathed the thought of marriage, and they looked after one another. The thought and recognition of such friendship indicates what Clarissa does not have with Richard, a true friendship. We are aware that Clarissa’s interest with Richard is more material than sensual. However, when she thinks of Sally, Clarissa recalls love and friendship, something she does not have with her husband. What she does have, however, is “a little independence,” something Richard provides her, aside for the material aspects of their relationship. What is more, Clarissa feels ecstatic when thinking of Sally; it revives her and takes her places she has not been in years: “Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally”



(MD 35). While in the “attic,” Clarissa, once again, is alone with Sally and her memories. She recalls the moment as “the most exquisite” thus indicating this is not something that happens often in her present life. Free indirect discourse shows the excitement Clarissa felt when Sally kissed her, as the “whole world might have turned upside down!”

In the entire novel, we do not see a moment where Clarissa thinks of Richard with such passion as when she thinks of Sally. Even when Richard brings Clarissa flowers, a moment of excitement and love, they are unable to say “I love you” to one another: “Bearing his flower like a weapon, Richard Dalloway approached her; intent he passed her; still there was time for a spark between them—she laughed at the sight of him, he smile good humouredly, considering the problem of the female vagrant” (MD 116). This, I would argue, is the only moment in *Mrs. Dalloway* where Richard and Clarissa show respect to one another; not love, but respect. The flowers, a symbol of love, turns into a shield of protection, not from Clarissa, but to disguise Richard’s coyness. Such moment, although it could have been more intimate, is one of discomfort to both Clarissa and Richard. Neither Clarissa nor Richard say a word to one another. There is a mutual respect between them, but I do not see the love and excitement in this passage as we see in the remembered scene between Sally and Clarissa. If we recall the scene with Sally, Clarissa feels such excitement and vehement emotion upon receiving flowers from Sally. When the flowers come from Richard, there is not kiss; instead, Clarissa “laugh[s] at the sight of him.” Such lack of reaction causes Richard to feel abashed and like her, he does not show any enthusiasm or passion. The thoughts in his mind are not about Clarissa but of a “vagrant” he sees on the street. I must add here that when she thinks of Richard, the only thoughts that come to Clarissa’s mind is that she is *Mrs. Richard Dalloway*. In fact,

when she considers Richard, Clarissa is in her room trying to comprehend how she “had failed him,” and soon after, she has that aforementioned orgasmic experience while she thinks of women (*MD* 31). Sally may be the only individual whom Clarissa *truly* loves or has loved.

Because of her “place” in society, that is, because she lives in and is a member of the upper classes of London in the 1920s, Clarissa’s love for Sally must remain hidden within her inner spaces, the mental spaces of her own desires and memories. Clarissa is free to explore her sexuality and love for Sally only in her memories, while located in this space that allows her to reminisce, since I would argue that the institutional forces present in Clarissa’s exterior spaces, namely the social system in which she is enveloped, restrict her freedom of desire in the real world. Indeed, had not the social norms in Clarissa’s environment forced themselves so severely upon the individual’s consciousness and actions, Clarissa may have not chosen marriage, which we recall, she and Sally had in their young womanhood deemed a “catastrophe.” Even as a good match, far better than Peter Walsh would have been, for instance, her marriage to Richard Dalloway represents a capitulation to social norms and remains a key element of Clarissa’s general unhappiness.

By the same token, other members of Clarissa’s social spaces seek to keep the rigid social norms within their physical and social spaces. I am speaking here of Sir William Bradshaw. He is the personification of such social norms. Bradshaw is a well accomplished doctor, who is respected by many, always evoking “proportion” (*MD* 99). Clarissa is well aware of what this sense of “proportion” means, so it comes to no

surprise that she must repress her sexual desire towards women entirely. In fact, when she sees Bradshaw in her party, Clarissa thinks,

And Sir William, who looked very distinguished, with his grey hair and blue eyes, they had not been able to resist the temptation . . . Why did the sight of him talking to Richard, curl her up? He looked what he was, a great doctor. A man absolutely at the head of his profession, very powerful, rather worn. For think what cases came before him—people in the uttermost depths of misery; people on the verge of insanity; husbands and wives. He had to decide questions of appalling difficulty. Yet—what she felt was, one wouldn't like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; not that man. (*MD* 182)

At this point, Clarissa is out of the “attic room.” Even though she is within the familiar spaces of her home, Clarissa does not seem to be enjoying her party. Rather, she immerses herself in her thoughts. As she looks at Bradshaw, a symbol for order and authority in this case, she recognizes his distinguished place amongst London's social circles and class hierarchy. She is aware of his power as a physician. She also knows that the “cases” in which he deals with are significant, involving people, diseases, and situations that are not to be discussed or brought to public attention in polite conversation. When he reveals the story of a young man who has killed himself (i.e., Septimus), Clarissa initially felt that it was “her disaster—her disgrace,” but then she does not pity the man, who has managed to escape this terrible unhappiness of life, after all (*MD* 185-186). While she looks at Bradshaw, Clarissa questions “[w]hy the sight of him . . . curl her up?” Free indirect discourse, again, indicates the urgency of Clarissa's

thought, but also a certain fear she may feel. Even though Woolf's narrative of Clarissa's thought does not explicitly tell us what the fear may be, we can assume that Clarissa, deep inside, knows she could never talk about her sexual desire towards women with anyone present in her party.

## **Conclusion**

Clarissa Dalloway, we can conclude, will always remain in the inner spaces of her mind because this is the only space where she felt that she could be herself. She, like Septimus, must lead a secluded life in the spaces of her mind, since what they feel and the situations in which they have encountered, displaces them mentally from their social spaces. In *Queering Mrs. Dalloway*, Thomas Peele says, "Clarissa and Septimus finds themselves in postwar London, then, disengaged from the culture in which they live because of the pressure to maintain the secret of homosexual desire" (206). The pressure and prejudices present in Clarissa's exterior spaces prevents her to be fully present in any place or space within London. The only space Clarissa has that is free of social norms and expectations in her inner space of the mind. What both Clarissa and Septimus need, in different ways, is a proper room, where social pressure cannot prevent them for being who they are.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As we have seen in the last two chapters, the disjunction between Septimus's and Clarissa's inner and outer experiences, which may be characterized as interior and exterior spaces, is closely related to their respective anxiety, trauma, or unhappiness. Even though they spend time in the physical, exterior spaces of London, Septimus and Clarissa retreat to their inner, psychological spaces of their mind. The mind, then, becomes a place where both characters can get away from the social pressures that stifle them. We can easily conclude that both Clarissa and Septimus are products of the social spaces and hierarchies of post-Victorian London. Clarissa, for one, conforms to the ideals present in her society. Septimus, too, marries; but shell-shock prevents him from re-integrating into London's social spaces. London's physical, exterior spaces are heavily influenced and, in a way, monitored by prestigious members of the upper class. Doctors, for example, have a strong influence upon Woolf's London not only because of their knowledge as doctors, but because of the service they provide for those who are sick or unfit for London's spaces. Sir William Bradshaw is a respected doctor who seeks "proportion"; he is someone who will do anything to "ma[ke] England prosper" (*MD* 99). In a way, Bradshaw is the only one who can help individuals like Septimus; after all, he wants nothing more than to provide Septimus with a room of his own. When thinking of Clarissa, Bradshaw, if he were to discover about her homosexual desires would probably want to place her in a space where she would be the subject of "psychological categorization" (qtd. in Barrett 148). Drawing from both Woolf's argument in her feminist essay *A Room of One's Own* and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, I argue that Clarissa and Septimus each need a "place of one's own," a sort of utopian

place where they are free, if only for a moment, from the social constraints present in their society.

Trauma is a major theme in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Woolf portrays it especially through her characterization of Septimus Smith. After serving in the Great War, Septimus returns home suffering from severe shell-shock. From the moment he appears in the novel, we immediately detect Septimus's spatial disjunction. Even though he sits in the physical, exterior spaces of Regent's Park or a tea shop, Septimus spends much time within the inner spaces of his mind. As Karen Demeester has observed in "Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Obstacles to Postwar Recovery in *Mrs. Dalloway*," "Modernist literature is a literature of trauma. In the 1920s, it gave form and representation to a psychological condition that psychiatrists would not understand for another fifty years" (77). Because of the limited and often erroneous knowledge doctors had about such a mental condition, it becomes difficult for doctors, especially those who attempt to treat Septimus, to find any other treatment that does not involve rest cure. Woolf's characterization of Septimus calls attention to trauma and the social perception of mental disease itself. What is more, through Septimus's characterization, Woolf exposes both a patient's inability to express what they feel and a doctor's, somewhat, frigid approach to a patient's delicate, mental condition.

Even though mentally ill, Septimus often ponders upon his condition. While sitting at a tea shop, Septimus observes people, but he questions his inability to feel. As Woolf depicts him in one scene,

He looked at people outside; happy they seemed, collecting in the middle of the street, shouting, laughing, squabbling over nothing. But he could

not taste, he could not feel. In the teashop among the tables and the chattering waiters the appalling fear came over him—he could not feel. He could reason; he could read, Dante for example . . . he could add up a bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then—that he could not feel. (*MD* 88).

Septimus's spatial disjunction is obvious at this particular moment. While he observes people around him, Septimus spends time in his inner spaces. As he watches all around him, Septimus notices that those around him are happy and able to “feel” the world around them. It is most interesting to witness Septimus's realization that, although he and others are within the same physical spaces, he is the only one who cannot “feel.” Notice how Septimus's reasons his ability to “read, Dante” and “add up a bill.” Here we see that Septimus is not only aware of what goes on around him, but we also see the keen observation and realization about what he can and cannot do. One could say that Septimus knows that something separates him from everyone else.

As noted in Chapter II, early twentieth century doctors did not have a full understanding of how to treat individuals suffering from shell-shock. Woolf, who read the *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock* in 1922, attempts to criticize the only treatment available for individuals who suffered from shell-shock—the rest cure. Rest cure involves having a patient removed from the comforts of their homes, away from family members, and having close to no physical or mental activity. Indeed, the members of the committee believed “rest of mind and body [was] essential in all cases” (242). Thus, it comes to no surprise that when we first encounter Septimus's doctors, we notice their callousness towards Septimus's condition. Both Dr. Holmes and

Sir William Bradshaw want to help Septimus; however, I must admit that the lack of emotional support and the authoritative tone in which they address their patient only worsens Septimus's condition. Dr. Holmes, upon visiting Septimus, says, "So you're in a funk" (*MD* 92), using a rather casual, if not callous, expression. Sir William Bradshaw, on the other hand, does not even address Septimus until a decision to place him in an asylum is made. He says, "There was a delightful home down in the country where [Septimus] would be perfectly looked after" (*MD* 96). One may say that the way in which Bradshaw and Holmes addresses Septimus is appropriate, after all, he is mentally ill. I do not necessarily believe the way Bradshaw and Holmes handle Septimus situation is the best way; in fact, I find that their lack of sympathy towards Septimus places more pressure on his already chaotic state of mind. What is more, we must remember that Bradshaw's main interest in to keep "proportion" within London's social and physical spaces (*MD* 99). Therefore Bradshaw's decision to displace Septimus's to an unfamiliar space may not be in Septimus's best interest, but for England's interest. War and those who are part of it, must not be discussed in London's well-"propotion[ed]"spaces, as Bradshaw sees it.

Septimus is not the only individual who experiences a disjunction between his inner and outer spaces. Clarissa Dalloway's spatial disjunction is mainly caused by her constant reflection upon the past. Unlike Septimus, Clarissa does not suffer from any mental illness; rather, she conforms to the social norms of her society. She is married to a distinguished politician, the conservative Member of Parliament Richard Dalloway; she throws parties and invites the most prominent figures of London's high society; she dresses well; she has servants, a fine home, and just about everything that a woman who



enjoys the lifestyle of the rich and famous might desire or need. Although she is married and well taken care of, Clarissa's freedom is limited.

Clarissa's sexual orientation is dictated by the social norms of her society. When choosing to marry, have children, and lead a life that is approved and expected by the same social class in which she is part of, Clarissa represses all homosexual desires. Although we are aware that the life she chooses provides her with money and "a little independence" that must exist "between people living together day in day out in the same house," Clarissa is never able to talk about her past with Sally or her attraction to women (*MD* 8). Even though she has everything she desires, Clarissa often thinks of her past with Sally Seton and Peter Walsh. When thinking of Peter, a potential husband, Clarissa thinks of how needy and emotional he was; in addition, she recalls how often "he scolded her!" (*MD* 7). Peter's needy personality and constant complaint forces Clarissa to break up with him. Sally, one could say, is Clarissa's first love. She is the one who Clarissa thinks of when she ponders on the subject of love. Both Clarissa and Sally enjoyed each other's company and, in a way, protected each other from social constraints in their society.

While at home, the friction between Clarissa's spaces become more visible. As she enters the house, Clarissa's perception of her own home is as though it is another space, a bleak sanctuary apart from "the world." That is, even though the house belongs to physical spaces among London, it is perceived as separate from the other physical spaces of the city. Upon her entrance, the gloomy, cold atmosphere of the house impacts Clarissa's mental state, and she describes the hall as "cool as a vault" (*MD* 29). Clarissa's perception of her house sounds as though the house is dark, lifeless, lonely place. No

longer do we see the excited, happy individual who “lov[es] walking in London!” (*MD* 6). Instead of joining her servants and preparing for the much anticipated party, Clarissa locks herself in the “attic” (*MD* 31). Such space is the only place where Clarissa may think about her hidden sexuality and attraction to women. Never could Clarissa share what she thinks of with anyone who is part of her social spaces, especially individuals like Sir William Bradshaw. Without a doubt, like Septimus, Clarissa would have to be placed in another space; a panoptic space—to use Foucault’s term—so that she would be observed, medicated, and molded, even more, to the social expectations of her society. The latter claim does not indicate that there were no homosexuals within London’s society. In fact, there were many couples who shared a life together. However, as Barrett indicates, “By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the homosexual person—at least the male—had become the subject of legal, medical, social, and psychological categorization” (148). Because of society’s prejudice against anything that does not follow the social expectations of her environment, Clarissa must repress all homosexual desires and lead a life that is approved by the social norms present in her society.

Septimus and Clarissa, then, are in dire need of “a place of one’s own,” a sort of utopian place where both may be free from society’s constraints. In order to understand Clarissa’s and Septimus’s need of a place of their own, I find it valuable to examine Woolf’s argument in *A Room of One’s Own*. The essay, which is broken into six different sections, speaks of the inequalities between men and women; the wealth of one and the poverty of the other; the visibility of one and the invisibility and “insecurity” of the other, even lesbianism (24). Woolf admits,

when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one’s audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. (2)

From the moment the essay begins, Woolf indicates an awareness about the “limitations” and “prejudices” against the female gender. She is quite aware of her own place in a society that hinders women’s opportunity to have any other place besides the homely spaces of the home. Woolf, immediately, challenges patriarchy. She defies all of those who believe that a woman’s life can only be dictated by a society’s social norms. One would think that by presenting such argument, Woolf hopes that individuals may see beyond social norms and realize that women, in fact, are capable of much more than just motherhood and marriage. Woolf indicates that women, unlike men, have been poor; they have been financially dependent on their husbands; therefore, in order for them to write fiction, she asserts, “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (2). The room in which Woolf speaks of here is an alternative option for women to have a place of their own. While men have their places of work outside the homely spaces that are associated with women, Woolf’s notion of a room of one’s own provide women with a space where they could write, make use of their intellect, and do anything other than care for husbands and children. Such space is a gendered space for women similar to the designated place men have to work.

As her argument progresses, Woolf indicates her awareness of how difficult it is for women “to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or sound-proof room . . .

unless her parents were exceptionally rich and noble” (56). It becomes evident that for a long time, women relied on men and their money to have a space of their own. In any case, the freedom from labor afforded by some degree of wealth was essential, and traditionally laws of inheritance, among other things, made women’s financial situation more or less dependent upon that of husbands, fathers, or other men. Ideally, the woman would be independently wealthy, but such a position is understandably rare.

While the room in which Woolf speaks of is a place for a woman to create, I believe that the concept of a room applies to both Clarissa and Septimus. The room, in this case, would be a space free of the social constraints. A place where no one has control over anyone’s thoughts or behaviors. We must recall that both Septimus and Clarissa are, in a way, are “placed” in a proper space. A room for Septimus would be a place where he could recuperate without the panoptic disciplinary practices described by Foucault. I believe that “the automatic function of power” over Septimus will worsen his condition, even if it is for his own benefit (Foucault, *Discipline* 201). If displaced from the *heimlich* (“familiar”) spaces of the home into an *unheimlich* (“uncanny”) space that is unfamiliar, Septimus health, I believe, will only deteriorate. He will be observed, medicated, and, in a way, “re-educat[ed] (qtd. in Bogacz 243) and molded into an individual who is, according to Bradshaw and the medical institution, “fit to be about” (*MD* 98). In addition, Septimus, while in “the country home” will be told not “to think” of himself at all (*MD* 98). There is no way someone like Septimus, who even though mentally ill, thinks of himself and his condition, would be able to abide to such rigid medical treatment. The room, in which I propose here, will be a space of regeneration; a place where monitoring is possible, but without the rigid rules that may hinder one’s

recovery. Such utopian space would allow family members to be present and provide familial love to the sick family member, Septimus, in this case. It would be a place where he is able to share his war stories, a space where communication is key to his recovery. Lastly, it would be a place where Septimus can think of himself and learn how to cope with his mental illness.

One may say that Clarissa, in fact, has the “attic,” and that it allows her a privileged space in which to think for herself, to think illicit thoughts, perhaps, as when she thinks of her love for Sally. Although this is a valid point, we must bear in mind that such space is still situated within the rigidly hierarchical, social spaces of London. It is located within the same space comprised of individuals who mold members of their own society. Additionally, the “attic” is located in the physical spaces of her home, a place that is also constructed and molded to fit social expectations. Clarissa, we can see, is so stifled in the spaces of her home, including the “attic,” that she thinks of other times, places, and people. She relies on her imagination to displace herself from her familiar spaces. According to Gaston Bachelard, “the imagination functions in this direction whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter” (*The Poetics of Space* 5). Here Bachelard speaks of the concept of “the house” a place where memories are stored and protected from any disturbance from the outer spaces of the physical world. Such a protected space is the room Clarissa needs, a place where she can, safely, be herself. Clarissa’s room would be a place where she can think, speak, and even write about her homosexual desires, among other things.

The physical, exterior spaces of London do not provide Septimus or Clarissa with a suitable place of their own. While Septimus is “displaced” by the powerful social

conventions of his exterior spaces, Clarissa is, specifically, “placed” in a proper place. Both characters are aware of both their place and the limitations imposed on them, but Clarissa, unlike Septimus, conforms to the social norms of her society. Septimus, on the other hand, refuses to abide by the strictures of his society and of the pressures imposed by the medical gaze, and he commits suicide. The idealized “house” of which Bachelard speaks is the only space where Clarissa and Septimus would have to imagine a life without the social norms present in their society (*The Poetics of Space* viii). Such space would allow both Clarissa and Septimus to reconcile the conflict between their inner, mental states and the outer, physical spaces of their social spheres, thus making them better able to make sense of, or to map, both their world and their places within it.

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