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Post War Trauma in Mrs. Dalloway

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In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf uses the characters in the novel to represent the different ideologies of British society following World War I. At the center of the story, Clarissa Dalloway embodies the feeling of the upper class, “a blockage to change, a love of beauty and familial attachment, but also indifference to others from pride of wealth, blood or position, and a false sense of immunity" (Larson 194). Clarissa is the epitome of repression and denial; she beautifies her world to hide the ugliness of death and pain underneath. At the opposite side of the spectrum, Septimus Smith is the personification of the collapse of the imperialistic pride and power of England after the war, exuding the pain and suffering that he is unable to keep hidden. Peter Walsh serves as a challenger to Clarissa’s aristocratic viewpoint, although he maintains a naïve attachment to prewar England. Another more blatant resistance to Clarissa’s ideals comes in the form of Miss Tillman, who represents the working class in opposition to the war, and Doctors Holmes and Bradshaw act as emissaries of continuity, staunch supporters of the prewar Empire.

The novel follows the lives of these characters throughout one June day, years after the war has ended. Despite the efforts of these characters to maintain the appearance of continuity and certainty, the manifestation of the trauma of the war recurs. Through these characters, Woolf reveals the way in which British society has lost its pre-war identity, particularly its sense of imperial pride and cultural superiority, as a result of lingering and disturbing manifestations of war trauma that threaten the society's sense of stability and purpose.

Britain’s desire for continuity coupled with an uncertainty about its reality appear early in the novel as the motorcar passes down Piccadilly. All of the people on the street witness the car driving past slowly with “inscrutable reserve,” trying to figure out who could be inside it (Woolf

16). Everyone perceives the car with the "same dark breath of veneration," a response reserved for someone or something to be feared and respected at the same time, and even though the passenger is unknown, "there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within; greatness was passing, hidden" (Woolf 16).

Clarissa, along with the other bystanders, believes that it has to be the Queen, Prime Minister, or royalty of some sort. Septimus is the only one who looks upon the car with dread and apprehension, "as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames" (Woolf 15). The mass of people who gathered around the mysterious car believe that they are within "speaking distance of the majesty of England" and stand in awe of the British Empire and the idea of its former reality (Woolf 16). Only Septimus, upon seeing the car, expresses a great fear, an intense foreboding of the destructiveness of that reality.

The British Empire before the war was an enduring symbol of power and greatness, but after the war, the symbol of the country's superiority is hidden behind tinted glass. This mysterious showing of imagined royalty represents the vanishing power of England's aristocracy and loss of imperial identity after the war.

When the car vanishes down the street, there is a disturbance among the people who had witnessed the event. The appearance of royalty driving through the city creates a stir among the common people and causes them to think "of the dead; of the flag; of the Empire" (Woolf 18). The intrigue surrounding the motorcar evokes a response of uprising in the crowd of people, for the ones who rebelled against the aristocracy and the ones who upheld the tenets of pre-war society. The House of Windsor is insulted in a bar room and a fight ensues. The car and what the power represents causes a ripple of "agitation" amongst the crowd of common people and touches upon emotions that are "very profound" (Woolf 18).

For a moment, the people in the street, with the exception of Septimus, collectively communicate their shared experience. The crowd responds with loyal veneration. That veneration is the people's "programmed response" of patriotism, what society believes is the acceptable reaction to royalty and the symbol of their imperial power. But the people seem to make no connections between the aristocracy and accountability for "feeding three million sons into the war machine" (Larson 197). Septimus appears to be the lone witness who sees this intrusion of royalty into the common streets as an omen of destruction and horror. The car, for Septimus, symbolizes an aristocracy that caused the deaths of thousands of soldiers who fought for Great Britain's army.

Woolf has the car pass through the city and out of sight again, to reveal how removed the aristocracy is from the common people's reality. The citizens are kept at a great distance from the Empire, and although society reveres their royalty, they also fear it. Woolf is portraying the disconnect that occurs between the two sides: the imperialistic views of the aristocracy that cause the destruction of society and the common experience of the individuals in that devastated society.

At the heart of the novel and the embodiment of stoic, British reserve is Clarissa Dalloway. Keeping in line with the unspoken societal rule of the English, Clarissa is determined to deny or evade anything that would disturb her. She chooses to repress the trauma by cloaking the images of death and devastation with beauty. Her attempt to "organize post-traumatic chaos" is much like Great Britain's repression of the devastation caused by World War I (DeMeester 89). Her response to trauma is to create beauty around her through her artistic expressions, such as gathering flowers for her elaborate party. Although she proves that it is still possible to find beauty in every day life, "it is too ephemeral to instigate real change," much like the superficial

monuments and tributes that serve as substitutes for the realities of war and death (DeMeester 90).

Woolf introduces Clarissa, walking the streets of London in search of flowers for her party that night. As she waits on the curb, she contemplates all of the things that she loves: "life; London; this moment of June" (Woolf 4). Although she does mention the war, her summary glosses over the devastation and loss. When she recounts that Mrs. Foxcroft's son or Lady Bexborough's son was killed in the war, she relates it just before declaring, "but it was over; thank Heaven-over" as if the death of the soldiers indicated an end to the suffering (Woolf 5). Lady Bexborough, who opened a bazaar the night she learned of her son's death, elicits respect from Clarissa for her ability to move on from her pain.

Clarissa's illusion of immunity to the devastation created by the war is due to her lack of connection to anyone who died in battle. Clarissa's only experience is through second-hand accounts through others who have been directly affected, and other than a passing sentiment, she appears to hardly acknowledge the effect of death on the survivors.

This idea of repression and denial in reaction to the trauma of war is an emotional response advocated and modeled by the aristocracy; It was taught in schools "as a mode of rule, which wartime propaganda had exploited to mobilize loyal Britons, and which was now sustaining a post-war culture of denial" (Larson 197). Woolf uses Clarissa Dalloway to express what is considered by society as an acceptable defense mechanism.

Although Clarissa appears to the people around her to be emotionally shallow, she reveals her inner turmoil and suffering when she is alone. Clarissa is recovering from an illness in her heart, which could be the manifestation of her "buried psychic pain" (Burian 70). She has to hide how she truly feels and be her composed self in front of others, but when she is left with

her own thoughts, she feels a deep "alienation caused by a traumatic shattering of her identity" (Burian 70). In this way, she represents the shattered image of superiority and power of prewar England. Although she suffers from the devastation of the war, she chooses to adopt the conventional English mode of repression to deal with it. Clarissa chooses not to confront or deal with her emotions and justifies it by claiming "that everyone was unreal in one way," to make sense of her own denial and align herself with English society's collective avoidance (Woolf 171).

Clarissa represents the vanity of British pride and the superiority of society before the war, and society's attempt to mask the devastation and destruction caused by the war. Peter Walsh refers to her as the "perfect hostess" who would "marry a Prime Minister," assigning her the same characteristics as the aristocracy (Woolf 7). Although she recognizes this about herself, she feels harshly judged by Peter when he labels her as such. She obviously adheres to the structure and superiority of her class, and even though she is obviously self-conscious of that role at times, she defends her imperialistic attitude as an expression of her artistic contribution to society.

She, and her husband Richard, the "public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit" are the personification of the British aristocracy's denial (Woolf 76). Richard acknowledges the war, but retains the same level of remove from emotional connection as his wife. Before he goes to see Clarissa, he thinks to himself, "It was a miracle thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shoveled together, already half forgotten" (Woolf 115). Although he is aware of the death and destruction, it only appears as a fleeting thought, and he immediately returns to thoughts of his beautiful wife.

When Richard returns from his luncheon with flowers for Clarissa, they engage in small talk about the day. Clarissa's mind wanders to her roses instead of listening to her husband's activities at his committee. She trails off into thought of what people say about her, which is revealing of her character and also her self-awareness. Although she acknowledges the opinions of others, that she "cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians," she proposes that her love of roses was her way of helping the Armenians (Woolf 120). She cannot allow the injustices committed against others to invade her thoughts, and so by tending to her roses, she makes herself immune to feeling sorrow for the suffering of the Armenians just as she does to the trauma inflicted on the people of England (Woolf 120).

She becomes depressed when she thinks of how Peter and Richard both criticize her for her parties because they do not understand the sense of them. Clarissa believes that they are her "offering" (Woolf 121). In an effort to contribute something of value to the world, Clarissa believes that she must bring people together, and that providing a space for community, she can avoid suffering. Clarissa tries to create a sense of belonging by gathering a group of like-minded people who share the same aristocratic view of England to encourage and foster her denial of reality.

At Clarissa's party that evening, the Prime Minister makes an appearance in the Dalloway's home. The arrival of royalty takes the notice of all of the guests, for they know that this is "majesty passing; this symbol of what they all stood for, English society" (Woolf 172). Woolf is using the guests at Clarissa's party to represent the upper class of English society as a whole. As the Prime Minister walks through the room, the guests, collectively, reveal their allegiance to those ideals of the aristocracy and their obliviousness to the realities of the war.

As Clarissa escorts the Prime Minister through the party, beaming with pride at the triumph, she acknowledges that "these triumphs had a hollowness…they satisfied her no longer as they used" (Woolf 174). Even though Clarissa upholds the aristocracy's view of conventional society on the outside, she knows, and has repressed, the pain that it has caused.

Near the end of her party, Dr. Bradshaw arrives and announces that Septimus has committed suicide. Clarissa's initial reaction is not an emotional display of empathy or concern, but an exclamation of inconvenience. "Oh! Thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (Woolf 183). She blames the Bradshaws for having the gall to talk of Septimus' suicide at her party, as if they were not allowed to mention death in the place Clarissa had created to avoid it. Clarissa leaves the room to process this information, the unwelcome intrusion of death into her party. As she thinks of Septimus' suicide, she determines that "death was [his] attempt to communicate," in an effort to deny the finality of his act (Woolf 184). If Clarissa justifies the death as an artistic expression instead of an absolute end, she can avoid having to face the "profound darkness" that she fears (Woolf 185).

Before she returns to her guests at the party, she resolves that Septimus has "made her feel the beauty," and in a matter of moments, Clarissa convinces herself that death is an expression of beauty to be celebrated, not mourned (Woolf 186). Throughout the novel, Clarissa remains the ideal of British stoicism in her reactions to emotionally traumatic events. She "ends the day as she began it, believing the war is over" (Levenback 81). Even when death appears at her party to confront her, she finds a way to deny its impact, and in the place of emotional expression, she chooses to process Septimus' suicide as a beautiful artistic expression.

In complete opposition to the socialite's emotional repression, Woolf introduces a damaged war veteran who fails to contain his emotional distress. Septimus Smith displays his

inner turmoil, even though he knows that society expects him to repress those emotions. Septimus returns from the war a broken man suffering from post traumatic stress disorder, and although his wife and doctors try to integrate him back into civilian life by forcing him to conform to the ideals and expectations of society, he realizes that he is not a part of that society any more.

Septimus recounts how he felt about England before the war and why he volunteered to serve in the military in the first place. He, like most young men, joined the army to protect and preserve his own version of idyllic England, which consisted of "Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress" (Woolf 86). In the simplicity of his youth, he became a victim of the propaganda of the aristocracy which inspired him to fight for something that he could not have when the war was over.

He attempts to latch onto those memories of his past with art and literature, trying to ground himself to something that he once loved, but he feels "that the war invalidated the fundamental beliefs that had given his prewar life meaning" (DeMeester 81). He feels nothing for the things and people, including his wife, that he cared for before he suffered the experience of war, and he can no longer relate to the values and ideals of the society in which he is forced to exist. He is the living symbol of the post-war collapse of British civilization. Just as the foundation of society had been devastated by the war, Septimus' identity as a man within that society is destroyed.

Septimus exhibits the symptoms of shell shock, or post traumatic stress disorder, which contradicts the social expectations of the masculine role in society. Soldiers went to war to protect and preserve England's status as a world power, and society expected the soldier to be

the same man when he returned from battle. If there is any question or disillusionment about the system, the soldiers are not viewed as heroes, but as dissenters.

Septimus is a tragic symbol of what many men became just after the war, suffering from what was labeled "male hysteria," an illness of emotional distress usually attributed to women in the Victorian era (Showalter 170). World War I and the trauma inflicted upon the soldiers led to a mass mental breakdown among the male population and created "a crisis of masculinity and a trial of the Victorian masculine ideal" (Showalter 171). Disillusioned after the war, Septimus knows that he is a changed man and cannot revert to his pre-war identity; He cannot conform to the beliefs and tenets of British society's idea of the masculine role.

Septimus could not uphold the stoic façade that was expected of him. The war was a "psychic cave of memory and trauma" that revealed itself, often in public (Norris 64). He has visions of death, with hallucinations of his fallen comrade, Evans, in the bushes at the park. The fractured state of his psyche and the horrific visions he has are a result of the trauma he has experienced in the war, but the people around him do not react to his openly strange behavior with empathy or understanding. His own wife, Rezia, cannot see beyond the masculine expectations that Septimus now fails to meet, declaring that it "was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself," when her husband threatens to commit suicide (Woolf 23). Even his doctors tell Septimus that his behavior would give Rezia an "odd idea of English husbands," indicating that he should conform to the role of masculinity that society has established for him and that the option to do so is completely under his control (Woolf 92).

Feeling constricted by the conventional mold for a proper English gentleman, Septimus describes the prescription of his doctors as an act of torture. When Septimus refers to Dr. Holmes and his treatment, he says, "The rack and thumbscrew are applied. Human nature is

remorseless" (Woolf 98). Septimus cannot return to his prewar self, just as England cannot reclaim its prewar glory, even though society expects him to be able to transform. Human nature, or Holmes, is the "repulsive brute, with blood red nostrils" who forces English propriety upon him (Woolf 92). Holmes is the personification of the collective opinion of society that believes Septimus should, and must, uphold the English tenets of masculinity.

Septimus realizes that the doctors are not interested in helping him, but only want to control how he lives. Although Septimus sees the inadequacy of the doctors' assessments, he still feels the weight of their commands. Holmes and Bradshaw "mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted (Woolf 148). Even though he cannot externally combat the will of his caretakers, Septimus fights against conformity to their idea of normality. He sees them as the dictators who enforce the will of an Empire that is destroying his, and society's, humanity.

Septimus sees death as an end to his isolation and oppression; he knows there is no place in this world for him, and the laws of human nature will not allow him to stay. He demands that Rezia burn all of his papers, his drawings and scribbles, because they represent all of the illusions of the world that frustrate him. With the destruction of his creations, he lets go of the expectations placed upon him to uphold imperialistic and archaic ideals. Septimus commits suicide, not because he wants to die, but because he feels that he has committed an "appalling crime and had been condemned to death by human nature" (Woolf 96). His crime was his inability to conform, and society had condemned him for expressing his true self.

He commits suicide, not as a desperate act of sadness, but as a willful expression of his freedom from the tyrannical oppression of societal rules. Just before his death, he accepts his fate, saying, "There remained only the window…it was their idea of tragedy, not his…" (Woolf

149). Septimus throws himself out of the window to his death as his final act, breaking out of the chains of conformity.

Septimus knows that he cannot live in the world that he knew before the war because it no longer exists. The mental illness with which Septimus suffers is the result of the failure of those antiquated ideals and causes the destruction of his identity as a man in English society. Woolf uses Septimus as a metaphor for the same dismantling of the prewar identity of England. Through Septimus Smith, she holds the ruling class accountable for "presiding over a bloody debacle in the name of an England that was passing away" (Larson 194). His death represents a death of the thoughts of convention and conformity to the idea of prewar England, its superiority, power, and stability.

The defenders of social order in the novel, Doctors Holmes and Bradshaw, represent the belief in custom and the value placed on the idea of a powerful and structurally sound England. Woolf portrays the antiquated imperialistic views and their oppressive hold on society through Holmes and Bradshaw, who try to repress anything that challenges the "established order and beliefs and conventions that secure it" (DeMeester 85). This repression of change, in an act of preservation of conventional beliefs, inhibits progress and recovery, as evidenced in their treatment of Septimus.

Dr. Holmes exemplifies the benefit of continuity and repetition. He tells Rezia when he visits that if he ever finds himself "even half a pound below eleven stone six," he would ask his wife for extra porridge (Woolf 91). He expresses the importance of doing everything in the same way it has always been done, a metaphor for the old world view of England. He determines that there is nothing the matter with Septimus and that he suffers from nothing more than "nerve symptoms," which could be solved from taking up a hobby (Woolf 91).

Dr. William Bradshaw comes in to visit Septimus and determines that his patient needs to go away to the country to rest and regain his sense of proportion, an adherence to the rules of conformity. “Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics…made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion” (Woolf 99). The prosperity of England, according to Dr. Bradshaw, depends on society acting as one in support of conformity and old world views, and the silence of anyone who could oppose those ideas. Holmes and Bradshaw believe they can “rebuild a stable, unified image of nation and empire,” by maintaining the pretense of that unified empire (Tsai 74).

Woolf uses Holmes and Bradshaw to illustrate and magnify the obliviousness of the ruling class and their adherence to, and indoctrination of, conventional rules. Bradshaw believes that it is his responsibility to protect “the health and virility of all of England,” by instilling prewar, imperialistic ideals and silencing or eliminating anyone who defies those ideals (Tsai 74).

The doctors maintain a steadfast hold on convention and the idea of Britain’s former glory as a powerful nation. They provide an “illusory mental sanctuary from the irrational terrors,” which they believe are caused by an inability to conform (Larson 194). Septimus is told to get himself into a repetitive schedule to alleviate the stress on his mind and divert his attention from feeling unmanly things. Septimus is labeled a selfish coward and a dissenter because he does not exhibit the right characteristics of a patriotic and dutiful man in England. In an effort to avoid the trauma and destruction of the war and to resurrect all that was great about England, Septimus, and Britain’s people, only need to revert to the proper and customary way of feeling and reacting to traumatic events.

Sir William had to "support the good of society, which, would take care, that these unsocial impulses, bred more than anything by the lack of good blood, were held in control (Woolf 102). As long as society conformed to the ideals and beliefs that made England superior before the war, they would be able to restore her to its greatness after the war.

With this resistance to change and adherence to old customs, Holmes and Bradshaw rob Septimus of the chance to recover by facing and dealing with the emotion of his experiences, and they destroy society's "meaningful recovery from the war by perpetuating a social, political, and economic structure that sacrificed an entire generation of young men to the First World War" (DeMeester 88). The same ruling class ideology, exhibited by Holmes and Bradshaw, created England's idyllic existence but also brought about its destruction.

Although a minor character in *Mrs. Dalloway,* Miss Kilman makes a bold statement of opposition against the Holmes and Bradshaw indoctrination of convention. Woolf uses Miss Kilman as the voice of the common people, a detractor who speaks of the dissatisfaction of the regime and the old world system. She works in the Dalloways' home and becomes a confidant to Elizabeth, although she resents Clarissa, and what she stands for, immensely. She holds no status or position of power but she voices a very clear opinion of opposition to the war.

Clarissa describes her employee with a vitriol that reveals the strained and uncomfortable relationship between the two, which is more a statement of their clashing ideologies than of any personal affront. Clarissa can hardly understand what motivates Miss Kilman, commenting on her political and social views with condescension. "Miss Kilman would do anything for the Russians, starved herself for the Austrians, but in private inflicted positive torture, so insensitive was she, dressed in a green mackintosh coat" (Woolf 12). Miss Kilman, in Clarissa's view,

spends her time caring about the other less fortunate that she has no time to attend to, in a respectful manner, the needs and feelings of her own employer.

Because Miss Kilman is a poor, but educated commoner, Clarissa cannot relate to her or her ideals. As Clarissa watches her leave with Elizabeth, she states, "It was not her one hated but the idea of her" (Woolf 12). The fact that Miss Kilman is the embodiment of all that Clarissa does not want to face makes her intolerable. Although Clarissa admits that Miss Kilman "had been cheated" in life and was a "poor embittered unfortunate creature," she resents Miss Kilman for being a constant reminder of her poverty, her misfortune, but most importantly, her antagonism towards Clarissa's position and ideals (Woolf 123, 12).

When Miss Kilman looks at Clarissa, she wonders, "with all this luxury going on, what hope was there for a better state of things?" (Woolf 124). Miss Kilman's is the only voice in the novel that represents the common civilians and their opposition to the aristocratic class. She voices her disdain for Clarissa's lifestyle and obliviousness to the suffering of others, and even though Miss Kilman does not hate her, she is angry that Clarissa, who is in a position to change the state of things, does nothing. Miss Kilman has an "overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her," so she can reveal that Clarissa cares nothing about the trauma and devastation that exist right outside her door (Woolf 125).

Miss Kilman spends much of her time with Elizabeth, which is another source of conflict for Clarissa. Although she believes that Miss Kilman is trying to indoctrinate Elizabeth to her religious views, Miss Kilman seems more determined to educate Elizabeth in an effort to deter her from becoming like her mother. Not only does she serve as Elizabeth's tutor, she also talks to her about social, political, and controversial topics, such as the war.

She tells Elizabeth that "there were people who did not think the English invariably right. There were books. There were meetings. There were other points of view" (Woolf 130). Miss Kilman is trying to steer Elizabeth away from adopting her mother's ingrained, aristocratic opinions. She believes that she can dominate Clarissa, fight the oppressiveness of the empire, and change the ideology of the nation by exposing Elizabeth to the other side of things.

When Miss Kilman feels that Elizabeth is not concerned with what she has to say, "she could not stand it" (Woolf 132). She wants to keep Elizabeth with her as long as possible, to influence her in a positive way. But when Elizabeth finally does leave to go to her mother's party, Miss Kilman feels that "Mrs. Dalloway had triumphed," and that Elizabeth would adopt her mother's attitude (Woolf 133).

Miss Kilman, as she walks the streets of London, arrives at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. As she watches the church goers shuffle past the tomb, she "barred her eyes with her fingers" and walks inside the church to pray (Woolf 133). Although she feels powerless to affect change, she still feels the weight of responsibility to fight against the aristocratic oppression of society.

Although Peter Walsh is not as antagonistic a character as Miss Kilman, he does serve as a counterpoint to Clarissa's aristocratic views. Although he still is a proper upper class English gentleman, he does, in a way, challenge her elitist ideas. Clarissa describes him as "adorable to walk with" even though he hardly pays attention to the things that are important to her, the beauty of the city (Woolf 7). "It was the state of the world that interested him," and in his subtle and innocuous way, he points out the shallowness of her opinions (Woolf 7). He recognizes the idealized version of England that once existed, and still exists in Clarissa's eyes, but he also

recognizes that that same idyllic construct recruited thousands of its young men to the front lines and their untimely deaths.

When Peter returns from India, he goes to visit Clarissa, and immediately upon facing her in her room, he retrieves his knife from his pocket. He spends his time during the conversation with Clarissa toying with the blade. Although he does still have feelings of affection for her, he sees this encounter with Clarissa as a kind of battle of ideas, and he handles the pocket knife in her presence as a form of defense.

The tension is evident in their discussion, although neither one of them says anything combative directly to the other. Peter looks at Clarissa mending her dress and criticizes her frivolous activities, "playing about; going to parties" (Woolf 41). He becomes more irritated at the thought of her shallowness and lack of concern of the world outside of her own, blaming the fact that she married Richard, a political conservative. Peter does not voice his disdain out loud to Clarissa but expresses his disapproval by "shutting his knife with a snap" (Woolf 41).

Clarissa is aware that Peter does not agree with her conventional ideas, acknowledging that she would not invite him to her party that evening. She adds, "my dear Peter" as a passive aggressive acknowledgment of his disapproval (Woolf 41).

Peter takes out his knife as Clarissa sits with her needle, "like a Queen whose guards have fallen asleep and left her unprotected" (Woolf 42). Clarissa feels as if Peter is attacking her for her conservative beliefs and aristocratic ideals because Peter is the only one of equal status and class who challenges Clarissa's political views. Peter thinks, "I know what I'm up against…Clarissa and Dalloway and all the rest of them," acknowledging the difficulty of challenging the ingrained conventional English mindset (Woolf 46). After their subliminal battle, he crosses the room and flicks a "bandanna handkerchief from side to side," indicating that he

surrenders to her (Woolf 47). Peter understands that the Empire, the aristocratic system, is too much for one man to oppose.

After Peter leaves the Dalloways' home, he strolls out into the street, thinking about Clarissa and what she thought of him. Peter is overtaken by marching soldiers, carrying guns, with "faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England" (Woolf 51). The soldiers, although performing the solemn duty of acknowledging the dead, still had to keep up appearances, set in stone, of support for the Empire (Woolf 51). Peter watches them pass, like one machine with many legs moving uniformly, and acknowledges that "life had been laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline" (Woolf 51).

Peter recognizes that the commitment and undying devotion to England's Empire of old customs and ideals are what led thousands of young men to their deaths. But at the same time, Peter acknowledges that the soldiers, as well as society, had made that sacrifice willingly. "The great renunciation," the relinquishment of society's right to oppose the will of the Empire, is what Peter sees in the soldiers. Although he does not adhere to this mindset, he can "respect it in the boys" because of their naiveté, hoping or even expecting that the soldiers will come to an understanding of reality when they get older (Woolf 51).

He then goes to Regent's Park to sit and observe people, and he expresses his approval of the civilization of London. Despite the changes in England, during his five years absence, he remains convinced that the things he loves are still a part of society: "doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust," as if in some ways England was still the strong and powerful nation it once was (Woolf 55).

In a way, Peter offers a bridge into the postwar era, from challenging society's stronghold on conventional customs to feeling "moments of pride in England" and belief in its ability to heal itself (Woolf 55). But Peter, in some instances, shows flippancy or naiveté in his attitude towards the devastation of the war. Peter curtly dismisses the war as "one thing and another" that would interrupt the flow of normal life, but that "the show was really very tolerable," indicating that despite the destruction inflicted upon the city, society as a whole was dealing with the aftermath of the war in true English fashion (Woolf 55).

Although Peter doesn't reveal a postwar trauma like Clarissa and Septimus, he suggests that England is different in the years following the war. Perhaps because Peter spent a considerable amount of time in India, he avoided most of the direct effect of World War I and can claim an ignorance of the things he witnesses. As he sits in Regent's Park, he recognizes that, "those five years-1918 to 1923-had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different" (Woolf 71). When he sees Rezia and Septimus in the park, Peter assumes that they are a normal husband and wife, "lovers squabbling" over some domestic issue (Woolf 71). In reality, Septimus is struggling with his illness, frightened by the hallucinations of Evans, and Rezia is confessing her unhappiness, while desperately trying to calm him. Peter dismisses the gravity of their situation and attributes their behavior to normal, everyday disturbances. Peter can see the effects of the trauma and devastation on the faces of the citizens, but he remains oblivious as to the cause of their pain.

After Septimus commits suicide, the ambulance that takes him to the hospital goes past Peter on the street. In an ironic twist, this prompts Peter to appreciate the "triumphs of civilization," as Septimus, the symbol of the destruction of the Empire, lies dead in the car (Woolf 151). Peter expresses pride for the "communal spirit of London" when it comes to

responding to the needs of its citizens, congratulating a system that works for the good of the people (Woolf 151). But immediately after, he realizes the fault of thinking of the system in the ingrained way. He once again turns to the loss of individuality and claims that his susceptibility to the programmed response of veneration to the Empire had "been his undoing" (Woolf 151).

Even though he, as a young man, believed those "abstract principles" that drove all of those soldiers to the front lines, he sees the futility of perpetuating that false belief into the future (Woolf 50). Although he accepts his own responsibility for buying into those old world principles in his youth, Peter, in his subtle way, tries to bring awareness of a new era of thought for England after the war.

Mrs. Dalloway portrays characters, who, in some way, exhibit postwar trauma in the aftermath of World War I, but the main character of the novel is the war itself. Woolf uses the backdrop of this historical event to produce her own commentary on the reactions to the trauma of the Great War and personalize the effect on society as a whole.

Woolf was increasingly frustrated with society's unawareness of the destruction created by the war and the lingering psychological trauma that persisted well beyond the signing of a peace treaty. World War I forced Great Britain to rebuild not only the devastated community, but also their identity as a nation. When the war ended in 1919, the soldiers returned home, and society had to deal with their postwar reality. In the years that followed the war, "the idea of national identity was the subject of a perhaps unprecedented cultural and political discourse" (Lawson 92). Created in the aftermath of the devastation was a form of extreme nationalism, an attempt to honor the Empire and its ideals, although many of the "certainties of the comforting nineteenth century" had fallen apart (Lawson 98). The result was a psychologically and emotionally damaged nation trying to heal themselves through denial and repression.

Woolf's commentary in *Mrs. Dalloway* attacks the aristocracy and its obliviousness to the destruction, the mindlessness of a nation that continued to support that archaic system, and the inhumane treatment of the many civilian and military sufferers of war-induced trauma.

Woolf uses the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* to express the disillusionment and devastation to humanity as a result of the war. Through Septimus Smith, she illustrates the most extreme form of trauma, and in turn, he represents the shell shock that all citizens experienced. "In postwar English society, both war veterans and civilians struggle to survive the havoc of the Great War," and in this way, Clarissa and Septimus are two sides of the same coin (Tsai 65). Both struggle with trauma caused by the war, but they choose to express it differently.

Although *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place on one day in June, five years after the war has ended, Woolf wants to illustrate that the pain and suffering does not just disappear after the soldiers are buried. Woolf was chiefly concerned with conveying the true nature of the devastation inflicted upon England, and *Mrs. Dalloway* is her "portrayal of individuals as victims of war…and the possible annihilation of civilization" (Bazin and Lauter 14). The lasting effects of World War I are apparent in the most extreme expression of mental illness in Septimus Smith and the repressed emotional pain of Clarissa Dalloway.

Woolf represents a society that collectively suffers, despite the individual's best efforts to uphold a "perfectly upright and stoical bearing" (Woolf 9). Clarissa denies and represses her pain, choosing instead to create beauty to mask her suffering. Septimus chooses suicide to escape the pressure of being forced to conform to the English standard of masculinity and strength as instilled by Holmes and Bradshaw. Despite Clarissa's best attempt to remain immune to the devastation and evade death, it appears at her party. Woolf's depiction of the aftermath of World

War I reflects a society struggling to regain its prewar vitality, but which cannot escape the trauma of death and destruction in their everyday lives.

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