

## The Manifestations of Woolf's Life Experiences in *Mrs. Dalloway*

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### ABSTRACT

*Mrs. Dalloway* is one of Virginia Woolf's greatest achievements. The novel continues to enthuse scholars across the globe, and there are myriad studies through which readers can gain a finer understanding of it. This paper attempts to show how Woolf implants in *Mrs. Dalloway* a plentiful range of experiences from her life. It argues that in order to have an ample understanding of a character's state of mind or behavior, emphasis should be placed not only on the text but also on the role of the writer's personal experiences in its formation. This paper discusses, more specifically, how Woolf's own experiences are linked to Septimus's, and showcases that Woolf's life is a major influence on the story of *Septimus*.

At the age of forty-three, Virginia Woolf introduced *Mrs. Dalloway*, considered to be among the most celebrated. At the age of 43, Virginia Woolf introduced *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is now among the most celebrated novels of the twentieth century. Replacing the traditional form, which focused on description of the external world, Woolf fostered a new form of literature that presented the flow of thoughts and feelings twirling inside someone's mind, known as stream of consciousness. Woolf mastered this style of writing in her novels. At the same time, she attempted to voice the impact of one's past on personality. "In her novels, Woolf enacts the idea that personality is determined by one's personal history, and one's history can be understood in terms of gender, class, social movements, and history," says Louise DeSalvo (1989). Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* can be described as a lyrical novel because the author's approach was to take meaning from the information revealed by personal traits and, by predicting that importance in other people's minds, to retain an unstable equilibrium amid narrative lyrical art (Drobot, 2014). Woolf, in her diary, recorded her intent to utilize texts lyrically. In her opinion, this particular kind of work must have elements of both poetry and prose. Powerful and contradictory feelings, dissociations, and generalizations are used in such a novel (2014). Woolf then offers her description of the "stream of consciousness": a way of

comparing life as a luminous halo, a see-through casing that surrounds us from the start of mindfulness to its close. Consequently, the characteristics of a lyrical novel are plain to see in Woolf's works. They include a concentration on private life, the transformation of scene and character into symbolic metaphor, and an effort to interpret the old types of story as careful examinations of mindfulness.

The detachment of one's self-system stresses the effect of the outside domain upon inner life. This is the best explanation of the process of awareness. For this reason, this self-representation in Woolf's novel is perceived as an imperative concept together with its connection to the world. As a result, Drobot explains, while analyzing *Mrs. Dalloway* most scholars emphasize uncertainties and contradictions in Woolf's works (2014). Subsequently, it can be argued that in the novel, Woolf describes one experience but shelters "self" away from the dangerous realm, and there exists an unclear border between the external world and the perceiver, leading to ambivalence. Some researchers have approached *Mrs. Dalloway* from a psychoanalytical and biographical perspective that relates its root and development to Woolf's state of mind and personal experiences and sees her literary expression as a successful exercise of self-catharsis and auto-analysis (Guo, 2017). Guo further explains that connections evidently exist between insanity and childhood traumas, and

between sensibility and insanity, and additionally endorses Woolf's alchemical determination and hard work, which empower her to change the material of madness into the material of art instead of leaving her in senseless dreams and ambivalent from reality (2017). Other scholars such as Vieco view *Mrs. Dalloway* as a social and historical commentary (2020). At the time the novel is set, the formerly powerful British Empire writhes, suffering the painful destruction of World War I, with its values and institutions crumbling. As a result, communication is challenged between people who seek to uphold traditional English society and those who yearn for continued transformation, such as Elizabeth, who is offered the chance to enjoy equal rights with men and the liberty to choose her professional path (Vieco, 2020).

Woolf's life and works have been extensively examined, not to mention her diaries and a stream of letters that paved the way for scholars to identify her experiences. Julia Briggs states that Woolf had a diary in which she "recorded key moments in the genesis of her fictions, providing an outline history of how they came into being ..." (2005). Woolf's diary sometimes records the genesis of her ideas and sometimes tells us of her experiences as they relate to her fiction. Hence, employing Woolf's personal life in the interpretation of her works can add more depth to the perception of her novels. In her diary entries regarding *Mrs. Dalloway*, her fourth novel, whose birth was twenty years earlier as a plan for a play, Woolf identified the reason for writing it, explored the formation of the characters, and presented her perspectives. According to Briggs, "Woolf intended her experiment to bring the reader closer to everyday life, in all its confusion, mystery, and uncertainty ..." (2005). One of the most interesting and often-studied of Woolf's characters is Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*. His trauma has received many critical treatments.

Septimus is a major character in the novel. He is believed to be Woolf's double, even though he did not exist in the first draft (Briggs, 2005). Woolf originally intended Clarissa to commit suicide instead. Moreover, Septimus is not only Woolf's double, but also the protagonist's. Alex Page asserts that "Septimus's character is in all essentials Clarissa's but taken to a deadly extreme" (1961). Although Clarissa does not meet Septimus in reality, she meets him spiritually. For her, he serves as an image with which she remotely connects. Deborah Guth notes, "'This young man' as she calls him, undermining his anonymity, is no more than a symbol, an image of defiance and self-immolation with which she ritually identifies" (1989). This connection is evident in the way Clarissa reacts to his death: "always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt" (Woolf, 1925). Clarissa sympathizes physically with Septimus's tragedy. Then she wonders: "but why had he done it?" (1925). Septimus's suffering seems to affect Clarissa both physically and mentally. According to Page, "Clarissa's reaction to the disclosure of his suicide gives us a new view of him ... his courage, his defiance ... [and] his commitment against human agencies that would 'force his soul' and that have, in part, forced hers" (1961).

The connection between Clarissa and Septimus goes beyond her sympathy for his death. In her investigation of

the parallels between colors and characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Nathalia Wright argues that Woolf attempts to link Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus with the color yellow (1944). Wright explains that yellow is seen in Mrs. Dalloway's hat and her living room curtains; in Septimus's case, he sees yellow flowers and yellow bananas on the sideboard (1944). Moreover, the two characters are linked with the works of Shakespeare. Both Clarissa and Septimus cite Shakespeare throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. For example, when Clarissa goes shopping, she reads lines from *Cymbeline*: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun/nor the furious winter's rages" (qtd. in Woolf, 1925). Septimus quotes these lines as well throughout the novel. Shakespeare is prominently used by only these two characters. It is evident that his works captivated Woolf and her central characters, her doubles. Woolf wrote a letter to her brother in which she declared that she felt "oppressed" by Shakespeare's genius (qtd. in Sawyer, 2009).

Woolf's passion for Shakespeare's writing is very noticeable in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Shakespeare's name is mentioned twenty times in the novel, which shows how much he meant to Woolf. Septimus and Clarissa share an interest in Shakespeare. Before the war, Septimus loved a woman, Miss Isabel Pole, who taught him about Shakespeare (Woolf, 1925). Although Clarissa and Septimus do not meet, it is Shakespeare who unites them. In her fifties, Clarissa seeks remedy in Shakespeare by coming to understand the connotations of his lines as the events of her life develop. In her diary, Woolf writes, "Why is poetry an elderly taste? When I was 20 ... I could not for the life of me read Shakespeare for pleasure; now it lights me ..." (Kopley, 2020). This quote shows Woolf's clear admiration for Shakespeare.

While Clarissa is seen as Septimus's double, Septimus's traumas in the novel are closely analogous to Woolf's real-life experiences (Batchelor, 1991). On the surface, Septimus appears to be a victim of World War I: he agonizes over the tragic death of his friend Evans. He suffers from shell shock that has isolated him from the physical world, leading him to struggle in his inner world. To find a remedy to his suffering, Septimus commits suicide—a heartbreaking escape from his inner problems. Similarly, Woolf herself experienced multiple psychological breakdowns that affected her mental state. According to Stephanie Forward, "there were five major bouts of debilitating physical illness and nervous breakdown" (2008). Woolf "made two suicide attempts, one by jumping from a window in 1904 and one by taking an overdose of veronal in 1913" (Batchelor, 1991). She drowned herself in 1941 in her third attempt. Woolf's first suicide attempt is similar to Septimus's. Hence, it appears that Woolf's experience influenced her representation of Septimus's death.

The trauma of the war that affected Septimus also had its impact on Woolf as she writes, "its life itself, I think sometimes, for us in our generation so tragic—no newspaper placard without its shriek of agony from someone... Unhappiness is everywhere; just beyond the door; or stupidity which is worse" (Bell, 1978). Woolf's words show how the war changed the perception of life for the worse. It was clear misery to Woolf. Similarly, Septimus was not able to enjoy life after the war. He could not love his wife or put up with

the idea of having children. Life was joyless for him. Qiuxia Li notes that for Septimus, “this world seemed to be an evil place, which caused despair” (2017). Septimus was always frightened. The incident where a car backfired along a busy London street caused Septimus to panic. He thinks that the huge noise is a whipping sound: “the world has raised its whip. Where will it descend?” (Woolf, 1925). Moreover, Septimus believes that he is “rooted to the pavement;” he is a “tree blocking the way” (1925). This severely traumatized man appears alienated. Woolf’s representation of the disillusionment and confusion that result from the war trauma is characterized in the way Septimus rigorously suffers. As a result, he loses faith in the system. Woolf writes, “the War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion... He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference” (Woolf, 1925). Septimus’s trauma that leads to his demise is the result of the failure of the system. He was not able to find meaning in his experiences and suffering. The society, whom Dr. Bradshaw epitomizes, resorts to rest cure to marginalize Septimus who after frustration repeatedly declares, “I will kill myself” (Woolf, 1925). Woolf uses Septimus “to criticize the social system and show it at work, at its most intense” (Woolf, 1980). It is clear that the system has failed him. The rest cure that Bradshaw proposes for Septimus is the system’s way to hide veterans and their traumas from society and thus have their experiences silenced. Given how Septimus’s trauma is not communicated to those in power, Woolf explicitly showcases Septimus as a person unable to cope with his post-war life.

It is not only Septimus’s death that is drawn from Woolf’s personal life: his hallucination embodies an experience of Woolf’s as well. Hearing the birds singing in Greek is another manifestation in *Mrs. Dalloway* of the application of the author’s experiences. Woolf splendidly portrays this in her narration of Septimus:

He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (Woolf, 1925)

Woolf encountered a similar problem when she experienced a vivid hallucination after her mother died in 1895, resulting in her first mental breakdown. The hallucination consisted of “displaced and invasive voices that most captured her imagination and aroused her fear” (Roe & Sellers, 2000). Through the representation of Septimus’s mental illness, and despite its different causes, Woolf shares her lived experience with her own mental illness, which was also appalling. Courtney Mauck writes, “mental illness was something that ran in Woolf’s family, and the sufferings of her father had a great influence both on her diagnosis of herself and as a root cause of her disorder” (2016). Septimus, like Woolf, suffers immensely and, like Woolf, he has no proper help (2016). Woolf was diagnosed with manic-depressive

disorder, which causes a person to have mania and episodes of depression (Caramagno, 1988). In the case of Septimus, Jean Thomson asserts that Woolf planted her own experiences with mania and depression, “giving authenticity” to the shattered Septimus (2004). Septimus’s “constant battle between manic hallucinations and depressing reality—are not much different from what Woolf had undergone herself” (Mauck, 2016).

It should be noted that the character of Septimus was difficult for Woolf to create, because Woolf’s life was filled with difficulties and struggles. Briggs explores Woolf’s problem with describing Septimus: “Woolf’s manuscript notebooks are full of deletions and insertions. She rewrote whole paragraphs and sequences, end on end, sometimes several times, but this is particularly true of scenes with Septimus, which gave her real difficulty” (2005). The story of Septimus is not the core of *Mrs. Dalloway*; however, it constitutes a major pattern in the book, “a pattern of selected human experiences whose relation to one another is emotional rather than logical” (Bennett, 1964). Woolf uses Septimus not only as a victim of war, but also as a window through which readers see Woolf’s experiences. Steve Ellis claims that Septimus has a “broader function in the novel for Woolf that draws on the experience of her youthful illnesses and lessons” (2012). The tragic loss of Evans is Septimus’s trauma, and changes him entirely. As for Woolf, from the loss of her mother to the death of her father, it is difficult to identify one single trauma that led her to drown herself. Nevertheless, the sexual abuse she suffered as a child had an immense impact on her and haunted her constantly. Woolf’s half brothers sexually molested her when she was very young. This incident left a tremendous mark on her life. In her book *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*, Louise DeSalvo claims that Woolf’s suicidal tendencies were a result of her sexual abuse (1989). Furthermore, DeSalvo states that Woolf left abundant sources in which she outlined her thoughts about this trauma: “she left, at her death, diaries, memoirs, letters, notebooks, notes, which document the trauma that she endured as a child and how she coped with it, reacted to it, and understood it” (1989). Both Woolf and Septimus experienced great losses: Septimus lost his friend Evans tragically in the war while Woolf catastrophically lost her childhood innocence.

The narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway* presents historical moments that explore the characters’ tendencies to think about their pasts. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf forsakes the “conventional narrative unit, the chapter” (Dick, 1989) where the reader becomes “the medium of connection” (Beer 1996). The retrospective moments in the novel come from Woolf’s past. Thus, through the character of Septimus, readers are exposed to a wide range of views. Furthermore, some critics interpret Septimus without taking into account Woolf’s life. For example, Septimus is seen as a man who “haunts an absolute world, bare of locality except for the dead places of the war” (Beer, 1996). To many readers, Septimus is a person who suffers from shell shock, a person who experiences the trauma of the war. Yet Woolf does not consider shell shock a major symptom for Septimus. Ellis states that Woolf “makes no reference to shell shock and suggests that

Septimus's prime polemical function in the novel is to voice Woolf's hatred and distrust of the male medical establishment" (2012).

Another powerful force upon Woolf's creation was her reaction to radical intellectual developments in science and philosophy. The novel truly echoes the rhythmical order that emerges out of the chaos of life as perceived by the people against an enforced system of command—the social pyramid. Therefore, Woolf diverges from traditional linear narrative, and elects to employ a fragmented narrative and non-linear, fluid syntax. *Mrs. Dalloway* seemingly follows the timing set by Big Ben when depicting events experienced by an upper-middle-class homemaker on a party day; the reader follows the protagonist's psychological arrangement of time. The novel permits narrative attention to switch between the outside world and the characters' minds constantly. It also switches from one personality to another and from one character's recollection of the past to their expectations of the future and back to the unadorned present. Hence, the plot and account of events that form the basis of the story's indiscernible reality are often recounted more sluggishly than they are when presented by a well-informed raconteur. Therefore, the idea of time in *Mrs. Dalloway* is something of an additional character or narrator in its own right. It demonstrates that Mrs. Dalloway's life connects to Septimus's. Without divisions of chapters, time, signified by clocks, is the controller that organizes events and characters to distinguish present from past, evening from morning. Time acts as a bystander to the characters' nonexistence or reality by continually sustaining the story through deaths and births. Woolf depicts Septimus and Clarissa as being in an opposition of existence/nonexistence that clarifies how the two regard themselves. Through hearing the gongs of Big Ben, the duo observe their reality through linear time. To an extent, the duo are characterized as nonexistent in the present but also existent because they are battling in conflicting ways.

Clarissa strives to live unbound by her past in order to liberate the affliction of her past life and continue to live presently in spite of her age. She observes an old woman living by herself across the street, then views the woman as a promising prospect, which scares her. Consequently, she attempts to focus on existing in each moment. Clarissa views her reflection in the mirror then constructs a whole look. Previously, Clarissa has cited the diamond to represent the adored peck Sally Seton gave her years back. Clarissa attempts to introduce a sense of joy to her current life by viewing herself in the mirror while bringing fragments together. Later, Clarissa sits to mend her evening dress, drawing together the fabric and threads. This repetition of pulling portions together means Clarissa needs to show her reality not only to herself through the mirror but also to the entire world.

Meanwhile, Septimus, as Woolf's double, strives to be nonexistent—to vanish from daily life. However, the author is nervous about dropping his reality of being enthralled by white caps or dying—perhaps in a fire (Vieco, 2020). Septimus feels he cannot execute anything alone, and never wants to be left alone. In reaction to Clarissa's sewing, which anchors her life, Septimus's wife sits by her side

stitching a fedora. Assisted by Septimus, she picks florets, ribbons, and beads as they craft the hat, and even if she cannot sew, she possesses a "magnificent eye" and can imagine the cap before it is done (Eng, 2020). The scenarios can be interpreted as a nod to Septimus's incapability of bringing together the parts of himself. He has a notion of what type of existence he wishes for, but can never accomplish it alone. Since Septimus is unable to define his present reality, he considers nonexistence. The ushering of the hat towards completion signifies such. Guo reasons that Clarissa's ailment is likened to schizophrenia, which both organizes and splits her existence in the realm of ontology from period to period (2017). While Septimus's perception of time has become confused long before, and although he attempts to discover the significance of life through his previous life, his quests to regain that time in his life become futile. Such an argument is very exciting because the different clocks used in *Mrs. Dalloway* support the notion that time alone is mad. The central marker of time in the novel is Big Ben, which often makes people halt and deliberate. Its control and authority offer the dint of presenting time as a physical thing: "the labored circles liquefied in the atmosphere" (Eng, 2020).

Correspondingly, many features of *Mrs. Dalloway* parallel Woolf's life. She was conceived in London and lived there throughout World War I, the story's setting. Woolf's family spent summers in St. Ives, Cornwall, similar to Clarissa's time in Bourton. Woolf also never had faith in Christianity, like Clarissa, who has never believed in God and is concerned her daughter Elizabeth is reading prayer books and even taking communion. Consequently, *Mrs. Dalloway* seems to be largely biographical, although it is founded on a character whose lifestyle is far different to Woolf's. The real-life aspect of the novel that is clearest is Mrs. Dalloway's sexuality. Clarissa marries a man, yet she truly loves a woman, Sally. Woolf had affairs with women throughout her life. This is mentioned because the novel is often depicted as a release for Woolf—a way of saying everything she wished to say without truly saying it (Montashery, 2012). During Woolf's lifetime, any non-heterosexual relationship was frowned upon. Therefore, Woolf was not entirely able to express her love for a woman publicly, but she could do so through her books. Other aspects of Woolf's life were "shameful", but she also included them: elements such as suicidal thoughts and her lack of belief in Christianity. These examples demonstrate that there were aspects that Woolf touched on in her work that she could not share in her everyday life. Woolf kept these thoughts repressed, and clearly *Mrs. Dalloway* was a work in which Woolf released her troubles and experiences.

The aspect of sexuality connects Woolf to Septimus through their feminist-masculinist association. Part of Septimus and Clarissa's problems with fitting in is based on the features of societal gender roles. Emotional women and unemotional men are studied in *Mrs. Dalloway* through these two personalities. Clarissa, as the hero, transforms immediately when she departs from Bourton. Clarissa travels from a safer, "womanly" setting to a place where she can experience homosexual feelings and experiences. As

a result, she joins a female-dominated space where only homosexuals are acknowledged and different sexual emotions are suppressed. David Eng describes it as “an ardently pre-Oedipal feminine-concentrated ordinary world” contrary to “the heterosexual masculine-subjugated communal realm” (2020). He further explains that a single way of changing from oedipal to pre-oedipal alignment (turning from the mother to the father) could result in a virile intricacy when one clings to the mother rather than shifting to the father (2020). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, when Sally takes the roles of both the mother and the object of affection, Clarissa might feel she is clashing between masculinity and femininity. Clarissa states, “Sally was the one who, for the first time, made me feel how protected life was at Bourton. This meant she was naïve on sex and societal issues” (Woolf, 1925). This implies it is through Sally that Clarissa knows about love, prose, and life. The duo spend time together, conversing on ways of transforming the world. “of course, these were Sally’s views, however soon Clarissa became just as pleased ... Sally’s authority was astonishing, her personality, gift” (Woolf, 1925). Swapping from a maternal setting to a male-controlled culture might have left Clarissa disoriented. Clarissa reflects on her condition and explains her fascination with women as a sensation of “what men felt” (Woolf, 1925). This implies that female attractiveness enchants Clarissa, but at the same time she holds in high esteem stout, influential women who are attracted to political affairs and favor sane behaviors before emotions. For example, Lady Bexborough, who receives a telegram informing her that her son has been killed in the combat, indicates a macho element. (Woolf, 1925). Conversely, Stamatovic and Vesna conclude that love between genders lacks a particular eminence “that only occurs between females,” suggesting that womanlike associations are strictly more desired (2018).

Septimus, who also faces the stress of playing a character, is similar to Mrs. Dalloway, who slides between femininity and masculinity due to the changing situations in her life. Septimus’s young years were part of a male-dominated society. However, when his professional hopes failed, he was pressured to participate in warfare to attest to his manliness. Whatever he did, he did not expect to feel sexual emotions for Evans, but just friendship. Certainly, Evans, his officer, was attracted to him; they lived as one, fought, quarreled, and shared (Eng, 2020). Sadly, when Evans passed on, Septimus “commended himself upon very reasonably and very little” showing his pride for reacting in a manly way (Vieco, 2020). When he returns to the community after encountering warfare, his feelings are profoundly suppressed—he feels numb. Therefore, he suffers by concealing his actual feelings. In Susan Bennett Smith’s words: “Septimus’s mysterious homo-erotic emotions for Evans proves it is challenging for him to accept Evans’s demise” (2009). For instance, Septimus realizes Rezia has removed her wedding ring as her finger has become too slim. Eng reports that Septimus’s response exhibits mixed feelings as he believes in anxiety and liberation (2020). Even though he fears being lonely, he feels a sense of release from the bondage of the pretense of being happy in his marriage. He later confesses to himself

that, “he wedded his wife but never loved her, he seduced her, cheated her: irritated Miss Isabel Pole” (Woolf, 1925). The novel indicates that his emotions died with Evans, to whom they belong.

The preceding paragraphs show that both Septimus and Clarissa live in secure but seemingly sexless marriages to keep up appearances, yet they are secretly mourning their deceased treasured ones, even if their manner of mourning differs: female mourning is portrayed as often too emotive and male mourning as too lucid. In this light, Clarissa is described as a rational mourner because she tries to be calm and upright each time. Vieco believes she has matured and become tough, and recalls, “there was often a cold aspect in Clarissa” (2020). In contrast, Septimus is emotional, discouraged, and no longer cares about rationality the way he did when Evans passed on. Presently he mourns perhaps for beauty or sorrow, and for his wife, Rezia, this is the most fearful situation: to see Septimus, a man who has fought in war and was fearless, crying (Eng, 2020). Septimus loses his manliness by becoming shell-shocked; he has failed to behave in the manner society expects of him. Consequently, the question arises whether Septimus becomes feminine through his sobbing and is excused from becoming a recognized griever by his gender (Griesinger, 2015). Hence, one can argue that Septimus and Clarissa are both womanly roles, as they are both oppressed by masculine-dominated structures. Additionally, one can claim that they are both womanlike in various ways. First, Septimus is categorized as female due to this grieving, whereas Clarissa is compelled to play a character, but she never feels entirely feminine. This implies that the duo are forced to suppress their homosexuality and present as on the threshold of androgyny instead of being part of a single gender.

For this reason, Iraj Montashery proposes that Woolf attempts to construct an androgynous model by allowing Septimus and Clarissa’s language to shift between poetry and prose. These two forms are thought to illustrate the feminine and the masculine, respectively (2012). Montashery explains this by providing case points from the Lacanian model of semiotic and symbolic language within the story. Put simply, the semiotic and symbolic are more lyrical, vividly characterized by metaphors and imagery. However, because Septimus and Clarissa use both forms, the effort to gender characters via language is futile. It appears that Woolf wishes to erase the antagonism between masculine and feminine, or to somehow interrogate their hierarchal ranking by ensuring both Septimus and Clarissa are unaware of their sexual roles. In other words, Woolf intended to deliberate on her personal situation as a married woman attracted to other women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, conveying female experiences through her works.

Montashery, however, maintains that Woolf is never, as most critics consider her, a feminist author and declares that Woolf’s usage of androgyny, “which is full command and balance of an emotional range that encompasses both female and male qualities,” is an escape from the author’s agonizing femininity because androgyny is a type of subjugation (2012). In Woolf’s essay *A Room of One’s Own*, Montashery argues, it is dangerous for authors to perceive their

gender “as woman or man, simple and pure” (2012). Rather, they should be “man-womanly or woman-manly” (2012). Therefore, Woolf did not express women’s experiences, as she tried to write in a genderless way. Woolf also failed in writing about women belonging to a different social class than hers, meaning she was unaware of their experiences. However, Septimus and Clarissa echo Woolf’s personal life experience: with muddled gender roles and Clarissa’s social order, she openly describes her personal experiences. Emily Griesinger rebelliously explains that Woolf, rather than running away from gender identities, negates them as she observes them for what they are (2015). Griesinger further affirms that Woolf realizes the objective of the feminist fight is “to critique the demise-dealing dual antagonisms of feminism and masculinity” (2015). The novel then disproves “the antagonism of woman/man as a disagreement” (Guo, 2017). In summary, Woolf’s work is applicable for a feminist reading, and it can be argued that through Septimus and Clarissa’s deconstructions of their genders in *Mrs. Dalloway*, combined with the personal experiences outlined above, Woolf is far more than a feminist attempting to offer novel viewpoints on masculinity and femininity in connection to society and homosexuality.

Woolf had doubts over whether or not reviewers or readers would interpret her work the way she intended—whether or not they could see the link between Clarissa and Septimus. The fact that Woolf thought about these ideas makes the role of the author’s experiences important in the interpretation of her works. Mitchell Leaska mentions that Woolf was afraid that “reviewers would not understand the intricacy of her design and would miss the connection between Clarissa and Septimus” (1977). Woolf continually questioned reviewers’ possible comments in her diary, writing: “The reviewers will say that it is disjointed because of mad scenes not connecting with the Dalloway scenes. And, I suppose there is some superficial glittery writing. But is it ‘unreal’? Is it mere accomplishment? I think not. And as I think I said before, it seems to leave me plunged deep in the richest strata of my mind” (Woolf, 2017). Woolf believed that *Mrs. Dalloway* would be subject to inaccurate interpretations, ones that would not pertain to the actual meaning she intended the novel to have. This paper has attempted to highlight that the character of Septimus is based on Woolf’s life experiences and trauma. It has made clear that Woolf’s life was a major influence on the story of Septimus. While the novel interconnects the plots of several characters, it prominently highlights the connection between Septimus and the protagonist, Clarissa, who never meet but are constantly unified.

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