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Professor Cavender

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Masculinity, Madness, and Woolf's Redefinition of Beauty in *Mrs. Dalloway*

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf contests numerous conventions of her time, including conceptions of beauty, and its relation to gender, normalcy, and behavior. The notion of beauty as a discreet aesthetic category is not new. In fact, representations of beauty in *Mrs. Dalloway* directly oppose those of Edmund Burke, who categorized aesthetics of beauty in the eighteenth century. He argued that beauty is the opposite of the sublime, and classified it as having attributes of the feminine form. Burkean notions of gendered aesthetics were mirrored in Victorian gender expectations, so that men, as the opposite of their weak female counterparts, developed a duty bound, nationalistic sense of honorable masculinity, lacking show of emotion and epitomized by reason and authority. The turn of the twentieth century marked the beginning of the modernist period where, in the wake of a post-World War I world, artists, including Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury group, felt the need to redefine art in the midst of post-war destruction. This change created an opportunity to play with conventional gender roles and its supposed relation to beauty, as seen in Wyndham Lewis's short-lived, but unforgettable *BLAST*, with its hot pink cover, whose hue and title suggest an obliteration of former conventions of art and gender, paving the way for other modernist works. Woolf contributes to this period in her strides to reconfigure beauty as an aesthetic category that reveals society's misconceptions about gender and madness alike. In 1925, *Mrs. Dalloway* was published, and I argue that Woolf's traumatized World War I veteran Septimus Warren Smith becomes a locus for intersecting issues

of madness, masculinity, and beauty, wherein Woolf's patchwork of narrators work to criticize the Burkean beauty of the pre-war Victorian world, and replace it with a new beauty: one that is simple in its creation, and ultimately allows Septimus to take control of his life one last time, by ending it.

Working with Burke

Woolf's novel provides a critique of the Burkean beauty, whereby she can then create a new beauty that contrasts with the old, Burkean influenced beauty of Victorian England. In order to display how this Burkean beauty is criticized as inaccurate and unproductive, one must first outline the gist of Burke's notions of beauty. One very interesting categorization of beauty, especially in terms of this paper, is that Burke terms beauty to be found in objects that are delicate. He writes that "[a]n appearance of *delicacy*, and even of fragility, is almost essential to it [beauty] ... [t]he beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness, or delicacy" (116). Here is the audacious argument that beauty, in its delicacy, as women most surely are, is inherently a female quality. Burke genders beauty in a way that is constricting to both women and men, which will be seen clearly in the treatment of Septimus by the medical professionals of his time. Beyond having a delicate quality, Burke characterizes object of beauty based on "[a] quality so essential to beauty, that I do not now recollect anything beautiful that is not smooth. In trees and flowers, smooth leaves are beautiful; smooth slopes of earth in gardens, smooth streams in the landscape; smooth coats of birds" (114). Roughness is not something associated with the Burkian beauty. Rather it is that which is not unsettling, but easy and pleasing to view, which is considered beautiful. Similarly, beautiful objects "vary their direction in every moment, and they change under the eye by a deviation continually carrying on ... it blends again with other parts; and the line is perpetually changing, above, below, upon every side" (Burke 115). In

order to be considered beautiful, objects must not possess any quality that would strike the observer as sudden, it must not startle. Quite the opposite in fact, Burke argues that beauty is something fluid, gentle in its variation. In addition, Burke asserts that the colors “which seem most appropriated to beauty, are the milder of every sort; light greens; soft blues; weak whites; pink reds; and violets (117). That is to say that beauty is limited to color that, in the same manner as other qualities of beauty, will not startle or incite wild passions, but rather please with its gentleness and delicacy, with a benign inclination. Woolf’s characterization of the Burkean beauty, by use of satire and comparison to horror, weakens the Burkean, and paves the way for her own redefinition of beauty.

Masculinity and Nation

Woolf crafts Septimus as a representation of the way in which English society is suffering during the post-WWI period. Septimus’s trauma stems from his experiences in the Great War. In war, Septimus experiences a drastically different version of war than that which was created for him by a patriotic England that galvanized duty to one’s country. Such an altered view of the world awakened him to the meaninglessness which he now sees as characteristic of that national myth, a knowledge that alters the way in which he views the world around him after he returns from war. Septimus’s emptiness is manifested as trauma, and is viewed by his post-war society as unacceptable, especially because his reactions to trauma are so sudden and intense, causing visions that make him out to be a madman. The source of Septimus’s emptiness is the discrepancy between a world that views the war, and his part in it, as a romanticized exercise of honor and duty to one’s nation, and the disillusionment he experiences after he actually participates in the traumatic realities of war. He went off bravely, fighting in response to a calling of duty and honor to England that had been so fiercely ingrained

into the hearts and minds of young men like him. In fact, in his *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, Modris Eksteins, a historian, synthesizes the effects of World War I on perceptions of masculinity that were influenced by nationalism. He asserts that the British civilian population was not prepared for the war to last as long as it did, or be as grueling and affecting as it was. When British minister of war Kitchener made a statement to the council of war in 1914, claiming that preparation must be made to endure the war, "putting armies of millions in the field and maintain them for several years ... Sir Edward Grey, the foreign minister, noted that Kitchener's estimate of the war's length 'seemed to most of us unlikely, if not incredible'" (101). Certainly, it is clear that such an unsuspecting view of what the war *would* be would prove disillusionary when contrasted with the harsh realities of war. If the British council of war and its citizenship was expecting a quick and easy fix and swift restoration of peace, it is no wonder that national duty continued to prevail and the dominant mentality. Images of this duty are echoed in *Mrs. Dalloway* as Woolf describes a common sight, reflective of the way in which duty was romanticized, especially in war times, of "[b]oys in uniform, carrying guns" (51). The fact that the individuals toting the guns are "boys" indicates that this myth of the romanticized warrior was an ideal that took its roots on the minds of young men, so that when these boys came of age, they would be able to recognize their obligation to England. This mentality was instilled in boys from a young age, so that by the time many of them came of age and were able to go off to war, they realized this expectation, and fulfilled it. They were taught to value the masculine role, in the form of duty and self-sacrifice, for the sake of the nation. The narrator represents them as they "marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising the duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England" (51). The simile comparing

duty with legend implies a connectedness about the way in which duty contributes to Septimus's identity as a man. The legend suggests a certain timelessness about the fulfillment of duty; that is, it ensures a legacy that will endure, a steady quality, summoning a historic rhetoric of constancy, supposedly inherent to societal expectations of him as a relatively young, able-bodied man. In addition, the fact that this message is inscribed as a caption to a statue, gestures toward the notion that the message of duty-driven service to one's nation is not a mere suggestion, but a fixed expectation, placed as a visible priority and value for the English.

Such a picture of war, that glamorizes the role of the soldier, is problematic when actual experiences of war do not prove to be as fulfilling as society had made it out to be. This inconsistency is a source of disillusionment, so that when Septimus returns home as a traumatized veteran, his experiences and perceptions of war have altered him in such a way that he cannot be understood by a post-war society that views him as a would-be hero, and is unable to understand his trauma. His former boss Mr. Brewer, from when Septimus worked as a clerk before the war, represents the mentality with which people thought of Septimus when he originally returned: that "[t]hey were proud of him; he had won crosses. 'You have done your duty; it is up to us--' began Mr. Brewer; and could not finish, so pleasurable was his emotion" toward Septimus (Woolf 88). The civilian world had received the same education about war that Septimus and other veteran had, that duty was an obligation that earns one pride and national recognition. However, the pride with which Septimus was received was contingent upon him being a hero who had fulfilled his obligation to his country. Septimus's experience of war was different from the romanticized perception of it in the civilian world, and this discrepancy, along with his trauma, became problematic. The pride Mr. Brewer experiences in response to Septimus's service indicates the satisfaction he, as a representative of civilian English society,

feels upon witnessing an exemplification of the duty bound masculinity to which they are all upheld. It goes to follow, however, the displeasure that would occur if Septimus did not continue to behave in alignment with Victorian masculinity, as is seen throughout the novel.

For Septimus, the England to which he felt this obligatory devotion was not one that elicited pride or duty. The national mentality was that Septimus should go off to war willingly because they galvanized the role of warrior, masculinized it, so that duty and self-sacrifice became requirements to proving manhood. However, Septimus was not driven to war based on these values. Rather, before the war, he was a clerk, in love with Miss Isobel Pole. Woolf combats the principle of duty-driven enlistment with her depictions of Septimus's urge to enlist. At the onset of World War I, "Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (Woolf 86). Septimus was inspired by poetry, basking in the attention of Miss Pole as she wonders if "he [was] not like Keats" (Woolf 85). He fought to defend an England that had produced more than little toy soldiers, dressed up for the parade. He fought for an England that had given him poetry, that had won him the attention of Miss Isobel Pole, that had taught him that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (Keats 49). Miss Pole's comparison of Septimus to Keats foreshadows the role that beauty will play when the England he knows has been destroyed by war. She was his statue, urging him toward glory, not a mother nation that had entrenched young men like him with a false sense of obligation. All these springs of passion – Shakespeare, poetry, and Miss Pole – which urged Septimus to enlist, none of them prevail in keeping him inspired as he experiences the war. This England, one of inspiring culture, might seem to be in direct opposition to the narrator's previous depiction of a national myth based on statues and legends. However, in actuality, the cultural beauty that inspires him exists within the

same realm of the Burkean influenced Victorian world that created the national myth of duty and heroism. I argue that the national myth is satirized when the narrator compares it to the actual reason Septimus chose to enlist; that is, to rescue an England of culture. Even the fact that Miss Pole's dress is green, a representation of a Burkean, feminine beauty with its soft green color, points to a distinction between a masculine myth of participation in war, one which Woolf satirizes, and another, of culture and beauty, that urges Septimus to go off to war. Even his dear Miss Pole critiques this beauty when he "wrote poems to her, [by] ignoring the subject, [and] correct[ing] in red ink" (Woolf 85). That beauty of Keats and Shakespeare, although at first glance so contrasted with the pomp of nationalism, is in fact accomplishing the same task: that of convincing young men to go off and fight for mother England. By blurring the distinction between the two illusions, of national myth and Keats, between what is masculine and feminine, the Burkean aesthetic is obliterated, criticizing the convention that war is an inherently masculine act, which sets up her condemnation of how Septimus's madness is perceived by society.

Based on how war was so romanticized, the characters and society surrounding Septimus expect that he would be proud, his masculinity affirmed, and inspired by a sense of nationalism, after coming back from war. Quite the contrary in fact, he grew cold, because "[t]he War had taught him. It was sublime" (Woolf 86). Septimus's experience of war was instructive to him, but it was also, destructive. Woolf's narrator labels war as "sublime," pointing again to Burke, illustrative how the true nature of war was vicious in its dealings with all, rendering anything in its path as weak, and inherently feminine in nature. War was a masculine experience, not fit for the boys marching in parades, as the narrator described earlier, *or* for Septimus, and his poetry. Burke's notions of gendered beauty and sublimity would suggest that England's patriotic boys represented a masculine ideal, while Septimus's predisposition toward Shakespeare and Miss

Pole pointed to him as having more feminine qualities. However, I argue that Woolf disparages this limiting notion by portraying war as destructive to the Burkean binary, by critiquing both myths of nationalism and beauty in her dealings with Septimus's madness and its treatment; it is through her critique that she situates Septimus as a point of convergence, where Woolf can redefine beauty.

The many voices Woolf uses to craft her text continue to describe Septimus's experience of war by distinguishing the sublimity of it all, as different from the civilian understanding of war. She writes, "He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference" (Woolf 86). All of the experiences he has are labeled as part of a "show," implying that there is a lack of truth to these experiences; a truth which Keats argued is only accessible through beauty (Keats 49). "Friendship," as a subcategory of the national bond that Septimus shared with his fellow soldiers and all men who were duty-bound to England, was a "show." The "European War," which had been so galvanized by an already hearty sense of patriotism and a commitment to an England of Shakespeare, was a "show." "Death," an honorable sacrifice for the sake of one's country and homeland, was a "show." "[Winning] promotion as a result of his actions in war and his habitual pledge to defend his country, was a "show." The fact that Septimus was still relatively young, and had a life to look forward to after the war, was a "show," because that life would not be compatible with his new knowledge of life once his trauma begins to manifest. All of the above are aspects of war which have served to further galvanize the experience of participating in war, but Septimus realizes that none of them really capture the essence of war. "War taught him" the realities of itself, beyond how it was perceived by the patriotic civilians (Woolf 86).

It is from this new knowledge, gleaned from his experiences in war, that Septimus encounters the fact that the Burkean beauty and passions which he enjoyed before the war – Shakespeare, poetry, and Miss Isobel Pole – are meaningless in the new sphere of post-war England. After Septimus returns from war, “he opened Shakespeare once more. That boys’ business of the intoxication of language – *Antony and Cleopatra* – had shriveled utterly” (Woolf 88). The very passions that urged him to go to war and protect an England that inspired him are now meaningless, empty. The fact that he returned to Shakespeare and found no pleasure in it reveals the destructive power of war, and the complete transformation that Septimus experienced in response to it. The use of the word “boys” gestures toward her earlier characterization of the patriotic parades meant to inspire enlistment, except that this time, she’s not addressing the notion of nationalism. The use of the word “intoxication” implies that both modes of persuasion, patriotic rhetoric and poetic passion, employ a certain quality of seduction. The boys’ youth leaves them vulnerable to that influence, convincing them to enlist and fight for England. However, war destroys that façade, and breaks the spell of intoxication, leaving the boys damaged and aware of the falsity of their former intoxication. Tammy Clewell, in her “Consolation Refused: Virginia Woolf, The Great War, and Modernist Mourning,” argues that Woolf acknowledges the war by writing fictive representations of its destructive effects. In post-war England, society was so eager to forget the war and return to the ways of the past that, what Clewell terms as Woolf’s “refusal to mourn” recognized the trauma of veterans and broader society alike in a way that no one else had (199). Clewell states that “Woolf places grief in the service of assessing conventional attitudes about gender ... to show how prewar constructions of masculinity prepared the way for intolerable loss” (Clewell 203). These constructions, which included both a dutiful sense of masculine nationalism and the passions imbued by Keats and

Shakespeare, were inadequate to prepare men for war, which only set them up for disillusionment and social failure upon their return.

The narrator delineates the change in mentality when she describes how, “[w]hen peace came [Septimus] was in Milan, billeted in the house of an innkeeper with a courtyard, flowers in tubs, little tables in the open, daughters making hats, and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him—that he could not feel” (Woolf 86). After the war ended, Septimus is staying at an inn, where the landscape is comprised of elements of Burkean beauty, natural and yet still domestic, which before the war, brought Septimus pleasure. However, now, having been disillusioned about what used to matter to him as a result of his experiences in war, Septimus finds them meaningless. Even Lucrezia cannot elicit stirrings of passion in him, as Miss Pole used to do, because “he could not feel” (Woolf 86). Many of the objects which used to inspire him, which even inspired him to enlist to go to war in the first place, now hold no meaning. War has stripped the world of its meaning.

Septimus acknowledges the onset of this emptiness shortly after his return. As he and his wife Lucrezia are returning to their home, he wonders: “It might be possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window, as they left Newhaven; it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning” (Woolf 88). At this point in time, Septimus is reflecting on a time when he was just recently returned from war, and his visions have not yet begun to overtake his life. Septimus forms the thought of a meaningless world in response to the train window view of England. It is England, and a myth of national heroism, that has brought him and many others to war, and so it is the view of a post-war England that, after his life altering experiences during the war, elicits a feeling of emptiness.

Medicalized Madness

Indeed, the society to which Septimus has returned is not particularly accommodating of Septimus and his condition, but the medical professionals are even less so. Septimus's post-war condition could be described as being in line with the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, but

[i]n World War I, the newly widespread condition was first dubbed 'shell shock' because most psychiatrists and psychologists charged with treating the afflicted soldiers thought it was due to the noise and physical disruption of incessant bombardment. For their part, many military men considered the symptoms to be a deceitful way of shirking one's duty (Baudy 391).

Such a view of the soldiers' psychological afflictions denotes cowardice, which is certainly not in line with the duty-oriented perception that society had of Septimus and his role of soldier. Shell shocked men such as Septimus were therefore seen as somehow less than they should be, because their response to war was different from that of a society that romanticized duty-driven action. It is this gap, between how society expected Septimus to react and how he actually reacts as a result of his trauma, which keeps him from overcoming his trauma. The general consensus about shell shock, as written by Woods Hutchinson in 1919 in *The Doctor in War*, was that "it is simply 'the revelation of the measure of nervous unfitness and mental unbalance admitted to the army', a large share of it 'merely ordinary insanity occurring in wartime and having its delusions coloured by the fears of the battlefield'" (Barham 143). This assessment implies that the conditions of war had very little to with what the soldiers were experiencing, but that the men

who were afflicted possessed an inherent disposition toward “delusion.” Therefore, anyone experiencing any varying emotional repercussions after participation in war, was naturally predisposed to emotional instability, a feminine trait of course, and that any response in direct opposition to war was simply the “battlefield” being manifested in an already troubled mind. Emil Kraepelin, a psychiatrist who treated soldiers during World War I, often referred to shell shocked men as “weak-willed persons,” “mentally deficient,” and “infirm and morally inferior persons” (Barham 139). This view places all the blame on the soldiers and their supposed lack of mental and emotional resolve, and masculine reason. It says nothing which indicates that the hostile war environment was a breeding ground for psychological unrest. Surely, when the values of eighteenth century English society and the way in which Septimus was expected to be a hero returned from war, were paired with professional opinions such as these, victims of shell shock were considered devoid of their manhood, because weakness and inferiority were generally associated with the feminine.

The narrator’s descriptions of how doctors respond to Septimus mirror the historical accounts of the medical establishment’s reactions to shell shock. In fact, she satirizes them in her depictions of how foolish Septimus’s doctors are in dismissing his trauma. Society’s reactions to shell shock stem from conventions of masculinity and the myth of nationalistic ideals of the warrior. Further, these gender categories are certainly reinforced and sanctioned by the health care professionals of the time. Clewell addresses the “medicalization of illness and dying [when she argues that] even the Great War, which temporarily returned an acute awareness of loss to the center of British society, did not ultimately stem the modern dying of death. As Woolf observed just one month after the signing of the Armistice, ‘the war is already almost forgotten’ (Diary 1:227)” (Clewell 201). Woolf herself asserted in her diary that English society

had already forgotten about the war, which automatically disregards the veterans, like Septimus, who are left unable to forget, let alone cope. Septimus did not forget, revealing again the discrepancy between his new awareness and the consciousness of denial that prevailed around him. If the war was forgotten, then the changes brought about by war were forgotten also, in an attempt to return to the old ways, to the Victoriam. This social denial sets up Septimus's message as inherently connected to his illness, and not as a direct result of his experience in war. Karen DeMeester, in her "Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," asserts that trauma is characteristic of modernist literature, that part of its purpose is to attempt to speak truth to an experience that historically has not been validated. She argues that society's attempts to help traumatized veterans like Septimus are futile because they are crafted by the same systems that laid the groundwork for the veterans' disillusionment in the first place. Septimus's attempts to communicate are not heard because society has not been equipped with the knowledge that would allow such communication. Consequently, the disillusionment, and resulting madness, is perpetuated. DeMeester states that "Septimus suffers not from a psychological pathology but from a psychological injury, one inflicted by his culture through war and made septic by that same culture's postwar treatment of veterans" (653). Her delineation of Septimus's condition as an injury, not pathology, indicates that his condition was caused by something external to himself, and does not exist simply as pre-existing deficiency, as Kraepelin argued. She argues the cause to be war, and identifies the social attitudes about gender and madness to serve as the reason why his illness goes without proper treatment. Similarly, Kimberly Coats, in her "Exposing the Nerves of Language: Virginia Woolf, Charles Mauron, and the Affinity Between Aesthetics and Illness," argues that "[l]ike art, illness demands that we inhabit an entirely different reality, a reality that eludes our grasp just as it alters and renders

foreign what at one time seemed most familiar” (246). Surely, Septimus could be viewed as the image of an artist, marginalized as degenerate because of his illness, but this would imply a lack of truth to his message, which I argue is fallacious. Certainly, his illness prevents his dominant society and his doctors from hearing the truth in his message, but that does not mean that it is actually untrue.

The doctors within the novel set an example of how to treat cases such as Septimus's. Woolf's narrator describes them as “the priest[s] of science” (94). Authority is implied with the use of both “priest” – in the context of religious authority – and “science” – which connotes authoritative proof of reason – meaning that the doctors have the authority to judge cases like Septimus's. When the Smiths seek the help of Dr. Holmes, his decision is to dismiss Septimus's struggles, claiming that he “had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was [just] a little out of sorts” (Woolf 21). Holmes determines that Septimus's condition is not “serious,” and deems it a “little” matter, toward which no extra attention need be placed. This conclusion completely eliminates any possibility of giving him any further chance of returning to a healthy emotional state. Furthermore, it eradicates any potential sympathy Septimus might have received for his traumas, dismissing them as signs of weakness. Holmes later asks Septimus if he is “[i]n a funk, eh?” implying that his condition is not of a clinical nature, but rather just a mood swing, a bout of depression, that will pass with time (Woolf 149). Rather, doctors told Lucrezia to “make him notice real things [... to] play cricket” (Woolf 25). If the prescription is a dose of reality, it implies that Septimus's struggles are not real, making his condition seem entirely illegitimate. Not only does he need reality, but he needs a masculine reality, which is reflected in the fact that Dr. Holmes suggests cricket, a sport, to heighten his spirits. This hints to the notion that the root of Septimus's problems is that he has lost hold of his masculinity,

completely bypassing the trauma he has experienced in war. This reading is supported by Eksteins's synthesis of the sports rhetoric that was so ingrained in the collective mentality of the British beginning in the Victorian era. He argues that "[s]port, in Thomas Arnold's vision at Rugby, where games first became an integral part of the education program, would give a young man the body of a Greek and the soul of a Christian knight," and then proceeds to cite "[t]he Clarendon Commission of 1864 insist[ing] that 'the cricket and football pitches ... are not merely places of amusement; they help to form some of the most valuable social qualities and manly virtues, and they hold, like the classroom and boarding house, a distinct and important place in public school education'" (Eksteins 120-121). The fact that both instances cite sport as integral to education suggests that manliness is something that is taught. However, if the pre-war education that the young men received was insufficient to prepare them for the realities of war, then the fact that the same education was speaking to standards of masculinity suggests that education to be flawed as well. In addition, the notion of sports as an education in and of itself gestures back toward Holmes's treatment of Septimus. The knowledge Septimus acquired in war changed his perception of the world, altering the education he'd received on nationalism from Shakespeare and Keats alike. When he returns traumatized, society imposes the need for him to be re-educated, and seeks the help of sports to help him in regaining hold of his masculinity. Holmes is a fool because of his irrational point of view, but his position as a doctor and, therefore, an authority figure, situates him in a place where he is able to judge Septimus, and perpetuate limiting notions of masculinity.

In contrast with Holmes's response to Septimus, requiring that he keep a stiff upper lip, participate in manly activities, in order to remedy his war-induced emotionality, Sir William Bradshaw, another doctor, has a different approach. Bradshaw's power over Septimus lies, not

on a traditional view of masculinity, of which Dr. Holmes is a proponent, but rather in his own conception of masculinity. Bradshaw considers himself a self-made man, as his “father had been a tradesman,” and he had learned his craft and become upwardly mobile of his own volition (Woolf 97). Such agency is one indication of the type of masculinity he requires of Septimus: the ability to do for one’s self, to provide for one’s wife, and to be able to live up to that “natural respect for breeding and clothing” (Woolf 97). Attention to clothing suggests that Bradshaw is concerned with appearances, and how they reflect upon an individual. Septimus is a war veteran, considered a hero by his nation, but the way he presents himself, whether he is able to control it or not, does not make him appear as a hero. Quite the opposite actually, Holmes and Bradshaw alike view him as completely mad, having lost hold of his sanity as he lost hold of his masculinity. Bradshaw determines that “[h]ealth 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” (Woolf 99). Septimus has a message, as a result of his disillusionment with the post-war world in which he lives. Bradshaw relates Septimus to some Christ-claiming lunatic, because Septimus acts as a sort of messenger, because he claims to possess a knowledge that is contrary to the norm. The fact that Bradshaw generalizes Septimus’s claims, by asserting that to have such a message is common, and a trait of any run-of-the-mill mad man, is to trivialize the credence of what Septimus has to say, and to invalidate his experiences in war, because they did not result in heroism and increased national pride—both examples of outdated masculinity. DeMeester argues that “[t]he trauma survivor’s testimony has the power to destabilize his culture’s social, political, and economic status quo and thereby to bring about change in that status quo. Though critics use Septimus’s messianic vision of himself as a truth-teller to

demonstrate his megalomania and his delusions of grandeur, his view of himself as a prophet, despite the seemingly fantastical presentation, is quite valid" (659). Septimus, as the "trauma survivor," carries a view of the world that differs greatly from the civilian population who did not participate in the war, and who still believe the stuff of national myth and gender, all rolled into one façade called mother England. The message that Septimus carries would be destructive to this world, just as war was destructive to his perception of that world. Certainly, his madness might lessen the credibility of his message, but its truth remains all the more real.

However, the narrator had already distinguished Septimus as different from the common man, when she writes that "London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; [and] thought nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents have thought to distinguish them" (84). Those young men made up an entire generation in whom were instilled the national myth London was offering as bait for their blood sacrifice. These young men were just like Septimus, as common as his last name of Smith; it is his first name that distinguished him from the rest, not only from the rest of the Smiths, but also from the rest of Bradshaw's lunatics who fancied themselves as Christ figures. Therefore, Bradshaw's failure to acknowledge Septimus's message of emptiness as valid, and prophetic even, reveals the fact that he is just another participant in the machine of English imperialism.

Bradshaw's solution to his madness is to "order rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months' rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve" (Woolf 99). Septimus has gained knowledge through his experience of war which awakened him to a message of emptiness, which is not understood by the people in his surrounding environment. They deem him mad. In order to snuff out Septimus' lack of proportion, Bradshaw orders him to be shut away, away from

people, commotion, and knowledge, until his message has been lost in the silence, and a sense of proportion has been achieved. Bradshaw's prescription of proportion is very much akin to the rest cure given to hysterical or neurasthenic women beginning in the nineteenth century (<http://www.hsl.virginia.edu/historical/reflections/fall2008/rest.html>). The fact that this treatment is so similar to that of a feminine "disease" indicates the fact that the nature of Septimus's problem is viewed to be a lack of masculinity, thus to be dealt with the same approach. Bradshaw's intent to shut Septimus away from the rest of society conjures a fear of contamination, as if, if Septimus's message were to be widely heard, it would infect the minds of the masses. This sentiment is echoed by Kimberly Coates, in her article "Exposing the Nerves of Language: Virginia Woolf, Charles Mauron, and the Affinity Between Aesthetics and Illness," where she argues that illness is a portal of sorts, that grants access to participation in the creation of art. Her argument reads Septimus as able to see beauty everywhere because of his illness. While this is partially true, it would be limiting to disregard the truth of Septimus's message simply because it was brought on by his illness. Coates states that "modern artists were diagnosed and then dismissed as dangerous degenerates who had best be approached with caution lest their diseased bodies, minds, and artwork infect the unwary British citizen" (253). The same aesthetic redefinition that Woolf and other modernists were after, parallels nicely the new perception of the world that Septimus had. Does it not reveal the power of this newness, that Bradshaw and those like him immediately illegitimate its truth and dismiss it as madness?

I argue that Woolf first critiques Bradshaw's authority by parodying his approach to medicine in her descriptions of his assessment methods, particularly his use of a pink card, on which he takes notes. Without asking Septimus any questions, he could see the first moment they came into the room ...[that] it was a case of complete breakdown—complete physical and

nervous breakdown, with every symptom in the advanced stage, he ascertained in two or three minutes” (Woolf 95). Bradshaw’s approach to medicine differs from Holmes’s in that he is most concerned with producing a certain diagnosis, and prescribing a solution. He acknowledges the fact that Septimus is suffering from some legitimate affliction, but his methods of diagnosis are still flawed—his diagnosis was made before speaking to Septimus at all, a conclusion based solely on appearance, which the narrator has already established as important to Bradshaw, and indicating class and level of manliness. Woolf repeatedly characterizes Bradshaw as taking Septimus’s condition very earnestly, “[a] serious symptom, to be noted on the card” (Woolf 96). She repeatedly describes how Bradshaw determines diagnosis, “writing answers to questions, murmured discreetly, on a pink card” (Woolf 95). Her repetition is emphatic, branding Bradshaw’s practice as contrived and formulaic. She satirizes his methods by paying special attention to the pink card and how it is supposed to signify Bradshaw’s methods as an exacting science, but really is based on nothing but appearance. Woolf’s use of irony toys with Bradshaw’s methods, implying that the weight with which he views cases such as Septimus’s is not as genuine as it might otherwise seem. The fact that Bradshaw is taking notes on a card during his visit with Septimus suggests that he considers his practice to be a scientific one – one that can be determinant through careful record keeping (on note cards) and prompt and certain diagnoses. However, the narrator’s ironic tone when describing his practices submits that science may not be the correct approach either. The pink card is reminiscent of BLAST’s striking cover, which denoted a separation from the Burkian binary, by combining the power of brightness and suddenness with the conventionally feminine color pink. The fact that the card is also pink is compelling because it gestures toward the notion that nerve cases are feminine. BLAST, just like war, obliterated notions of gender in conjunction with other qualities, such as

color. The pink card carries the message of BLAST to communicate the fact that war, as the catalytic event, created the chaos necessary in order to disturb the paradigm. Since Bradshaw is the authority of masculinity, any absence of this quality must be, by default, feminine, and therefore to be noted on the pink card. The fact that Bradshaw equates illness to inferiority and weakness, which are conventionally feminine traits, reveals the fact that he represents an outdated, Burkian school of thought. This agenda becomes clear when one recalls Burke's statement that "the beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness ... without any remarkable appearance of strength" (116-117). Bradshaw's judgments and modes of practice exemplify the Burkian, the same influence that failed Septimus in the first place, which is why Bradshaw is unable to help him, except to shut him away, in order to maintain the Burkian status quo.

I assert that the medical authority which Bradshaw exerts is akin to a religious authority, because religion is a power that is institutionalized, ingrained and accepted as moral law. However, very few characters within Mrs. Dalloway seem to question Bradshaw's techniques. His methods come at a high price, and "his weariness, together with his grey hairs, increased the extraordinary distinction of his presence and gave him the reputation (of the utmost importance in dealing with nerve cases) not merely of lightning skill, and almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis but of sympathy; tact; understanding of the human soul" (Woolf 95). Dr. Holmes's authority comes with tradition and a continued acceptance of the old ways – he represents a Victorian England of duty-oriented masculinity. Bradshaw on the other hand, is scientific, and his credibility is to be found in his demeanor, and quickness to determine cause of illness. His prescription is "proportion, divine proportion" (Woolf 99). The war has, apparently, disrupted Septimus's level of proportion: a proportion of manliness and duty. According to Bradshaw, the

cure included “rest,” away from society and Lucrezia, because they are preventing him from regaining hold of the masculinity that is so necessary to male health (Woolf 96). His reputation renders him as “understanding of the human soul” (Woolf 95). Woolf fashions the surrounding society’s perception of him by characterizing him with language of religious power, and his patients as supplicants to this power. The narrator repeatedly describes Bradshaw in religious terms, implying that his authority is not based on his skill as a practitioner, but rather on blind faith of his patients. She refers to him as a “priest of science,” claiming that his authority holds a doubled weight when it comes to determining illness both of the body and the soul. This language is repeated in the scene of Septimus’s visit to him when Septimus wonders if he should speak to Bradshaw about what he is really experiencing. He wonders what would happen “if he confessed” (Woolf 98). Confession implies something much different than communication; it implies that the speaker is at fault, because of something he did wrong, and that the hearer possesses authority to absolve the speaker of his sins. In this case, Septimus has sinned in that he has not maintained hold of his duty-bound masculinity that is required of him after he returns from war. Bradshaw, as a doctor who is entrusted with “understanding the soul” of his patient, is the one with the authority to help Septimus reach absolution (Woolf 95).

After first parodying Bradshaw’s practices with her use of the pink card, Woolf’s narrator then criticizes his methods by characterizing him as imperialistic, and cannibalistic even, thereby identifying the purpose of his practice to be for his own benefit, and not to actually help his patients. It is with his implied religious authority that Bradshaw suggests proportion as a solution to Septimus’s madness. However, “[p]roportion has a sister ... Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace” (Woolf 100). Conversion is for those who lack Bradshaw’s

sense of proportion to begin with; it does not need to be restored, but rather, needs to be instilled. Septimus, as a traumatized war veteran, is viewed as weak, as one upon whom, medicine can feast, cannibalistically, in the same way that Mr. Brewer consumed Septimus's experiences in war in order to glean a personal "pleasure," a sick titillation from the suffering of a would-be hero, and in the same way that "London has swallowed up millions" of young men to offer up as sacrifice for the good of mother country (Woolf 85). DeMeester identifies the fact that

[t]he result of Bradshaw's effort to Silence Septimus is twofold: he destroys Septimus's chance to recover by robbing him of the essential way he can give meaning to his experiences, and he destroys his own culture's meaningful recovery from the war by perpetuating a social, political, and economic status quo that sacrificed a generation of men to the First World War and enslaved and exploited numerous undigenous cultures and their lands to expand its empire (661).

DeMeester's argument villainizes Bradshaw, and rightly so, to reveal the fact that his mistreatment of Septimus is coupled with a mistreatment of his own country, by letting it continue on the greedy path of utilizing the blood, bodies, and weakness of others to increase personal and national gain. Bradshaw uses conversion as a tool, because in being "stamped on the face of the populace," it is institutionalized, in law, in medical practice, in currency even, to further his own agenda of personal monetary gain. The narrator describes it as being "disguised as brotherly love through factories and parliaments; offers help but desires power" (Woolf 100). Bradshaw is deceitful, playing in a field of benevolence, with motives of personal gain at the expense of others. The "brotherly love" Woolf mentions is echoed in her earlier descriptions of patriotism, and national pride, which were purposed to send England's boys off to war, to make

heroes of them, all for national gain. Bradshaw is an embodiment of imperialism, whereby Woolf criticizes the notion of war as inherent to masculinity. She identifies this conversion as being “concealed, as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self sacrifice” (Woolf 100). Duty and self-sacrifice are the very masculinized ideals which Septimus and other young men were taught in hopes of inspiring an urge to enlist and fight in World War I. Conversion is the national myth that created a love of England that was so strong, so powerful, that it drove men to enlist and fight for their country. It instilled in them a meaning beyond themselves, in order to perpetuate a broader agenda. Bradshaw is representative of this mentality. Since Septimus has come back from war with a different understanding of the war, he brings a message of the meaninglessness of that national myth, which Bradshaw would argue is Septimus asserting himself as a Christ figure. However, because Bradshaw has a masculine and religious authority as a doctor and “priest of science” he gets to decide who is sane and insane; and if the latter, he gets to decide to do away with the insane, to lock them up, to render proportion, to prevent their message from being spread to others. It is ironic that Septimus went off to war to further the imperialism of England, yet when he comes back traumatized and with a message of meaninglessness, he is treated with the same correction as the colonized (Woolf 94).

Septimus's Visions: the Horrific

The reader is first introduced to Septimus as he witnesses a commotion in the streets: “Everything had come to a standstill. The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body. The sun became extraordinarily hot because the motor car had stopped” (Woolf 15). Everything, the commotion in the street, and the world around him had halted for Septimus. The world fell behind the veil of Septimus's vision, a skewed version of reality. The “throb of the motor engines” began as a phenomenon external to

him, but was then internalized as he felt the effects of it personally (Woolf 15). The verbs in the context of this, Septimus's first vision, as we see it in *Mrs. Dalloway*, are all very strong and active: "throb" and "drumming" are all very forceful, which is indicative of the fact that Septimus did not have any control over his visions, that they were forced upon him, as a result of his inability to reconcile his trauma. Similarly, the narrator describes the increasing heat of the sun, which is intensified in non-motion. The fact that Septimus is back from war and no longer moving forward, always forward, fighting for his life, means that he only has to stand and continue to realize the meaninglessness of this post-war world. It is this realization that bears down on him, like the heat from the sun.

The focus is shifted to Septimus, and what is happening, not in the physical "pulse" of the city, but inside his thoughts (Woolf 15). In the same manner that the pulse of the city is altered, Septimus now has an altered "pulse," which is difficult for him to reconcile with the body he inhabits, because his body is seen by the people in his environment as that of a courageous war veteran. The passions that used to inspire him, and "pulse" through his body and stir him to action – Shakespeare, poetry, and Miss Pole, all beautiful to him – now are replaced with the "pulsing" of the physical world around him. The "pulsing" movement that occurs within the vision reveals the instability of Septimus as he experiences his visions. Woolf's narrator illustrates that in reaction to simple, daily events, he is plagued by his distortion of thought, "and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface, and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames" (Woolf 15). Again, the language of movement, of "wavering and quivering," represents the effect of movement on Septimus, that it serves to conjure his madness. The fact that "everything" has been built up and is just now

taking a toll on Septimus' motions to his trauma, and how it is just now, when he has finally returned from war, feeling the effects of his experiences. In addition, the simile comparing his vision to a "horror coming to the surface" suggests that the trauma is internal, threatening to burst toward of him.

The visions to come are transferred from being housed in his thoughts as he observes the commotion in the street, to being present "before his eyes," so that way is first spurred in his mind, takes the form of a physical reality for him, to be experienced physically, viscerally. In this particular vision, the horror intrudes gradually, boiling inside of him, and threatening to overflow. His reaction is spurred by the visions that occur externally, and it is this intrusion that frightens him. It – the horror – threatens to "burst into flames," so that he is battling with his surroundings, including society and the standards they impose upon him. This threat is emphasized with the repetition of the word "flames," which is indicative of the notion that the horror is to be regarded as a constant and unyielding threat to Septimus, continually interrupting his process of re-acclimation to a post-war society. The flames also echo the mention of the "sun" and its "heat" directly prior to the threat of his horror boiling over, reflecting the way in which Septimus experiences his internal, psychological trauma as something physical. As his mind manifests his traumas in what he perceives to be a tangible way, his body is his prison, allowing the war, and its lingering effects, English society, to exert its influence and claim sublimity, over Septimus.

As the flames continue to threaten him, they begin to affect a greater sphere, so that "the world wavered and quivered" (Woolf 15). Septimus' horror has spread from his thoughts to his body, to the world around him, explaining the inescapability he feels, as the horror continues to pose a threat. Here is where it can be observed that trauma, as a subcategory of explaining the

lack of meaning. The “wavering” and “quivering” that Septimus perceives is reflective of the change that is happening in this moment. In addition to change however, this language of motion also indicates a lack of certainty, a lack of absolute meaning, which is reflected when Septimus pauses to reflect on his current place within the bustle of motor cars, and wonders, “But for what purpose?” (Woolf 15). Here Septimus acknowledges his feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness, revealing the city, and its accompanying myths of nationalism and heroic duty as causal to his disillusionment upon returning from war. This initial lacking is then furthered by the “wavering” and “quivering” which signify a decrease in the concrete perception of the world that Septimus once had, when everything to him was made of Shakespeare and Miss Isobel Pole, and that was enough to live and die for. But—the lack of meaning is made apparent in the fact that Septimus explicitly questions his purpose in the first few pages of the novel, which situates him in a place from which he can attempt to find meaning, as his story in *Mrs. Dalloway* continues.

Septimus’s Visions: the Burkian Beautiful

It is clear that in the same way that the treatment of Septimus by both Dr. Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw reflects the Burkian, the beauty within Septimus’s visions reflects the same convention. At first, one might mistake the beauty in his visions as somehow productive, as it grants him an escape from the realities of war, and indeed from the horrific visions described above, focusing his attentions on magnificent hallucinations of nature. However, this is not the case. The Burkean beauty in his visions distracts from its deceit, because it sits in such direct contrast to Septimus’s visions of horror. This Burkean beauty, even though it draws him away from the initial trauma, only contributes further to his madness.

Further, it will be shown that, although the objects of beauty that exists within Septimus's visions so distract him from how out of place he is in society after returning from war, the beauty that occurs within these visions is a Burkian beauty, which has already proven to be insufficient as a remedy to the irreconcilability of his trauma. Septimus's images of beauty provide a contrast to his prior images of horror, which are explored above, but it would be fallacious to deem them somehow better or more beneficial than those of horror. In fact, they are just as destructive and problematic as the former, because they perpetuate a false paradigm that left Septimus ill-prepared to deal with war in the first place. Septimus' visions reflect both the effects of his trauma, but also the way in which the Burkian beautiful only contributes to his madness. Dr. Holmes is unable to understand Septimus's condition, and therefore unable to provide accurate treatment. In response to his trauma and the inadequacy of Septimus's medical professionals, his mind seeks refuge in beautiful images of nature. In fact, in addition to the images of beauty contrasting to the former images of horror in terms of content and form, they also contrast in that the former deals with Septimus's own internal struggles of reconciling the disillusionment he has with the post-war world, and the latter is in response to advice from Dr. Holmes to "take an interest in things outside himself" (Woolf 21). Although the beauty of nature seems at first to be more pleasing, it is still equally, if not more, destructive, because it is sanctioned by a doctor who advocates the same values which influenced society's reaction to Septimus.

Shortly after the reader is introduced to him and his first vision in the street, he has another as he sits in Regent's Park with his wife Lucrezia. As he looks to the sky,

...it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the

sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks (Woolf 21-22).

Even now, in the midst of his visions, Septimus himself identifies beauty, yet a beauty only witnessed in madness, as that which has the capacity to “provide him,” but with what? Holmes would argue that it provides him with a good dose of reality, but that does not seem so convincing. If the trauma that he experiences in war served as a way to strip meaning from the world as he once knew it, Septimus is left empty. The beauty of the sky as he sees it however, is able to “bestow ... charity” to him, is able “to provide [for] him,” so that some of his emptiness can be temporarily sated by the beauty of the sky. Not only does he experience a transitory relief from his emptiness, but he is able to cry. The “tears [that] ran down his cheeks” are miraculous. If, directly after his return from war, he was unable to feel because of what the war had taught him, then it is compelling to observe that it is beauty that is able to reclaim some of his feeling. However, this escape is only fleeting, because while beauty seems to be nurturing for Septimus, in that it creates a way for him to experience his madness without experiencing the fear that typically accompanies it, it also serves to perpetuate and intensify his madness. The insufficiency of his experience, along with the language of Burkean beauty, reveal what has been shown in Septimus’s other visions: the Burkean beauty is the same illusion that left him unable to deal with his trauma in the first place, so it will be equally unable to help him.

After his experience looking at the sky, he has another vision, which elucidates why the beauty of his visions is one and the same with the beauty of the pre-war world.

The excitement of the elm trees rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave, like plumes on horses' heads, feathers on ladies', so proudly they rose and fell, so superbly, would have sent him mad. But he would not go mad. He would shut his eyes; he would see no more. But they beckoned (Woolf 22).

At one moment, beauty is providing Septimus with an answer, with a counter to the emptiness which has taken over him upon his return from war. Then at another, the beauty he sees in the nature around him in the park is yet another source of his madness. Septimus sees beauty in nature, as the "elm trees" and "their leaves." These provide a beauty of movement and of color, that inspire him with "excitement." He compares the beauty of nature to "plumes on horses' heads [and] feathers on ladies'" thereby implying that the beauty found in nature is comparable to the beauty found in a more refined civilized setting. The verbs that provide action to these images are what intensify Septimus's madness. The trees and feathers alike, move in the same way that the world does in his previous vision. They are "rising and falling," as well as "thinning and thickening." This language gestures back to the language of movement Woolf uses when she describes the world as "wavering and quivering" (Woolf 15). The "rising and falling" though, would be classified as beautiful by Burke because it is a gradual variation. The fact that the language of movement is present in both types of visions, horrific and beautiful, reveals that a Burkian influence is at work in both. Initially, Septimus experienced this uncertainty in response to his trauma and the emptiness it created. However, regardless of the fact that he was able to see beauty in his surroundings, and experience a temporary relief from the meaninglessness that torments him, Septimus encounters the lack of meaning again, even

within beauty. It is in this way that beauty serves both as a balm to quell his fears, if only for a while, but also is eventually another source of his madness. The trees and their leaves are beautiful in their smoothness. The greens and blues he sees are like the color of Miss Pole's dress, exposing the fluidity of Burke's supposedly strict and separate categories. The plumed horses and feathered ladies gesture toward the patriotic parades meant to convince young men to go off to war for the sake of Mother England. Such a comparison is indicative of the fact that beauty is not something that exists in its own right, but rather, holds its value in his perception of it and how, instead of serving as a balm to his madness, or as an energizer which intensifies his madness. Septimus even is able to acknowledge the maddening power of this beauty, "but it beckoned." It has the same hypnotic, convincing power and pull as the myth of national heroism, as Bradshaw's proportion and conversion. This beauty: it is the same force that lead him to madness in the first place.

Similarly, Septimus has another vision in the park, later in the novel. He has a moment of epiphany, realizing that,

Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy ... all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere (Woolf 69).

After enduring the strain of his visions, and being fearful of what he sees, waiting for that moment of beauty to grant him respite, it becomes clear that the beauty sprang forth from the

world, that it is his changed perception of the world that allows him to see it anywhere, because it is not a true beauty, as the naïve Septimus would have understood from his days of reading Keats. The narrator describes Septimus's changed mentality, needing to "prove it (scientifically)" because he has learned from Dr. Holmes and the abiding society that it is science which holds meaning in the post-war world. Here, she blends the methods of a world that is foreign to Septimus, with his images of madness, to explain the "truth" of his realization. Images of the urban, in examples of "houses" and "railings," and nature, in the case of "antelopes and "leaves," now serve as sources of beauty. In one sense, this epiphany is assuring, in that it is "calm and reasonable," a balm to his madness. However, the "truth" is that beauty is not always a balm, but also a conductor, which intensifies the magnitude of his madness. The trauma against which beauty is a distraction, is simultaneously excited by the Burkean beauty that exists in nature just as it does in the post-war world. Again, though, he quotes Keats, acknowledging "beauty, that was the truth now." However, it is apparent that beauty, at least this Burkean version of it, is by no means true, and is simply another version of the myth that was fed to men like Septimus from a nationalist lens. Keats's poetic narrator, his romanticized ideas about beauty, and the mentality of civilian England that he represents, are all discredited. The fact that "beauty was everywhere" foreshadows Septimus's death because it indicates that his madness will always be present as long as the Burkean beauty exists in its untruth.

Again, it is clear that the beauty within Septimus's visions is only another contributing factor to his madness. However, Cornelia Burian, in her "Modernity's Shock and Beauty: Trauma and the Vulnerable Body in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," asserts that by conflating flower imagery, which she considers to be beautiful, with trauma, Woolf creates a paradox characteristic of a modernist work. She disregards Septimus's attempts to communicate,

claiming that the beautiful flowers are the only thing able to reach him. Burian argues that “[t]he beauty of flowers, too, cannot longer conceal the world’s ugliness” and that is why Septimus eventually commits suicide (72). However, this is not the case. Firstly, Burian limits beauty to images of flowers. Certainly, Septimus finds them beautiful, but they represent a beauty that is valued in English society, which is different from the beauty that Septimus experiences because he is experiencing the whole scope of the Burkean beauty; his madness is not limited to images of flowers. It is not that beauty is insufficient to pacify Septimus’s fears of the post-war world, because then he would not be able to see that “[b]eauty is everywhere” (Woolf 69). Rather, beauty is simultaneously a distraction from his madness and a means to strengthen it.

New Beauty and Salvation in Suicide

Ultimately, Septimus takes his own life, by throwing himself out of a window of his home. What was it, though, brought Septimus to the realization the Dr. Holmes would be his undoing, and made his decision to commit suicide? Shortly before he commits the act, Septimus is sitting with Lucrezia while she is making a hat. He observes her and wonders about the “[m]iracles, revelations, agonies, loneliness, falling through the sea, down, down into the flames, all were burnt out, for he had a sense, as he watched Rezia trimming the straw hat for Mrs. Peters, of a coverlet of flowers” (Woolf 142-143). All of the grandeur of his experiences of fear and Burkean beauty alike are “burnt out,” simmered down into meaninglessness, just like everything else had after the war. After that, all that is left is Rezia, making her hat. Woolf’s solution to this is to redefine beauty as a simple act of making something new and pleasing, out of the scraps of a damaged world. Septimus views her as “a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes ... [a judge he was]; who mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear,

yet ruled, yet inflicted. 'Must' [he] said. Over [him] she triumphed" (Woolf 148). It is Rezia's simple beauty that echoes "truth" for him. Rezia helps Septimus realize that it is not Holmes or Bradshaw in particular, who demand of him, with their instruction of "must," or even the destructive beauty he experiences in his visions, but rather, it is a society influence by all those effects in combination with one another, that will be the constant source of fear, a constant reminder of the world that let him down. Rezia, and her simple act of creation, as beauty, is the truth, as indicated by Rezia being described as a "lawgiver." The ugliness that Burian mentioned is Holmes, and all that he represents, and the beauty that saves him is when he and Rezia make the hat together; it has nothing to do with the flowers, for the Burkian beauty of those flowers provided Septimus with a temporary escape from his madness, but it also served to intensify it. This increased display of madness solidified Dr. Holmes's opinion of Septimus as being mad and a coward, so that when Rezia makes the decision to reject Holmes, so does Septimus. Rezia making her hat in the midst of Septimus's madness parallels Woolf's remaking of art in the midst of the post-war world. It is in the simple artistic beauty of the hat that Septimus finds a foothold, and is able to reclaim his life one last time, by making the choice to end it on his own terms.

In addition to observing Rezia in her making of the hat, Septimus participates in the making of it. He acts for himself, wondering

[w]hat had she got in her workbox? She had ribbons and beads, tassels, artificial flowers. She tumbled them out on the table. He began putting odd colours together—for though he had no fingers, could not even do up a parcel, he had a wonderful eye, and often he was right, sometimes absurd, of course, but sometimes wonderfully right (143).

Septimus notes Rezia's materials, her "ribbons and beads, tassels, artificial flowers;" they are not the grand, sweeping things of beauty that exist within his visions. Rather, they are simply the makings of beauty, if put together correctly. Her act of tumbling them out on the table indicates that they seem to have been in some disarray, messy and unorganized – chaotic – in the box. Chaotic as they are though, they are the elements which, in combination, create beauty in their making. Their joint creation of the hat nods to the closing line of T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," like *BLAST* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, another paradigm shifting modernist work: "These fragments I have shored against my ruin" (Eliot 51). Septimus's "fragments" are the scraps of ribbon, bead, and tassel—each simple and plain in its own right, but, when joined with one another, produces a beauty that allows Septimus his final moment of reason, which he uses to "shore" himself up against a world that has lied to him, and that wishes for him to be shut away. Septimus combines colors described as "odd," indicating that one would not think of them to go together nicely, as would Burke's soft greens and blues. Instead, his color combinations are unexpected, certainly not the norm, and yet are made beautiful nonetheless. Woolf describes him in this moment as having no fingers, gesturing toward the fact that his body, as a man, is no longer valued because it is not enacting the role of a Victorian man. She claims that he had a "wonderful eye" though, and it is in this description that one is reminded of Septimus as having a message, that he is able to see the world as others cannot, because of his experiences in war. The most important aspect of the passage is that he is validated, when his "eye" is considered "wonderfully right," regardless of being "sometimes absurd." Here, it is made unmistakably clear that although society, and certainly Holmes and Bradshaw, would consider Septimus's message to be ridiculous and illegitimate, it is in fact spoken with truth; even more compelling too, that it takes

the act of creating simple beauty, in contrast with a sweeping Burkian beauty, to reveal the truth of Septimus's message.

Further, to again elucidate the effect of this new simple beauty on Septimus's otherwise incoherent ramblings, he experiences yet another moment of lucidity before his suicide, in response to the beauty of his and Rezia's hat making. He has just woken up, and

started up in terror. What did he see? The plate of bananas on the sideboard. Nobody was there ... that was it: to be alone forever. That was the doom pronounced in Milan when he came into the room and saw them cutting out buckram shapes with their scissors; to be alone forever ... as for the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead, where were they? There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen (Woolf 145).

After reading through Septimus's visions throughout the entirety of the novel, it would seem to follow that Septimus waking suddenly from a dream would mark the beginning of some overwhelming vision. Quite the opposite though, all he saw was his simple surroundings: "the plate of bananas on the sideboard." The mundaneness of his surroundings had replaced both the horror and the Burkean beauty. He did not envision anyone there with him when he awoke, not Evans, his dead comrade, nor some demonized version of Bradshaw, coming to take him away. This instance is remarkable in its simplicity, its lack of hallucination. The only variation between this and the others is the occurrence of the hat-making directly prior. His solitude, his state of being "alone forever," is marked by the act of crafting something simple. It is

pronounced in the same sentence that the cause of this realization was the “cutting out of buckram shapes with their scissors.” The action of cutting is starkly comparable to the making of the hat. These two similar occurrences brought about the only two moments of lucidity in a whole novel of madness. Septimus is lucid enough himself to question the lack of “visions,” “faces,” and “voices.” This action points both to their absence and to Septimus’s state of mind, for him to be able to discern that absence. A screen is then described, which acts as a shield against the intoxicating power of the Burkean beautiful. The screen itself is very simple, not ornately described or causing any kind of far-reaching effects. Rather, it is contrasted with the visions it hides: “blue swallows,” “mountains,” “faces,” and “beauty” itself, a Burkean beauty. This sentence puts the faces of Septimus’s horrible visions, and the nature of his beautiful ones in the same category, classifying them both as unproductive. The screen, a safeguard against these visions, is enabled only after Septimus discovers the simple beauty, one that grants him respite from his madness.

It is this lucidity that allows him to make a rational decision to take his own life, as opposed to continue to live in a Burkean world, which will only continue to view him as mad. Certainly, it should be no surprise that Dr. Holmes considers Septimus’s suicide a result of his overwhelming madness, consequently considering him as “The coward!” (Woolf 149). However, this judgment is inaccurate, as Septimus’s decision to fling himself out of the window was made in a moment of lucidity. This distinction is observed in noticing that Septimus takes the time to rationally consider his options in regards to the means by which he will kill himself:

Holmes would say ‘In a funk, eh?’ Holmes would get him. But no; not

Holmes ... he considered Mrs. Filmer’s nice clean bread knife with

‘Bread’ carved on the handle. Ah, but one musn’t spoil that. The gas fire?

But it was too late now. Holmes was coming. Razors he might have got, but Rezia, who always did that sort of thing, had packed them. There remained only the window (Woolf 149).

It becomes clear, regardless of the relief from terror that beauty poses, aside from its additions to his madness, that Septimus's decision to kill himself is based on the realization that, he cannot escape Dr. Holmes or the collective attitude of this surrounding society which Holmes represents. Although Holmes, and virtually everyone except Clarissa, views Septimus's suicide as a determining act of madness, it is most assuredly not. In this moment, he is considering his options. He contemplates using a bread knife, but does not want to dirty it, or cause any trouble for Mrs. Filmer by soiling it upon his insides. So he moves on to consider throwing himself in the gas fire. Once again, this option is insufficient, because it would take too long; Dr. Holmes would soon be upon him and would remove him from the gas before it was able to take effect and end Septimus's life. He ruminates on using razors, but, remembering that his wife, in consideration of his condition, had removed them so he would not have access to them. The last outstanding option was to throw himself out of the window. Regardless of how Dr. Holmes or his post-war society views the act of suicide, Septimus's choice to kill himself was made in a moment of lucidity. It was truly a choice, and not simply a desperate act of a madman.

When Clarissa hears news of Septimus's suicide, she is in the midst of her party. When she receives this news, her reaction is telling in terms of how they had experienced emptiness and beauty in different ways. She reflects on the fact that "[t]he young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him ...She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away ... He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble" (Woolf 186). She is able to identify

with him, admires him even, because they both experienced a lacking, and he took hold of his own life and threw it away, threw life away, instead of letting the emptiness sweep him away. He killed himself, took a choice, took his life into his own hands, revealing the inaccuracy of Dr. Holmes in deeming him a coward, while simultaneously refusing to be shut away by Bradshaw. His suicide “made her feel the beauty.” It is clear that the beauty she is feeling is the new beauty is simplicity, marked by her decision that “she must assemble” and return to her party. Her action of assembly is so similar to the making of the hat – they are both verbs of creation, creation of something new out of the scraps of the old. That is why Septimus commits suicide and she is able to return to her party – because Septimus knew the magnitude of the meaningless enough to experience beauty to an extent that it afforded him respite to a madness which would only be intensified by its own rescue. Clarissa’s emptiness only exists within her own sphere, and has not been magnified by the experience of war. She redeems Septimus with her view of his suicide, as a choice, as something brave. She sees his death as productive, as communicative; he, unlike any other in the novel, is able to refuse Holmes’s idiocy and avoid Bradshaw’s self-serving institutionalization, and take hold of his own life, even if that means ending it. Clarissa is able to return to her party and enjoy the beauty of it in its mundaneness, just as Rezia’s hat was beautiful in its simplicity, a beauty different from the sweeping pleasure of the Burkian beauty. It can also be argued, as DeMeester does, that “his untimely death changes nothing, because Clarissa Dalloway, who is a trauma survivor herself and recognizes the truth of Septimus’s testimonies, refuses to change” (661-662). Does Clarissa’s assembly prove her own action of accepting the message of Septimus’s new and simple beauty, or does her return to the party indicate her choice to remain satisfied to participate in the status quo? Either way, Clarissa’s

redemptive view of Septimus is what matters. His death is a personal victory, not a societal one, and gives hope that the potentiality of change is a real possibility.

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