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懸宕戰爭邊緣：維吉尼亞・吳爾芙《戴洛維夫人》中的陰性氣質與酷兒氣質作為一種癥候

On the Brink of War: Femininity and Queerness as Symptoms in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

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本論文係吳珮瑜君（R10122024）在國立臺灣大學外國語文學系完成之碩士學位論文，於民國 114 年 7 月 25 日承下列考試委員審查通過及口試及格，特此證明

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how Virginia Woolf reconfigures and reexamines gendered subjectivity during the interwar period of modernism. Through a close reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, I engage with Jacques Lacan's theory of symptom and *sinthome*, particularly his provocative claim that "woman as a symptom of man." While this assertion appears to reinforce a patriarchal hierarchy in which men are positioned as superior to women, Slavoj Žižek offers a critical reinterpretation. According to Žižek, this formulation instead highlights a structural lack within male subjectivity. In other words, "woman as a symptom" reveals not the inferiority of women, but the incompleteness of men. Adopting Žižek's perspective, this thesis explores how Woolf portrays figures such as Septimus and Clarissa—as well as other marginal characters—as symptomatic disruptions within the Symbolic order. In doing so, Woolf unveils alternative forms of femininity and queerness that resist symbolic containment.

Chapter one examines Woolf's critique of war and nationalism. As a woman, Woolf refuses to recognize the nation as the supreme phallus of the Symbolic order. She denounces nationalism as the most extreme form of patriarchy, one that wages wars to satisfy its desire to conquer and dominate, sacrificing both men and women in the process. Drawing on this logic, I argue that war, as the extreme demonstration of the Symbolic order, paradoxically undermines and destroys the order itself. Chapter two analyzes Woolf's depiction of post-war London as a return to a pre-Oedipal condition. In this disrupted social landscape, symptoms emerge from the fractures of the Symbolic. Clarissa and Septimus, functioning as parallel narrative threads, embody the symptoms of a patriarchal society's failure to assimilate femininity and queerness. Chapter three further explores the possibility of reconstituting the social order through more fluid and inclusive forms. At the end of the story, the news of

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Septimus's death reaches Clarissa's party, triggering a moment of introspection and transformation. In the analysis of this ending part, I argue that Woolf's identification with symptoms reveals an ethical gesture—Septimus's death not only completes the process of Clarissa's awakening but also traverses the fantasy sustained by patriarchy and nationalism, opening space for new subjectivities.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, War, Gendered subjectivity, Subjective destitution, Jacques Lacan, Symptom

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摘要

本篇論文探討維吉尼亞・吳爾芙如何在戰間期的現代主義脈絡中，重新建構並反思性別化的主體性。細讀《戴洛維夫人》，我將與雅各・拉岡關於「癥候」與「聖癥」的理論進行對話，特別聚焦於他那句極具挑釁性的論述：「女人是男人的癥候。」此一說法乍看之下將男性置於女性之上，強化了父權體制中的階層結構。斯拉沃熱・齊澤克卻提出了一種批判性的重新詮釋，根據齊澤克的理解，這一論述所凸顯的其實是男性主體性中某種結構性的匱乏，換言之，「女人作為癥候」所揭示的並非女性的劣勢，而是男性的不完整性。本論文採納齊澤克的觀點，進一步探討吳爾芙如何將賽普提默斯、克萊麗莎以及其他邊緣角色，描繪為象徵秩序中的癥候性擾動。透過這種描寫，吳爾芙揭示出一種抵抗象徵體系規訓的陰性與酷兒主體性形構的可能性。

論文第一章聚焦於吳爾芙對戰爭與國族主義的批判。作為一名女性，吳爾芙拒絕將國族視為象徵秩序中至高的陽具符號，她將國族主義視為父權體制最極端的展現，一種為了滿足征服與慾望而發動戰爭的權力機器，其結果是男性與女性皆在戰爭中被犧牲，依循此脈絡，我將探討戰爭作為象徵秩序的極致展演，反而顛覆並瓦解了該秩序本身。第二章分析吳爾芙對戰後倫敦的描寫，呈現出一種倒退至前伊底帕斯階段的社會狀態。在這個失序的社會景觀中，癥候從象徵秩序的裂縫中浮現，克萊麗莎與賽普提默斯在故事中以平行敘事的形式出現，暴露了父權社會無法涵納陰性與酷兒主體的結構性失敗。第三章則進一步探索如何以更流動且包容的形式重建社會秩序。在小說結尾，賽普提默斯的死訊傳至克萊麗莎的宴會現場，觸發了克萊麗莎的內省與轉化，透過對這一結尾場景的分析，我主張吳爾芙對癥候的認同揭示了一種倫理姿態——賽普提默斯的死亡不僅完成了克萊麗莎的覺醒歷程，更穿透了父權與國族主義共構的幻想，從而開啟了新主體性的想像空間。

關鍵詞：維吉尼亞・吳爾芙，《戴洛維夫人》，戰爭，性別化主體，主體匱乏，雅各・拉岡，癥候

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Chapter One

Virginia Woolf Refusing to Participate in Patriarchal/Patriotic Displays

At the dawn of the 20th century, the world teetered on the brink of war. Artists, thinkers, and especially the most perceptive writers, sensed a rupture in human experience and a profound shift in atmosphere. As Virginia Woolf famously declares, "On or about December 1910 human nature changed" (*Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown* 4). The unprecedented world war soon shattered the Enlightenment's faith in progress, bringing a different sense of time, where the past never passed and the future perpetually deferred, both collapsing and converging at the immediacy of the present. The present thus became crystallized, characterized by fluidity and fragmentation of postwar subjectivity. 1922, known as the *annus mirabilis*, witnessed the apocalypse of traditional literature and the arrival of the new literary world. The simultaneous appearance of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Woolf's *Jacob's Room* inaugurated a literary terrain defined by linguistic dislocation and formal disruption. Their experimental linguistic forms point to "a loss for words" and a profound destabilization of self-identities (Goldstein 2). As literary history presents, modernism was born in the trenches of World War I, in which the entire literary world was steeped in the atmosphere of mourning.

The work of mourning, however, entangles with national ideology. As Alex King observes, "the erection of war memorials and the conduct of Armistice Day ceremonies followed common patterns, suggesting a nationwide uniformity of aims and attitudes, and a desire to conform to national stereotypes" (qtd. in Goldman 89). In other words, the nation transforms the war dead into symbolic figures and shapes the civilians' perceptions of death by encouraging them to participate in the glorification of the war dead. As Jane Goldman concludes, "the erection of monuments of remembrance is born

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of a collective of diverse individual[s]," and "each new local monument is joined to the larger order of existing national monuments" (89). Simply put, the nation put every effort to create a narrative of glory, leading its people to believe that sacrificing for their nation is the highest glory. Observing the mechanism of state ideology, Woolf offers some incisive analyses of the complex relationship between war and the individual. In the following discussion, I will begin with Woolf's two polemical essays—*Three Guineas*, written on the eve of WWII (1938), and "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," composed at the WWII's outset (1940)—to illustrate her critique of war and nationalism.

Virginia Woolf's Feminist Manifesto during Wartime

Since the 1990s, Woolf's relationship to wars has become a topical issue. Mark Hussey first reads Woolf as a war novelist. In his edited book *Virginia Woolf and War*, Hussey recognizes "the centrality of war" in Woolf's writing, describing Woolf as a "serious political and ethical thinker" who reveals the political realities in her aesthetic practices (3). As Hussey observes, Woolf articulates "the connection between private and public violence," leading us to "turn away from the battlefront to the home front, to the home, in thinking about war" (3; 13). Often considered Woolf's most polemical essay, *Three Guineas* offers a female perspective on viewing wars. Adopting an epistolary form, Woolf imagines a response to a gentleman's request for women's assistance in preventing war. As Kristen Garrison notes, the request to prevent war is a "rhetorical question" (266), for realistically, "men are NOT asking women's opinion" (267). Yet, in doing so, Woolf provokes public debates on gender issues and "creates a space for a 'private' correspondence on the topic of preventing war" (Garrison 266).

In this letter, Woolf initially reveals a gender-based violence, declaring that "to

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fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's" (*Three Guineas* 6). Naomi Black precisely indicates that Woolf has perceived war as "one of the products of gender hierarchies" (5). As Woolf herself claims, nationalism is deeply rooted in and operates as the ultimate patriarchy—a system that wages wars to fulfill men's desires for "some glory, some necessity, [and] some satisfaction" (*Three Guineas* 6). Facing such militaristic and hierarchical world, Woolf reconsiders the position of women through British history and then proposes a question—"What does 'our country' mean to me an outsider" (107)? In replying to her own question, Woolf claims that "her sex and class has very little to thank England," for "the greater part of its history has treated me [her] as a slave" (*Three Guineas* 108). As Anna Snaith argues, "Western women have been systematically excluded from the public sphere" (8). Snaith, like Black, proposes that Woolf's works demonstrate that "the tyrannies of the public world" are rooted in "patriarchal oppression" (9). Through oppressions, men control the economic, educational, as well as military powers, to consolidate their authority by continuously positioning themselves at the center of power while relegating others—particularly women—to the status of outsiders.

Then, Woolf illustrates an ideal world of "the Outsiders Society" (*Three Guineas* 106), providing "a way of negotiating between the public and the private" (Snaith 12). In Woolf's delineation, The Society of the Outsider is founded by "the daughters of educated men," those who seemly possess a respectful position in society but essentially lack agency in defining themselves (*Three Guineas* 106). All their deeds and intentions need to follow their fathers, brothers, or if she is married, their husbands, or they will not have enough support for their living. In order to eliminate this gender inequality, Woolf urges outsiders to enter the educational system and the professions, so that they can acquire sufficient resources both intellectually and economically. However, society

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offered few opportunities for women to realize this ideal. Thus, in responding to this current male-centered society, Woolf also demands that women remain indifferent, that is, "not to fight with arms," not "to make munitions or nurse the wounded," and most importantly, "to take no share in patriotic demonstrations" (*Three Guineas* 106; 109). Finally, Woolf famously asserts that—"As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world," seriously critiquing the male-centered concept of nationhood from the outsiders' point of view (*Three Guineas* 109).

In "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," Woolf reiterates the collusion between nationalism and patriarchy, further exploring the harsh realities of war by delineating her personal experience exposed to the ongoing wars:

> It is a queer experience, lying in the dark and listening to the zoom of a hornet which may at any moment sting you to death. It is a sound that interrupts cool and consecutive thinking about peace.
>
> …
>
> At any moment a bomb may fall on this very room. One, two, three, four, five, six pass. The bomb did not fall. But during those seconds of suspense all thinking stopped. ("Thoughts" 243, 247)

Examining the wartime circumstances, Woolf reclaims that "The defenders are men, the attackers are men. Arms are not given to the English-woman either to fight the enemy or to defend herself. She must lie weaponless tonight," once again, underlining women's passivity and vulnerability in the face of patriotic display from which they are systematically excluded.

As Karen Levenback observes, "1939 was not 1914 all over again" (8). The real

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danger forces Woolf to think about war from the home front instead of the battlefront. Resonating with Hussey's war-reading of Woolf, Levenback highlights the distance between the battlefield and the home front by differentiating the distinct roles of civilians and combatants during wartime. The combatants are those who enter the battlefield, experiencing and witnessing death directly at the very front line. After wars, the combatants are prone to suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, such as shell shock or psychic schizophrenia. The civilians, on the other hand, "refers to [outsiders] to military service" (Levenback 6). They are often "5solate[ed] from the war" and live within an "illusion of immunity," a fantasy that the war is far away from them and has ended permanently, leaving no lasting impact on civilian life, after the signing of the truce (Levenback 9). Purposefully, Woolf's inter-war writings dismantle this illusion, revealing that the reality of war lies in its irrevocable damage and the enduring loss of life. Even though civilians may not have directly experienced death on the battlefield, the dead continue to haunt them, not only disrupting their emotional and psychological structures but also reshaping the societal order as a whole. Levenback also demonstrates that Woolf's later essays embody "the evolution of Woolf's own war-consciousness," which "involves transgressive representations and an ongoing process of reorientation" (8). As the "official language" keeps "depriv[ing] the word 'war' of its horror," Woolf insists on bringing the reality of war into her writing (Levenback 7).

In "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," Woolf reveals that the imperial ideology has falsely led everyone to believe that we need to fight to "defend freedom" (244). Yet, war never brings freedom. Trapped in the collusion of war and nationalism, men are "boxed up in his machine with a gun handy," and women are "lying in the dark with a gas mask handy" ("Thoughts" 245). In other words, both men and women "are equally prisoners" as they are exposed to the threats of wars and the false consciousness of the

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state apparatus (Woolf, "Thoughts" 245). I certainly agree with Jean Thomson's comment, "It is saddening to reflect that the state of a soldier returning from war is likely to be given no more understanding or importance in 2004 than in 1924" (70).

Virginia Woolf's Elegiac Writing

After the 2000s, especially in the aftermath of 9/11, academia seriously reconsidered the relationship between nationalism and the individual. The Woolfian scholars also began to read Woolf's writing as a narrative form of mourning, which aims not only to mourn the World War catastrophes but also to visualize the historically invisible subjects/objects.

Starting from Sigmund Freud's "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," Tammy Clewell underscores that Freud has "warned against engaging the work of mourning to restore cultural values destroyed by the war," asserting that "the overwhelming sense of despair and disillusionment…must be experienced without any defensive shields" ("Consolation" 203). Freud observes that the Great War overthrew "the conventional treatment of death" (291). That is to say, death was no longer denied nor far away from reality (Freud 291). As the Great War hit the citizens' ordinary lives, they saw "people really die[d]"—"no longer one by one, but many, often tens of thousands, in a single day" (Freud 291). Based on this observation, Clewell argues that Freud has rectified his theories around mourning and melancholia. As Clewell elucidates, the early Freud regarded mourning as "a process of working through" the bereavement by "relinquish[ing] emotional ties to the lost object," in other words, "reclaim[ing] the libido invested in the lost object" and finding "a substitute for what has been lost" ("Mourning" 44; 47). Once the work of mourning is completed, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud qtd. in Clewell, "Mourning" 44). On the

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other hand, melancholia, under Freud's early theoretical framework, is a "pathological failure" as "the melancholic refuses to break the attachment to the lost object," and "the lost one becomes internalized as a living part of the self" (Clewell, "Mourning" 59-60).

However, the experience of the Great War, from which Freud witnessed numerous deaths overnight, drastically changed his attitude towards grief work. In his later theoretical framework, Freud "collapses the strict opposition between mourning and melancholia" (Clewell, "Mourning" 61). For Freud, grief work is no longer "a decisive end" but "an interminable labor" which "preserv[es] the lost object in and as the self" (Clewell, "Mourning" 61). In this context, Clewell demonstrates that Woolf likewise refuses to "engage a process of mourning aimed at 'working through' despair and grief," instead emphasizing the role of gender constructions ("Consolation" 198-99). As Clewell argues, Woolf rejects any attempts to "idealize the war dead" since such idealization sustains the prewar value of nationalism, which has justified the violence of war and has "empowered men and consigned women to the margins of society" ("Consolation" 203).

Clewell thus interprets Woolf's writing as an example of "aggressive mourning discourse," in which Woolf demands "not to heal wartime wounds" but "to keep [the wounds] open," that is, to keep articulating the grief and the grievance of wars—especially the grief obscured by the official language and the grievance of the minorities ("Consolation" 198). In doing so, people will keep "remembering the catastrophic losses of the twentieth century" ("Consolation" 199). Following Clewell, Noreen O'Connor similarly considers Woolf's writing as "an aggressive 'working through' of melancholic mourning" (171). Taking *Mrs. Dalloway* as an example, O'Connor argues that Woolf "imagin[ed] new and feminist social communities" as the "entire generation of husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons in England, Germany, and France were

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destroyed" due to the Great War (172). Walking on the street of postwar London, Clarissa Dalloway undergoes an "ambivalent mourning" which not only "express[es] disillusionment with the past," but also "frame[s] a new vision for the future" (171).

Erin Penner, on the other hand, proposes the concept of "novel elegy" to underline Woolf's invention and dedication to modernist literature of mourning (16). As Woolf herself notes in the diary, "I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel.' A new —— by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" (*Writer's Diary* 80). Deviating from the traditional elegy which "transforms the lost other into writer's own aesthetic," Woolf "reclaim[s] the elegiac subject from eulogy" as well as "from neglect" by "reconstructing the stories that link the dead to the world of the living" (Penner 17). While the culture has "narrowed the ways in which the dead are perceived and mourned" (Penner 4), Woolf's novelized elegy seeks to provide "multiple perspectives"—especially from the outsider's point of view—and "openendedness" which consistently "reestablish[es] the significance of social and historical context" (Penner 17; 18). As Penner warns, "replacing mourning with melancholia only begets new problems," for "it assumes that only acts of melancholic refusal are ethical, while acts of hopeful reparation are not" (10). If Freud's diagnostic analysis designated the "prewar mourning" opposite to the "postwar melancholia," Penner argues, Woolf's novel challenges this early Freudian dichotomy (2), insisting on an incomplete mourning that "restore[s] the voices of the elegist and the elegiac subject" (22).

In reading *Mrs. Dalloway*, Penner moves from Freud to Jacques Derrida. As Penner elucidates, Derrida argues that "the mourner may not want to reclaim his or her ego from the dead but rather may in fact 'welcome' the decentering that comes from inviting the lost one into oneself" (116). Septimus's failure to mourn demonstrates such self-decentering that comes with bereavement. As he witnesses the death directly on the

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battlefield, he becomes an "elegist for Evans and other war casualties" (Penner 125). However, he is not the "elegist that England needs" (Penner 127). His will to reveal the truth about the war draws him to marginality. He is pathologized, for people say that he falls into a psychotic world. Finally, Septimus himself becomes the elegiac subject, "a victim of war trauma," "a failed elegy," and a "story that the public [does not need] proclaimed" (Penner 125; 127). Only through Clarissa's mourning does Septimus's death become meaningful and does Woolf "[bridge] the gap between combatant and noncombatant" and further "reshape social concerns" (Penner 145).

"I am *not* this, I am *not* that:" Psychoanalytical Reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*

In the following, I will introduce Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to further explore and explicate the relationship between the subject and society. I argue that war, being the extreme demonstration of patriarchy—or in Lacan's terms, the Symbolic order—however, destroys the order itself. Lacan's theory of the Symbolic order establishes a linguistically dominating world, in which the formation of the Lacanian subject undergoes two processes, alienation and separation (Fink 49). Alienation is the first operation which refers to a child's submission to language, that is, "to allow him or herself to be represented by words" (Fink 50). The subject thus becomes a split subject, which activates the production of desire. In most cases, a mother is a child's first object of desire. It is not until the father intervenes and instructs the child to cease desiring the mother that the child undergoes the alienation and enters into the order of the Name-of-the-Father. The moment of alienation from the mother thus creates a void in the child; in order to fill this void, the child begins to learn the process of desire.

However, according to Lacan, "man's desire is the desire of the Other (Le désir de

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l'homme, c'est le désir de l'Autre)[1]," which can never be fully fulfilled (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 38). In Lacan's theoretical framework, the Symbolic element functions as "the *signifier* for the Other's desire" (Fink 57), consistently projecting the Other's desire onto the subject and "creat[ing] a rift in the mOther-child unity," in which the mother's desire functions as the "first signifier" in most cases (Fink 58). Lacan then introduces a new role, object *a*, to further explicate this function of desire. Object *a*, as "the cause of desire," forms at the rift of the mOther-child unity and "can be understood here as the *remainder* produced when that hypothetical unity breaks down, as a last trace of that unity, a last *reminder* thereof" (Fink 59). Object *a* maintains a complex relation to the subject that "by clinging to object *a*, the subject is able to ignore his or her division" (Fink 59) and as well to achieve "a *phantasmatic* sense of wholeness, completeness, fulfillment, and well-being" (Fink 60; emphasis added). In other words, object *a*, though it creates a sense of wholeness, is principally an unattainable object of desire which points to the lack of the Other.

Once the subject recognizes that the Other is inherently lacking, the process of separation begins. In separation, "the subject attempts to fill the mOther's lack…with his or her own lack of being, his or her not yet extant self or being" (Fink 54). This second operation, separation, thus "involves the alienated subject's confrontation with the Other, not as language this time, but as desire" (Fink 50). In *Seminar XX*, Lacan explains the sexual relation between man and woman based on the logic of the operation of desire. In Lacan's theory, man and woman are not biologically defined but work as a set of linguistic signifiers which revolve around phallogocentrism and point to the impossibility of sexual relationships. As Lacan defines, all men are "*quoad*

[1] See Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. It can be translated as "man desires what the Other desires" (55) or "man desires the Other's desire for him" (59).

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castrationem," that is to say, obtaining a castrated position after entering the Symbolic order (*On Feminine Sexuality* 35). They are subjected to the phallus, and in order to establish male subjectivity, men assign women to the position of lack. Women then become objec*t a*, namely, the cause of men's desire and the fulfillment of men's phantasmatic subjectivity. Thus, Lacan further proposes that woman is a symptom of man.

While this infamous claim that "woman as a symptom of man" appears to perpetuate an antifeminist notion, Slavoj Žižek offers a critical reinterpretation, arguing that this formulation points to the structural lack within male subjectivity, as defined by the logic of the Symbolic (*Looking Awry* 28). As he explains, the symptom is "a certain formation that exists only insofar as the subject ignores some fundamental truth about himself; as soon as its meaning is integrated into the symbolic universe of the subject, the symptom dissolves itself" (*Looking Awry* 44). Following this logic, I will begin by reading *Mrs. Dalloway* through the lens of symptomatic analysis. Septimus, as a veteran, suffers from severe shell shock. His symptom encapsulates an underlying oppression of gender, pointing to the lack of the patriarchy as well as demonstrating the trauma of imperialism. On the other hand, Clarissa, as an upper-middle-class woman, emerges as a symptom in the post-war society, revealing the historical trauma of patriarchy.

As Žižek explains, trauma remains "buried" in the "everyday reality," which retains "a fragile equilibrium that can be destroyed at any moment" (*Looking Awry* 17). In Freud's terminology, this very moment is designated by the return of the repressed and is "quite contingent and unpredictable," while it disrupts the Symbolic order and thrusts the subject back into the Real (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 17). Žižek then concludes, "the role of the Lacanian real…erupts in the form of a traumatic return" (*Looking Awry*

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29). In other words, the moment when the subject is closest to the Real is the moment when the trauma occurs.

In this sense, "'reality' is always a symptom," and "for reality to exist, something must be left unspoken" (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 45). To cope with this traumatic void, one can either create a new fantasy to cover it again—as the patriarchy keeps working on—or identify with the symptom which enables the subject to traverse the fantasy. In his later theory, Lacan introduces the concept of *sinthome*, a personal symptom that serves as a substitute for the Name-of-the-Father (Rabaté 170). Unlike traditional symptoms that are seen as failures of the Symbolic, *sinthome* becomes a creative force in shaping subjectivity and in revealing the limitations of the existing order. In Lacan's theory, *sinthome* occurs after the previous circles of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic dissociate. It binds "our enjoyment [our *jouissance*] to a certain signifying, symbolic formation" (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 81). It "suggest[s] a more dynamic process of naming as writing, or writing as naming" and reconstitutes the Borromean circles (Rabaté 158).

Following the trajectory of French feminists,[2] Minow-Pinkney highlights the convergence of feminist and modernist aesthetics in Woolf's writing. As Minow-Pinkney points out, "to make the woman's voice heard, one might be led 'to destroy the very foundation and rules of literary society…,'" which is precisely what modernism has achieved (7). As Minow-Pinkney observes, feminists often face two primary options for "valoris[ing] the position of woman as difference" (80). One approach is to "deny the difference in order to be admitted as subject in the symbolic," as seen in the character of Miss Kilman, who "becom[es] a token man" (Minow-Pinkney 80). The other approach is to "refuse the symbolic altogether, and risk being even more

[2] In Moi's *Sextual/Textual Politics*, she delineates the contours of the theories of three prominent French feminists, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. Especially relying on Kristeva's theory of the semiotic, Moi underscores the radical nature of Woolf's writing strategy.

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marginalized than before or, worse, expelled as mad from society," as exemplified by Septimus (Minow-Pinkney 80-81). According to Makiko Minow-Pinkney, Woolf's original plan was for Clarissa herself to commit suicide, but she eventually exempts Clarissa from death, allowing Clarissa to maintain a "precarious balance" between the Symbolic and the Real (81). This liminal space allows women to reject the function of the phallus and embrace their feminine *jouissance*, which exists beyond the limits of phallic logic and marks a space of excess that resists symbolic categorization. In this framework, woman is uniquely positioned "qua Other," which means that she confirms the sexual differentiation (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 81). As Lacan indicates that "there's no such thing as Woman" (*On Feminine Sexuality* 72), there are only women in their plurality and differences.

Julia Kristeva's semiotic theory develops Lacan's sexual differentiation in conceptualizing female subjectivity. In response to Lacan's Symbolic order, Kristeva introduces the notion of "the semiotic" which "provides a framework for examining the contribution of women, femininity and female specificity to symbolic functioning" (Grosz 71). Kristeva's semiotic theory posits the existence of a space outside the Lacanian Symbolic, which she terms the *chora*. The *chora* is a pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic realm where gender differentiation has not yet been established, and "linguistic sign is not yet articulated" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 26). Within the *chora*, where meaning is not fixed and signification is fluid, the not-yet-formed subject remains open to numerous possibilities of identity formation. Kristeva also emphasizes the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic, that is, to maintain the "balance between coherence (obedience to the symbolic) and transgression (the overflow of the semiotic)" (Grosz 58). In "Women's Time," Kristeva critiques the idea of establishing a women-dominated society, asserting that a women-dominated world

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merely mirrors the current symbolic order. Instead of advocating for the dominance of one gender over another, Kristeva calls for a reconsideration of historical gender differences through a concept that transcends the existing binary structures. She invents the concept of "hypothetical bisexuality" ("Women's Time" 204), declaring that masculinity and femininity are "not mutually exclusive" but are able to "coexist in each individual" (Grosz 96).

In Lacan's late theory, he eventually claims that "there's no such thing as a sexual relationship" ("*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*"; Bruce Fink's trans.; *La topologie* 1), questioning the differentiation of male and female under the logic of the Symbolic, as well as denoting the void of linguistic structure. According to Lacan, while the phallus governs the sexual differentiation, the Symbolic recognizes only one sex: Man; on the other hand, women are "indicated as 'not-whole' (*pas tout*) with respect to phallic jouissance" (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 7). Unlike men, who are universally subjected to the phallus, women become the phallus, but they cannot obtain the phallus either, since what they can get from men is always the penis. Phallus thus becomes a "conscientious objection made by one of the two sexed beings to the service to be rendered to the other," demonstrating the impossibility of sexual relationships (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 7). Finally, Lacan proposes the concept of "*troisième sexe*" (*La topologie* 1) to try to reach out to the truth of the impossibility of sexual relationships; but, Lacan is eventually unable to position this *troisième sexe,* since between the Symbolic differentiation of man and woman, there is never a place for the third sex (Shen 549).

To reconsider Lacan's framework of gender and sex, I will finally turn to the field of queer theory which judiciously examines the heteronormativity of Lacanian sexual subjects. While Lacan acknowledges the fluidity of the speaking subject's registration

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in the symbolic order—where a person could theoretically occupy either the male or female position, regardless of biological sex—Butler argues that Lacan's framework operates within a binary system that privileges heterosexuality. As man has built male subjectivity on the repudiation of females, the heterosexual identity is similarly built upon the repudiation of homosexual attachment, that is, a refusal or a prohibition of homosexual desire. In "Melancholy Gender," Butler elucidates this mechanism of repudiation. They[3] recognize the two prohibitions in the formation of the subject, "the prohibition on incest" and "the prohibition on homosexuality" (Butler, "Melancholy Gender"168). For a girl to form her subjectivity, she has to first "[bar] the mother as an object of desire" and then "[install] the barred object as a part of the ego" which thus "embodies the ungrieved loss of the homosexual cathexis" (Butler, "Melancholy Gender" 169). On the other hand, becoming a man requires a "precondition for the heterosexualization of sexual desire"—that is, he must not incorporate the woman as part of his ego, but rather desire her as the one he could never be (Butler, "Melancholy Gender" 169; 170). Following this logic, Butler concludes that "the straight man becomes man he 'never' loved and 'never' grieved; the straight woman becomes the woman she 'never' loved and 'never' grieved" ("Melancholy Gender"178). This process, Butler argues, "achieved and stabilized" gender through "the 'accomplishment' of heterosexual positioning" ("Melancholy Gender"168).

Furthermore, in Butler's theoretical framework, even biological sex is not a natural given but is assigned through social regulation. In *Who's Afraid of Gender?*[4] Butler asserts that "biology is *always* interacting with social and environmental forces" (176). Departing from Western traditional ontology, Butler proposes the concept of

[3] Butler identifies themselves as non-binary and uses they as pronoun.
[4] I believe this book title resonates with Toril Moi's famously polemical article "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" published in 1985.

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social ontology, accentuating that "the biological body…is connected to other life-forms and an array of social systems and powers" and thus forms a "constitutive relationality" (*Who's Afraid of Gender?* 178). Sex assignment is resultantly where the "social powers operating on bodies" (Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* 179), and this operation follows a "normative social trajectory" where "[t]he imaginative anticipation of normative gender is already there in the framework through which sex assignment takes place" (Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* 181). In *Frames of War*, Butler has already examined how the framework is operated within certain societal structures. They claim that human beings are "exposed to socially and politically articulated forces" and are "constituted through norms which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognized" (*Frames* 3-4). However, Butler argues that recognition is not given to all individuals. Under the framework of recognition, some beings are deemed visible and audible, while others remain invisible and inaudible. For example, under the frame of heterosexuality, the homosexual can never be recognized and hence becomes "political consequences of ungrievable loss" (Butler, "Melancholy Gender" 175).

Elizabeth Abel famously examines the homosexual relationship in her psychoanalytic analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway*. As Abel observes, Woolf "elevates Freud's second developmental path[5] [of female homosexuality] over the costly route toward 'normal femininity'" (37-38). In other words, Woolf "valorizes homosexuality over the inhibitions of imposed heterosexuality" (Abel 38). Abel exemplifies two worldviews in

[5] As Abel points out, Freud claims that while experiencing the separation from mother, "the loss for women is less well compensated" than for men since there is no "renewed access to the lost maternal body" nor the "acquisition of paternal power" for women under the social structure (32). In Freud's theory of female development, there are three paths for women to undergo the loss of maternal object. First is a renunciation of active sexuality, that is, a sexual inhibition imposed on women. Second is a masculinity complex, that is, a homosexual tendency conducted by women to "preserve her active orientation toward her mother" (Abel 36). Third is Freud's so-called normal femininity, in which women "turn to her father and seal her femininity by desiring his baby" (Abel 36).

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Mrs. Dalloway, the pastoral female world of Bourton and the sociopolitical male-centered world of London (31). In her retrospection of Bourton, Clarissa preserves "the most exquisite moment" in her life, that is, a moment encapsulated in Sally Seton's kiss which Clarissa would never feel again in male-centered London (Abel 31-32). As Abel concludes, "This adolescent love assumes the place of the early female bond unrepresented within the narrative [the symbolic narrative]" (32). Fortunately, post-war London is not always hopelessly solid. As the world wars have devastated the symbolic order, London also becomes a fluid place, where deviance, queerness, and all other possibilities converge, and thus provides us with an opportunity to reconstruct narratives.

As Woolf herself wrote in the diary, "I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense" (*Writer's Diary* 57). In this thesis, I aim to extend her critical project by asking: if war is understood as one of the most profoundly collective traumas in human history, then what kind of gendered reality is exposed—revealed, perhaps even unraveled—amidst the ferocity of guns and fire?

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Chapter Two

Fantastic National Allegory: There's No Such Thing as Woman

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

--Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

As a representative work of Woolf's interwar writing, *Mrs. Dalloway* portrays a post-war London where the social order has been disrupted and remains in a state of flux. Within Woolf's stream-of-consciousness writing, the narrative oscillates between post-war London and pre-war Bourton, creating an interstitial space for characters to reconsider their identities. As Elizabeth Abel demonstrates, Woolf constructs two poles that structure Clarissa's flow of consciousness—a "pastoral female world," Bourton, and a "sociopolitical world," London (31). Yet, these two worlds are fluid as well. While the pre-war Bourton offers a feminist grounding, post-war London opens up possibilities for disrupting the gender binary through ruptures in the Symbolic order.

In this chapter, I will begin by contrasting these two poles of gendered consciousness. And then, through an analysis of Septimus's war trauma and Clarissa's social deviances, I aim to reveal the gender oppression embedded in imperial patriarchy, and ultimately propose an alternative mode of subjectivity, articulated in the disintegration of the Symbolic order.

Men's Order

Following Erin Penner's reading, I first interpret *Mrs. Dalloway* as Septimus's "failed elegy" (127) —a provocative example of how the law of men, operating under the dominance of the Name of the Father, oppresses and ultimately destroys a man. As a

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veteran of the Great War, Septimus suffers from severe shell shock—his world order completely crashed after he came back to London as a civilian. According to Charles Myers's study of shell shock, the most prominent symptom is the disruption of perception, including a deeper stage of "hallucinations, anaesthesia, and post-hypnotic amnesia" (317).

Wandering through the streets of London, Septimus is repeatedly visited by haunting hallucinations—"There was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 22)! Septimus's hallucination first signifies a disintegration of the Symbolic order. As Karen DeMeester describes, "Such a shock [shock of radical historical change] is registered as an injury, a trauma that sabotages faith in traditional value systems and the cultural order" (78). Witnessing his comrade Evans's death becomes the site of Septimus's trauma, in which "the unconscious unwittingly repeats or re-enacts the traumatic event" (Pong 441), as well as marking the moment of the return to the Real. To maintain the Symbolic order, Septimus's trauma must be reintegrated. "Communalization" thus becomes a significant way for his "postwar recovery" (DeMeester 86). By recounting a traumatic story, Septimus seeks recognition and faithful retelling by others within the community. Logically speaking, the process of communalization offers Septimus great opportunities to interpret his trauma. Yet, Septimus's words do not enter the system of communalization, because "the community wants him to be the man he was before the war—the man who was willing to die to preserve the community's social order" (DeMeester 86). The "struggle for control over the interpretation of the trauma" develops "between the community and the survivor," and ultimately, Septimus loses his right of interpretation (DeMeester 85).

It is noteworthy that Septimus is "one of the first to volunteer," who "went to

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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, *Mrs. Dalloway* 75). In other words, Septimus used to commit himself to protect his land, his country, his people, as well as his Shakespeare culture, submitting himself entirely to the fantasy of patriotism. As Louis Althusser famously asserts, "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete* individuals as concrete subjects, through the functioning of the category of the subject" (190). As Septimus is interpellated as a British man, he internalizes the core value of imperialism and patriarchy, that is, a "considerable responsibility" to protect, or even sacrifice himself for, his country (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 77). However, as war manifests the extremes of imperialism, it results in mass death, shattering the idealized vision of the empire. Witnessing his comrade dying in front of him, Septimus's interpellated subjectivity turns into a "subjective destitution [in Lacanian sense]" which conducts "not an act of sacrifice (which always implies the Other as its addressee) but an act of abandonment which sacrifices the very sacrifice" (Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptoms* 59). In other words, Septimus "withdraw[s]" his "subject from the Other" (Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptoms* 59), reducing himself to "a void, a null point, a gap in reality" (Žižek, "Subjective Destitution" 79).

Turning back to this null point, Septimus holds the very chance to reach and obtain the truth. As he constantly claims, he "hear[s] the truth" and "learn[s] the meaning…after all the toils of civilisation" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 59).-Christine Froula underscores that Septimus "brings the war home" (112), carrying a "potentially redemptive 'message' of witness to social violence (88). However, society never grants him the space—or the language—for redemption. His glance at truth is regarded as a hallucination and is thus pathologized. In order to cure Septimus's hallucination, he is sent to Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw. Dr. Holmes negates Septimus's profound

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internal suffering in a single sentence, declaring that "there was nothing whatever the matter" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 79). Yet, Dr. Holmes is regarded as "a good man," who holds the standard of being an ideal "English husband" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 79, 80). Even if Septimus has seen through Dr. Holmes's "human nature"—that is, its bruteness—he is unable to reveal it, for he is labeled mad. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 80).

Sir William Bradshaw, on the other hand, diagnoses Septimus as "a case of complete breakdown—complete physical and nervous breakdown" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 83). As Minow-Pinkney notes, Bradshaw embodies "the incarnation of the imperialist spirit" (65), a figure who, in Woolf's own words, "not only prospered himself but made England prosper" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 86). He worships his two goddesses—"proportion" and "conversion," believing that rationality dominates and forms human proportion (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 87). Whoever does not conform to these proportional values faces the threats of exclusion and is expected to undergo "conversion" in the name of "love, duty, [and] self sacrifice" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 87). As Kaley Joyes points out, "proportion epitomizes imperialism's hierarchical ideology" which indicates that "some humans are more human than others" and thus establishes "proportional hierarchies" which "lead to multiple forms of inequality, including colonialism, racism, classism, sexism, and war" (79). As in Septimus's case, people force him to believe that he "served with great distinction," in other words, forcing him to become the glorious veteran that the British Empire needs him to be (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 83). While Septimus is refusing to enter into the national narrative, he is abjected to the marginality, labeled "not having a sense of proportion" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 84). Eventually, Septimus is sent to "one of Holmes's homes" to be "[taught] to rest" until he ceases to resist the imperial ideology (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 84, 85).

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Jean Thomson accurately identifies that Sir William Bradshaw's remedy "is a more sophisticated version of Dr. Holmes' commonsense paternalism" (61). Specifically, what Bradshaw did is "not about treatment, but about how to control deviant behavior" (Thomson 65). That is to say, "as well as being doctors, they are men seeing another man who must face his responsibilities as they have had to do" (Thomson 61). Born as a British man, Septimus's duty is to protect and glorify his country. Thus, "[a] psychologically disturbed ex-soldier was unthinkable, liable to be designated a traitor or a coward" (Thomson 66). As Joyes underscores, Septimus is the "archetypal damaged man" who marks "the war's ongoing presence in British culture" (72), but "the doctors play their parts as unaware of the whole picture as the patient" (Thomson 65), conspiring with "the generals and the politicians" who "had taken the Smiths of London to fight and kill but wanted to ignore the possible effect of such violations of normal behavior on those who returned to civilian life" (Thomson 67).

While Peter Walsh was wandering around London, he saw a march of British soldiers—"Boys in uniform, carrying guns, 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 duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 44). Again, the Imperial ideology interpellates the young man in the name of love and duty, to make them "The Unknown Warrior," namely, "the most beautiful and poetic tribute which any nation has ever paid to those who have fought and suffered for their country in war" ("The Unknown Warrior" 469). If they are great enough, they might become the "exalted statues," that is, the "spectacular images of great soldiers" like Nelson, Gordon, Havelock, and so on, who "had made the same renunciation…, trampled under the same temptations, and achieved at length a marble stare" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 45). Simply put, the imperial interpellation first effaces

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the individuality by calling them warriors and then forms an ideological subjectivity by creating the fantasy of gloriousness, completing the castrating function of the Other upon the subject within the Symbolic order. Ultimately, as Woolf describes, "London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 74). As Septimus Warren Smith's case demonstrates, "the pathology is not shell shock, but the commission of violence and murder that society demanded of its young" (Pong 447-48).

In Myers's case report, he observes that, in addition to hallucinations, the patients sometimes fell into a state of anesthesia. Septimus as well exemplifies this psychological numbness in his loss of capacity to feel after the war: "For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 76). Many scholars have pointed out that one of the enduring myths of war is the belief that it definitively ends with Armistice Day. For Septimus, however, the war remains unresolved, for his process of understanding continues. Tracing back to the day of Evan's death, "He [Septimus] was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference," but "Evans was killed, just before the Armistice" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 75). Such stark contradiction—an occurrence of death at the very brink of armistice—completely deconstructs the idealized notion that war can bring about peace. In fact, as an apocalypse brought by modern technology, war devastates the imperial-modernist conception of temporality as linear progress and blasts the possibility of peace into fragments, giving way to a crystallized and fractured narrative thread. If Septimus's hallucinations imply a disintegration of the Symbolic order, his indifference then foregrounds a suspense during/after wartime, not only rejecting a symbolic closure of death but also opening up a space for the interpretation of trauma. As Beryl Pong indicates that Woolf's temporal apprehension "manifests as

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delay or deferral," in which "characters are always in the process of comprehending the past" (442).

As in Septimus's case, the temporal gap between Evans's death and the Armistice falls into a state of unresolved suspense. Seeing from Septimus's perspective, "the word 'time' split its husk," embedded with the haunting war memories, "like shells, like shavings from a plane" and finally turns into "an immortal ode to Time" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 61). Drawing on Derrida's concept of the madness of time, Fay Chen and Chung-Hsiung Lai underline the "discrepancy between inner time and calendar time," pointing out that "while calendar time continues, the trauma stops [the] inner time" (232). In Septimus's inner time, Evans returns as a "present-absent specter" (Chen and Lai 235), haunting and then becoming "a *politics* of memory" (Derrida qtd. in Chen and Lai 234). As a mourner of Evans, Septimus refuses to join the narrative of national mourning, or in other words, refuses to return to the Symbolic narrative which gives ideological meaning to war and death.

In Lacan's analysis of the Greek tragedy *Antigone*, he underlines the idea of "second death," distinguishing between physical death and symbolic death (*Ethics* 248). According to Lacan, "death insofar…is regarded as the point at which the very cycles of the transformations of nature are annihilated" (*Ethics* 248). In fact, death signifies merely the end of biological living in the realm of desire and reality world, and the subject continues to exist within the Symbolic order even after physical death. Antigone's case exemplifies a peculiar condition in which Antigone lingers between two deaths. Being "placed alive in a tomb" (Lacan, *Ethics* 268), Antigone "is not yet dead" but "is eliminated from the world of the living" (Lacan, *Ethics* 280). She "is about to turn into certain death," that is, "a death lived by anticipation, a death that crosses over into the sphere of life," or to say, "a life that moves into the realm of death" (Lacan,

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Ethics 248). This liminality between life and death thus opens up the possibility of the reconstitution of subjectivity.

As Shen observes, it is only in this suspense between two deaths that subjects "perceive the problem of their presence and absence within the Symbolic order" ("看見他在象徵中的存在與不存在問題"; my trans.; 133). Resonating with Lacan's conception of the subject, entry into the Symbolic order always already implies a fundamental split within the subject. Retreating from the Symbolic order, then, becomes the very gesture through which "the false metaphors of being (*l'étant*)" can be distinguished from "the position of Being (*l'être*) itself" (Lacan, *Ethics* 248). Septimus's fall into the temporal gap between the prewar and postwar periods similarly exemplifies the state of suspense between two deaths. In this context, Holmes's house may be read as analogous to Antigone's tomb—a space of symbolic entombment before the final death. When Septimus is sent to Holmes's house, he is cast out of the Symbolic order and the social communalization. As Septimus's wife Rezia recognizes, "[they] had asked for help and been deserted" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 86). Septimus's struggle to hold onto the moment of Evans's death, though avoids Evans from becoming the Symbolic Unknown Warrior serving imperial ideology, casts himself out to the margins, the position of the abject[6]. Staying in Holmes's house, Septimus again sees the hallucination of Evans—"Evans, Evans, Evans—his message from the dead" (Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway 128). While Derrida reads Hamlet's temporality[7] as haunted by mourning, Septimus likewise experiences disjointed time "because he cannot stop mourning" (Chen and Lai 235). In other words, Septimus is unable to complete the

[6] See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

[7] In Derrida's analysis of *Hamlet*, he claims that everything begins "at the moment when…the specter arrives by returning," highlighting that the repetitive returning of the specter "break[s] down the progression of time" and "caus[es] Hamlet's time to be 'out of joint,' entangled, confused and then mad" (qtd. in Chen and Lai 234).

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work of mourning by inscribing Evans's death into the Symbolic order.

At the final moment of his life, Septimus enters into the in-between state of life and death—"Holmes was coming upstairs. Holmes would burst open the door. Holmes would say 'In a funk, eh?' Holmes would get him…There remained only the window,… and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 129). Before Holmes entering into the house, Septimus is suspended, again, in the state of "a life that moves into the realm of death" (Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 248). On the one hand, to live means to return to the Symbolic order—to follow Holmes and Bradshaw's instructions as they said "he must be taught to rest" and "they [Septimus and his wife] must be separated" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 127). On the other hand, to die means to question the operation of the Symbolic order, "'Must,' 'must,' why 'must'? What power had Bradshaw over him" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 127)? As the Symbolic order hollows out the meaning of the subject, Septimus eventually commits symbolic suicide—"There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 159). By throwing himself out the window, Septimus not only stages his own death but also mimics the sound of gunfire, reactivating London's collective trauma of shell shock. Failing to complete the work of mourning, Septimus undergoes his second death, finally becoming a symptom of the British Empire.

In his studies of the shell shock patients, Myers also indicates that it is "difficult to understand why hearing should be (practically) unaffected, and the dissociated 'complex' be confined to the senses of sight, smell, and taste (and to memory)" (320). Logically speaking, hearing is supposed to be the first sensory faculty to be impacted during artillery warfare; however, according to Myers's investigation, patients with shell shock often show no impairment in their hearing. Instead, auditory perception serves as

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a trigger for traumatic memories. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf depicts a moment when the sounds of a motor car startle Londoners—"The violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump and Miss Pym go to the window and apologise came from a motor car had drawn to the side of the pavement precisely opposite Mulberry's shop window" (12). Not only were the soldiers in the battlefront traumatized by bombs and shells, but these sounds of war created a collective trauma among the civilians. Even though now, "[t]he War was over," a car engine backfire can easily bring back the horror of war experience (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 4).

As Jennifer Spitzer observes, "Septimus figures as a thorn in the flesh to the upper-class society that the Dalloways represent, a society whose thriving depends on the repression of the war it helped catalyze" (71). In other words, Septimus becomes a symptom that cannot be reintegrated into the Symbolic order, "bod[ying] forth the psychic and social consequences of the war" (Spitzer 71). That is, the War is never over, since "every one has friends who were killed in the War" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 58) and that every one shares a collective traumatic experience of war in which "the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 9):

> The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way—to the window…for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 16)

Most importantly, everyone has to admit that Empire has killed its people—or at least distorted the meaning of war. In one of the most famous episodes of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the

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skywriting scene, Woolf again highlights the sound of war. Recalling Woolf's writing about war experiences in "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," "lying in the dark and listening to the zoom of a hornet which may at any moment sting you to death…One, two, three, four, five, six pass. The bomb did not fall. But during those seconds of suspense all thinking stopped" (243; 247). The sound of the aeroplane encapsulates and returns as citizens' traumatic experience of war, "bored ominously into the ears of the crowd," creating fissures on the fantasy of Imperialism (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 18). The ideology of Imperialism, however, covers this fissure rapidly in collaboration with capitalism. Hearing the sound of the aeroplane, the crowd looked up, seeing the aeroplane writing something in the sky and finally figuring out it was an advertisement for a confectionery brand. Immediately, a haunting memory of war is turned into a "latest mode of advertising" (Bowlby, "Between the Houses" 146), in which the true meaning is consumed and hollowed out as Imperialism is advertised as patriotism and "intellectual liberty" (Snaith, "Empire" 53).

Up to this point, the post-war London seems to fall into a condition of post-hypnotic amnesia, that is, a forgetting of war cruelties and a pretense of returning to normal society. However, shell shock "as a social disease" betrays this "national ideal," further exposing a deeper structure of patriarchy, of gender discrimination, and "of outsider and insider, which were rooted in society long before the war" (Mosse 105, 108). George L. Mosse points out that under the logic of militarism, "war was regarded as a true test of manliness," and "those who were the victims of shell-shock had failed this test" since "the shock of war could only cripple those who were of a weak disposition, fearful and, above all, weak of will" (102; 104; 105). Shell shock is then associated with hysteria, a condition once pathologized as a uniquely female illness, characterized by ungovernable emotional excess and near-madness. Septimus thus falls

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into this feminine position in which his subjectivity dissolves. However, if shell shock now exemplifies that men, too, can "be subject to hysteria" (Mosse 102), doctors are caught in a self-contradictory impasse—to pathologize it or not to pathologize it. Refusing to pathologize it risks destabilizing the Symbolic order; yet pathologizing it entails admitting that war feminizes men. Thus, the process of pathologizing shell shock exposes the deeply rooted gender oppression sustained by patriarchal structures. They cast out women to the margins, while women become their symptom, pointing to the incoherence of their subjectivity. Next, I am going to weave women into my discussion of war, further examining how women—as a symptom—exposes deeper problems of patriarchy and ultimately points to the void of the Symbolic order.

Women's Order

While Penner reads Mrs. Dalloway as a "failed elegy" of Septimus (127), Beryl Pong moves "from individual to collective elegy," that is, "from mourning Septimus to mourning his victimization by a war-making society" (448). As the famous opening sentence goes, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy *the* flowers herself" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 3; emphasis added). Why is it *the flowers* and not simply *flowers*? What is the function of the definite article that Woolf adds here? I initially read this phrase as an elegiac gesture—an establishing scene for a mourning ritual. That is to say, these are *the* flowers dedicated to the elegized subject. In English elegiac tradition—for instance, Milton's *Lycidas*—elegy "has been aligned with the pastoral, replete with classical deities and catalogs of flowers and mourners" (Penner 7). Here, we already have the flowers. Then, I will read Clarissa Dalloway—a middle-aged, upper-middle-class woman who is the most distanced from the frontlines of war—as the primary mourner for the post-war London. As people say that, "She cared much more for her roses than

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for the Armenians"—"she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? but she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?)" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 104). For Clarissa, Albanians or Armenians are merely names that bear no real weight in her lived experience, far less real to her than her roses, which she loves and finds immediately present.

Some may regard Clarissa's apolitical deeds as a sign of impotence. As Trudi Tate argues, women's ignorance "is part of the cultural structure which took Britain to war and continued to oppress its victims" (470). However, I will initially read Clarissa's ignorance as a symptom that epitomizes a post-hypnotic amnesia of Britain. In Tate's historical investigation, she also discloses that "people in Britain were strangely positioned in this period of peace, as the war continued in a fragmented form in various parts of Europe" (469). The Albanian or Armenian questions thus expose such symptomatic amnesia. According to Tate, the Albanian question refers to the "Albanian refugees escaped from the Greek-Turkish war," which was occasionally reported by British newspapers but aroused little attention in Britain (472).

The Armenian question, on the other hand, was of greater concern to the British. It refers to a territorial dispute among Armenia, Turkey, and Russia. In the beginning, Britain supported the Armenians in establishing their national home and assisted them to resist massacres perpetrated by Turkey, which is considered "the twentieth century's first act of genocide" by some historians (Tate 473). Then, the Armenians were "effectively abandoned by the Lausanne Treaty[8]," an agreement that placed Armenia under Turkey's control in exchange for securing British interests in the region (Tate 474). That is to say, the British hypocritical concerns and support for Armenian human

[8] As Tate notes, Lausanne Treaty is signed on 24 July 1923, just "a few weeks after Mrs. Dalloway is set" (474).

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rights were, in reality, far outweighed by their own political and economic interests. Even more, the British Empire's early political intervention exacerbated the conflict between Armenia and Turkey. For many people, "this was a grotesque betrayal of the Armenians" (Tate 474). The Armenians "had suffered so much," and "Britain had some responsibility" in contributing to the Armenians' suffering (Tate 474).

So, didn't Clarissa's lack of interest in political issues, in a way, essentially help the Armenians? Next, I will turn to Woolf's *Three Guineas* to consider this question from a different perspective—if applicable, from women's perspective. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf highlights the measure of "maintain[ing] an attitude of complete indifference" (107). She claims that patriotism is inherently structured by patriarchal logic, and therefore women should take no part in it. Abstaining from participation, she argues, becomes a way to deviate from this patriarchal logic, for "psychology would seem to show that it is far harder for human beings to take action when other people are indifferent," and such indifference may ultimately help to prevent war (*Three Guineas* 109). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa, in her mid-fifties, is depicted "like a nun withdrawing" to "an attic room" (Woolf 27). Transforming the image of the madwoman in the attic (Gilbert and Gubar), Woolf creates a figure of an indifferent woman in the attic[9] who carries "cold spirit" and "a virginity preserved through childbirth" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 28). A virgin mother, again, is essentially a self-contradictory notion, yet it serves as the prototype of the ideal woman within a patriarchal framework.

If for Septimus, being sent to Holme's home parallels being entombed in Antigone's tomb, Clarissa's attic room, however, symbolizes that women have always already resided in Antigone's tomb—first as daughters, then as wives, and subsequently as mothers. As many scholars have noted, Clarissa embodies the Victorian idea of "the

[9] That is, a room of one's own.

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Angel in the House," who is "intensely aympathetic,…immensely charming,…utterly unselfish,…excel[s] in the difficult arts of family life,…sacrifice[s] herself daily," and most importantly, "never [has] a mind or wish of her own" (Woolf, "Professions" 2153). Woolf thus aims to "kill the angel in the house"—to kill this "male ideal" and to reconsider what a "living woman" will be (Woolf, "Professions" 2153; Showalter, "Killing" 340). As Cynthia Enloe asserts that "women's wars are not men's wars," they are situated within different gender structures and face different forms of oppression, and "each of those political dynamics will continue when the guns begin firing and the missiles are launched" (9). Clarissa has "'failed' Richard" due to her "cold spirit," and the language used to depict her relationship with her husband is notably "devoid of sexual passion" (Bond 78). Once again, Clarissa's numbness demonstrates not women's ignorance, but rather a symptom—an aphanisis—that reveals the oppressive structures of patriarchy.

Next, I will turn to Žižek's elaboration of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to further examine the idea of "woman as a symptom of man" (Lacan; Žižek). According to Žižek, the woman-symptom is "a sign of the fact that man had 'ceded his desire'" ("Woman" 20); in other words, woman-symptom showcases that man "accept[s] 'symbolic castration'" ("Woman 43). While a symptom is, according to Lacan, is "a *ciphered message*" (qtd. in Žižek, "Woman" 20), the notion of woman as a symptom signifies the male subject's sacrifice—an attempt to "prevent the Other from learning th[e] truth," that is, "the Other is 'always-already dead'" (Žižek, "Woman" 29, 30). Further more, if "the symptom is dissolved, the subject itself disintegrates" (Žižek, "Woman" 21). Thus, "'woman is a symptom of man' means that man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom" (Žižek, "Woman" 21). That is to say, woman functions to confirm the construction of man/woman as a system of gendered signs that serve to sustain the

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ideological Other.

As Lacan states, “There’s no such thing as Woman,” suggesting that not all women are subjected to the Other and thus retain their fluidity and multiplicity (*On Feminine Sexuality* 72). In other words, woman as a gendered sign opens up the possibility of deconstructing the linguistically structured Symbolic order. If the father’s “No!” symbolizes the intervention of language into the Real, forcing the subject to separate from their mother and enter the linguistically governed Symbolic order in the Name-of-the-Father, Antigone’s “No!” to Creon, however, suggests a resistance to the Symbolic, enabling the subject to encounter the Real. After Antigone enacts her symbolic suicide, she retreats into a state of ambiguity. Until her tomb is reopened, the subject remains suspended in an indeterminate space, one that escapes signification in the Symbolic order.

In Kristeva’s theory, this state of indeterminacy is called a not-yet position, *chora*, that is, “not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e., it is not a sign),” nor “a *position* that represents someone for another position (i.e., it is not yet a signifier either)” (*Revolution* 26). Distinct from the symbolic operation of determining and structuring linguistic signs, the semiotic *chora* is a “regulating process” that “effectuates discontinuities by temporarily articulating them and then starting over, again and again” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 26). In other words, the semiotic *chora* resists fixation of meaning, continually disrupting and reopening the production of language. In the process of displacement and condensation, *chora* becomes a “place where the subject is both generated and negated” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 28). After war devastates the Symbolic order, Clarissa’s London falls into this state of semiotic *chora*,

> She [Clarissa] had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this

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> astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 9-10)

Woolf originally intended to title this novel *The Hours*. The final decision to name it *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, foregrounds the performative and constitutive nature of language. That is, as language functions as a signifier reiterated within the Symbolic order, its signified becomes progressively emptied out, ultimately pointing to "the absence of an object" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 26). As Peter Walsh comments, Clarissa is "the perfect hostess" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 54), described as "immensely charming" and "intensely sympathetic," capable of "excell[ing] in the difficult arts of family life" (Woolf, "Professions" 2153). She dresses in a manner that adheres to the patriarchal beauty standard, so perfectly that "people should look pleased as she came in" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 9). For Clarissa, hosting parties holds profound significance: it not only showcases her skill in hospitality but also symbolizes her role in reestablishing social order in the aftermath of war. The title Mrs. Dalloway thus designates Clarissa primarily through her role as Richard Dalloway's wife, invoking what Jane Marcus critiques as "Victorian relics" (*Languages of Patriarchy* 77).

Shannon Forbes observes that Clarissa "chooses to perform [in Judith Butler's sense] the role of Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (43). As both Marcus and Forbes note, Clarissa "accepted the loss of self as an essential piece of her present 'happiness'" (Marcus, *A Feminist Slant* 170), yet remains "ambivalent," for "performing this role, paradoxically, exacerbates her sense of her lack of a unified self while simultaneously providing the only sense of stability and order she knows" (Forbes 43). In other words, the only way she is able to establish a coherent identity is through the name of Mrs.

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Dalloway. Yet again, as Lacan points out, once the subject enters the order of language, they become a linguistically split subject—inherently incoherent and perpetually unable to fully realize the meaning of their name. This fragmentation is especially pronounced within the language of patriarchy, where Woman's meaning is systematically emptied out. Subsumed under the name of someone's wife or someone's daughter, "the woman or mother is always a void, a hole in discourse—as the unconscious, the unrepresentable" (Minow-Pinkney 73). While Clarissa "attempts to convince herself that she has a unified, ordered, and stable [Victorian] self," she ultimately finds herself invisible, unseen, and unknown (Forbes 43-44). That is to say, "she has no identity outside of the confines of the role she performs" (Forbes 44).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf presents a scene that concretizes the symbolic association between the tree and phallogocentrism, that is, the moment of the death of Clarissa's sister, Sylvia. Sylvia's death occurs when a tree accidentally falls on her. Witnessing her sister being killed by a falling tree constitutes a traumatic moment for Clarissa. After that, she begins to believe that she has to "[behave] like a lady" for "the sake of goodness" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 68). While Elizabeth Abel describes that Clarissa's memory of Bourton is a "pastoral female world" (31), Spitzer argues that Bourton is "lorded over by a domineering father" and is thus "a symbol of the violence of heteropatriarchy rather than the romance of the pastoral" (75). Though Clarissa, in her memory, gives precedence to the moment she shares with Sally Seton, there is always the intrusion of men—an intrusion marked by "his hostility; his jealousy; his determination to break into their companionship" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 31).

Thus, in order to realize her female subjectivity, Clarissa must relinquish the constraining roles of wifehood and motherhood, allowing the "I" to be deconstructed and reconfigured into new possibilities of being. As Woolf contends in *A Room of One's*

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Own, "I respect and admire that 'I' from the bottom of my heart. But—here I turned a page or two, looking for something or other—the worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter 'I' all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a woman" (99). Echoing the Lacanian notion that there's no such thing as Woman, Woolf illustrates the structural invisibility of women within patriarchal society. Ultimately, in Woolf's final choice of title, "not only that the name 'Richard' is missing from the title, but that the name 'Clarissa' is missing from the title as well" (Forbes 39). In doing so, Woolf appears to stage a dialectic between Richard and Clarissa, that is, between the patriarchal identity imposed upon her and the self that remains untitled. Turning back to post-war London, I suggest again that as the Symbolic order is disintegrating, the city enters a state of semiotic *chora*, which "celebrate[s] the nomadic existence of the urban wanderer" and even "reconstructs the city from a female point of view" (Parsons 188, 189). Wandering on the streets of London, Clarissa experiences an initial sense of counter-actualization,

> She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fräulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language; no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 7-8)

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Resonating with Kristeva's idea of "'spasmodic force' of the unconscious," Clarissa "fall[s] back into pre-Oedipal or imaginary chaos,… maintaining a precarious balance between an overestimation of so-called 'feminine' madness and a too precipitate rejection of the values of the symbolic order" (Moi 11-12). Traumatized by the falling tree that caused her sister's death, Clarissa comes to feel that living within the logic of patriarchy is always dangerous. She has spent every effort becoming the perfect hostess, only to find that the name itself has effaced her true identity. Contrary to Elaine Showalter's analysis, what Woolf portrayed is neither a "utopian projection" of a feminine world nor a passive "escape" from the patriarchal world (Showalter, *Literature* 289). Instead, she dares to walk along the border of conflicting ideological systems, disrupting single narratives and opening up possibilities for the coexistence of multiple value systems. In Clarissa's refusal to define herself, Woolf "contextualize[s] time within spaces," allowing the present to converge multiple timelines and perspectives (Bond 67). And finally, as Wang Ban indicates, "One can become everybody or nobody. The self is always on the run, on the run toward nonself" (188).

As exemplified by the Unknown Warrior—who dies bodily but remains fully absorbed into the Symbolic constructed through national allegory—physical death does not necessarily entail symbolic death. Conversely, one may undergo symbolic death without immediate physical demise, as in the case of Septimus. Instead, symbolic death can open up the possibility for the reconstruction of the subject, disrupting the stability of the Symbolic and gesturing toward a new mode of becoming. Therefore, through Woolf's pen, "Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity, an indescribable pause," and most importantly "a suspense" that negotiates between the signifier and the signified (*Mrs. Dalloway* 4). As Rachel Bowlby indicates, *Mrs. Dalloway* "is an exploration of what a woman might become" (*Feminist Destinations* 48). The flowers,

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as presented in the opening line of *Mrs. Dalloway*, may function as tokens of mourning, but also as expressions of celebration and homage, for women now could buy flowers for themselves, and also for "all women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn," who "earned them the right to speak their minds" (Woolf, *Room* 64).

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Chapter Three

Traversing the Fantasy: There's No Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship

As Lacan's assertion that "There's no such thing as Woman" opens up the possibility of reconstructing subjectivity, I suggest that another of his famous claims—"There's no such thing as a sexual relationship"—provides a theoretical foundation for deconstructing the binary system (*On Feminine Sexuality* 72; *La topologie* 1). According to Lacan, under the regulation of the Name-of-the-Father, "there is no chance for a man to have jouissance of a woman's body…without castration" (*On Feminine Sexuality* 72). In other words, all men are subjected to the function of phallus—in the name of Man—harboring an illusory sense of fulfilling their desire through sexual relations with woman. However, "what he approaches is [merely] the cause of his desire," which functions as a structural disguise of the void (Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 72). As Woman does not exist, the man/woman binary proves to be structurally unsustainable.

Instead, woman—as a concept of multiplicity—constitutes a pivotal site of transgression against phallic logic. Though woman is constructed "as 'not whole' (*pas-tout*) with respect to phallic jouissance," this very condition of incompleteness liberates her from the logic of phallus (*On Feminine Sexuality* 7). In other words, woman is not entirely confined to the phallic function and thus is able to access the feminine jouissance—a form of pleasure that exists beyond the limits of language and the Symbolic order. As Lacan asserts, "women are free to situate themselves there if it gives them pleasure to do so" (*On Feminine Sexuality* 71). In this sense, lesbianism becomes a site of resistance that challenges the phallocentric system. They are excluded from the system of phallic jouissance and thus are able to ignore the phallus, especially "being capable of escaping the trap of collapsing the penis into the phallic signifier" ("能夠不

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落入將陰莖當成陽具意符的陷阱"; my trans.; Shen 429). However, as Shen points out, Psychoanalysis fundamentally lacks a theorization of lesbian experience and fails to adequately articulate the specificity of feminine jouissance (429). In what follows, I turn to queer theory to further investigate this impossibility of a sexual relationship.

Queering Disorder

In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler proposes a series of questions to examine the politics of marriage:

> Indeed, the questions are even more complicated: whose desire might qualify as a desire for state legitimation? But also: whose desire might qualify as the desire of the state? Who may desire the state? And whom may the state desire? Whose desire will be the state's desire? (111)

Heteronormative hegemony, much like patriarchy, serves to consolidate imperialist power. If patriarchy foregrounds men's desire for conquest and dominance, heteronormativity reinforces the social norm that positions men as the protectors of women. Constructed as man's *cause of desire*, the "Lady is presented with depersonalized characteristics," that is, a "feminine object" which "is emptied of all real substance," circulating around the structural lack of the Other (Lacan, *Ethics* 149). In order to sustain the structure of the Other, "the state becomes the means by which a fantasy becomes literalized" through marriage, where "desire and sexuality are ratified, justified, known, publicly instated, imagined as permanent, durable" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 111).

After the war nearly devastated the social order, Septimus marries Rezia in an effort to reintegrate himself into the Symbolic order. Yet, their marriage is a complete

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failure, for Septimus could not feel anything for Rezia, and for Rezia could not bring Septimus into communalization either. Ultimately, Septimus embraces death as an act of "defiance" and as "an attempt to communicate" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 160). The arrival of the news of Septimus's death at Clarissa's party brings her self-dialectic to its climax and simultaneously opens up boundless possibilities for reconstructing subjectivity. If Clarissa's party is an attempt to hold on to the social order, Septimus's death violently interrupts this order, exposing the impossibility of returning to the pre-war structure and underscoring that war lingers beyond the signing of a truce. Though Clarissa and Septimus remain entirely unknown to each other, the experience of World War I serves as "a shared trauma that unites [them] both" (Lilienfeld 123).

Whereas Septimus's witnessing of Evans's death in the trench reveals the inherent violence of imperialism, Clarissa's confrontation with her sister Sylvia's death exposes patriarchy as the foundational structure of domination. DeMeester specifies that, "Septimus's death, if not the truths he has to share, comes to Clarissa's party uninvited but not wholly unexpected," for Clarissa has already "sense[d] the brutal monster—the vulnerability, the frailty, the evil—stirring about in her and her social and political circles" (88). Thus, Clarissa is capable of interpreting and responding to Septimus's message. After receiving the news of Septimus's death, Clarissa retreats from the party to herself, contemplating that,

> It held, foolish as the idea was, something of her own in it, this country sky, this sky above Westminster. She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising!—in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to bed. And the sky. It will be a solemn sky, she had thought, it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty. But there it was—ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds. It was new to her. The wind must have risen. She was

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> going to bed, in the room opposite. It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window. Could she see her? It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 161)

This complete paragraph articulates a profound spatio-temporal dialectic, in which the past and all the possibilities of the future converge in the immediacy of the present moment.

First, the sky offers a diachronic framework of imagination, weaving together Clarissa's memories of the country in Bourton and the city of London. Whether it was Bourton twenty years ago or London twenty years later, they both look up at the same sky. That is to say, the linear concept of time dissolves into the sky's timeless expanse. The sky also provides a geographically synchronic imagination, bridging our perceptions between the home front and the battle front. As Lilienfeld demonstrates, "time itself became the soldier's enemy," for "the daily procession of the sun and moon across the sky, observed by thousands of soldiers trapped in trenches, ironically

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conveyed stasis," leading many to believe "the Great War would last forever" (120). In trenches, dawn signifies death, for each sunrise marks the beginning of another day of bloodshed. The dusk, on the other hand, signals relief (Lilienfeld 120, 121). As Clarissa finally reads the words "Fear no more the heat of the sun" (8, 161), a line previously echoed by Septimus from William Shakespeare's play[10], the boundary between their disparate experiences momentarily collapses, revealing a shared existential indictment against society.

For Septimus, the sun is both a signifier of death, as witnessed in the trenches, and an emblem of colonialism and imperialism, epitomized by the British Empire—the empire on which the sun never sets. For Clarissa, the sun signifies the masculine cultural tradition, deeply rooted in the canon of Shakespeare.[11] In Shakespeare's play, this is a funeral song mistakenly sung for the female protagonist. In Woolf's appropriation, however, Clarissa becomes the mourner of Septimus. This apostrophic sentence, though not directly addressed to Septimus, breathes life into his death (Johnson 32). Indeed, precisely because the subject is omitted, "the poem can no more distinguish between 'I' and 'you' than it can come up with a proper definition of life" (Johnson 33). Both imprisoned within the Symbolic order, Septimus and Clarissa present the dialectical counterparts of life and death. One fractures the Symbolic order through the enactment of symbolic suicide, and the other reactivates and reconfigures the Symbolic order by reconstructing a fluid subjectivity. Thus, it is only through Clarissa's "aggressive mourning"—a discourse that refuses to seal the wartime wounds—that Septimus's death becomes visible and audible, ultimately constituting a powerful critique of nationalism (Clewell, "Consolation" 198).

[10] This line originates from Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline*.
[11] In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf critically interrogates the male-dominated literary tradition by proposing her famous hypothesis of *Shakespeare's sister* (44-46).

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Septimus's death also foregrounds Clarissa's suspension between the Symbolic order and symbolic death. While Clarissa—like Septimus—walks to the window, she does not throw herself away. Instead, she enters the Imaginary order, where she encounters an old lady staring straight at her. This moment rewrites what Lacan theorizes as the mirror stage, where the Symbolic order "brings about the internalization of mirror and other images" (Fink 36), and where "the child misrecognizes in its mirror image a stable, coherent, whole self" (Felluga). Their reciprocal gazes mutually reconstruct and represent a split female subjectivity—one who puts out the light and goes to bed; the other who goes back to the party, rejoining the social assembly. As Minow-Pinkney underscores, Clarissa "negotiate[s] a precarious balance" between complete subjugation to, and total expulsion from, the Symbolic order (81), giving voice to "the specificity of a female subject who is outside any principle of identity-to-self" and thus can "identify with multiple scenes without fully integrating herself into them" (83).

While Big Ben serves as a symbol of domination, persistently anchoring London citizens to a linear timeline, Clarissa remains "a suspense" before its striking (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 4), enabling herself to enter St. Margaret's temporal rhythm—a deviation from the authoritative strokes of Big Ben (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 43). If the sound of Big Ben is "a warning" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 4), encapsulating the Symbolic rule "which disrupts the fluid internal experience of the characters with its insistence on official time" (Spitzer 76), St. Margaret's, by contrast, offers a flexibility that allows the characters to attune to their psychological time. By chiming slightly after Big Ben, St. Margaret's destabilizes the authority of official time, opening up an alternative temporal imagination and becoming a fissure in the Symbolic order. Functioning as an incoordination, St. Margaret's "glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in

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ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest—like Clarissa herself" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 43).

As Jennie-Rebecca Falcetta observes, Woolf "collapses time" by "keeping other times and places constantly in play on the field of London, 1923" (125). In doing so, London itself becomes "very queer" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 106). Although men could not "understand what she meant"—neither Peter nor Richard would "[take] the trouble to give a party for no reason whatever"—Clarissa knows the true meaning of holding parties: it is a "thing she called life," a queer gesture for her "to create" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 105-106). In describing the night just before the party begins, Woolf feminizes London by superimposing the image of a lady onto the city:

> One might fancy that day, the London day, was just beginning. Like a woman who had slipped off her print dress and white apron to array herself in blue and pearls, the day changed, put off stuff, took gauze, changed to evening, and with the same sigh of exhilaration that a woman breathes…I fade, she was beginning, I disappear, but London would have none of it, and rushed her bayonets into the sky, pinioned her, constrained her to partnership in her revelry. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 140)

During the day, Clarissa was mending her evening dress, a green dress that "by artificial light the green shone, but lost its colour now in the sun" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 33). By inhabiting the name Mrs. Dalloway—namely, the perfect hostess—Clarissa is able to shine in the social sphere, known for her impeccable grace and hospitality. Yet, as I have noted, the name Mrs. Dalloway empties Clarissa of her subjectivity, reducing her to a social signifier, in which she gradually becomes the faded green in the sun. Until, at the party, Clarissa feels that she is "forced to stand here in her evening dress" (Woolf, *Mrs.*

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Dalloway 160). As Falcetta demonstrates, "the city [London] offers the possibility of transcendence," in which Clarissa "obliterates any subject-object division between herself and London" (131). The celebration of London's night, embodied in Clarissa's party, "relieves her from the pressure of entertainment, which allows her to slip away to contemplate the disturbing news of Septimus's death" (Penner 141). Employing Derrida's theory of mourning, Penner underscores that Clarissa "'welcomes' the decentering that comes with bereavement" (139). Her party exemplifies a "splitting of focus," in which "*many* choices that appear equally possible there" (Penner 140, Derrida qtd. in 141); and her "party consciousness" (Woolf, *Writer's Diary* 75) embodies her engagement in "a more fluid relationship with those around her" (Penner 141). Ultimately, through her sensitivity to the delicate threads that bind humanity, Clarissa "unites souls," thereby contributing to what Penner and Froula respectively describe as a "communal postwar elegy" (Penner 141, 139; Froula 88).

Queer Gestures of Anti-war Resistance

Last, I will turn to Lee Edelman's theory of queer temporality to propose a potential queer approach to anti-war resistance. In Edelman's *No Future*, he criticizes heterosexual reproductive futurism, underscoring that futurism is a "cultural fantasy" (39), which "generates succession, temporality, and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness" (60). As Edelman explicates, fantasy, though "endows reality with fictional coherence and stability," originates from "the lack in the Other" (34) and thus perpetuates "meaningless circulation and repetitions of the drive" (39). For heterosexuality, reproduction is the primary and most prominent function in sexuality, so they relegate homosexuality to the position of "a culture of death," referring to their incapability of giving birth (Edelman

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39). However, Edelman argues that this sex-centric consideration of relationship, in fact, is an "act of self-destruction" (40). To realize reproductive futurism, heterosexual marriage is institutionalized in collaboration with patriarchy and further nationalism. Based on the concept of inheritance and blood lineage, the Symbolic order, though ostensibly functioning as a system for the generation of meaning, sustains a process of meaningless circulation. Subjugated to the Symbolic, the subject becomes fixed within signifiers and is deprived of the capacity for self-interpretation. Simply put, they perform the roles assigned by the Symbolic order and ultimately forfeit their subjectivity. Examining the prevailing structures of patriarchy and heteronormativity, Edelman asserts, "we created a culture that in effect murdered us" (40).

Edelman thus develops a queer perspective, deviating from the heterosexual reproductive futurism. Drawing on Lacan's theory of *sinthome*, Edelman proposes the concept of *sinthomosexuality*, which "den[ies] the appeal of fantasy" as well as "refuse[s] the promise of futurity" (35). In Lacan's definition, *sinthome* is a "particular way each subject manages to knot together the order of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real" (Edelman 35). It "carries nothing of meaning" yet never "cease[s] to write itself," functioning as a "site at which meaning comes undone" (Edelman 35). In this process, the *sinthome* opens up "the possibility of being a subject" by "stick[ing] to a certain *sign* that cannot be integrated into the Symbolic order," that is, "a 'pure sign,'" "a pure negation of what the order stands for" (Edelman 36). By situating homosexuality at the site of the *sinthome*, Edelman empowers it to identify with the symptom, to refuse the "final signifier," and to "[reduce] *every* signifier to the status of the letter and [insist] on access to jouissance" (Edelman 35). In doing so, Edelman subverts heteronormativity, which relegates homosexuality to the position of cultural

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death, and instead repositions homosexuality as a line of flight—a flight toward an open-ended world of meaning.

Though Woolf never clarifies it, Septimus's feeling for Evans is often regarded as an implication of homosexual love. Recalling the days he met and spent with Evans, Septimus describes that,

> There in the trenches…he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name. It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug; one worrying a paper screw, snarling, snapping, giving a pinch, now and then, at the old dog's ear; the other lying somnolent, blinking at the fire raising a paw, turning and growling good-temperedly. They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 75)

Septimus illustrates his relationship with Evans through the intimate play and gestures of a pair of dogs. They snarl, snap, and playfully pinch each other, behaving like carefree lovers who sometimes quarrel as well. In doing so, Septimus retreats from anthropocentric ideology, envisioning an escape route toward a non-hegemonic, consequently a non-heterosexual worldview. From the perspective of dogs, they transcend a linguistically constructed society, entering an ideal world where neither gender nor heterosexuality is inscribed.

However, the British institution ultimately shatters this queer imagination. In the effort to restore the pre-war order, post-war London once again succumbs to the ideology of reproductive futurism. For instance, Rezia is constantly told—and repeatedly tells herself—that "she must have children" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 77), especially being "better to have a son" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 24). As a consequence of

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militarism, post-war society is marked by the absence of son— "Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed," and Lady Bexborough "with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 4). At the very beginning, Woolf has exposed that war—a consequence of nationalism, one manifestation of the Name-of-the-Father—had killed their beloved son. Yet, these individual deaths remain unacknowledged by the nation. They thought "the War was over," and "The King and Queen were at the Palace" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 4). Grounded in reproductive futurism, the nation conspires to produce new fantasies that artificially sustain the illusion of coherence within British society—what Edelman criticizes as a "meaningless circulation," an "act of self-destruction" (39, 40)—as if the birth of sons could compensate for the death of sons inflicted by nationalism.

Septimus's queerness, however, emerges as a symptom that interrupts the logic of reproductive futurism. Acknowledging that "now we [our society] will kill ourselves" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 58), Septimus insists, "One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 78). He admits that "he had married his wife without loving her; had lied to her; seduced her" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 79). Their marriage is ultimately a failure. When he sees his wife take off the wedding ring, Septimus, however, feels relieved—"He dropped her hand. Their marriage was over, he thought, with agony, with relief" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 59). As Rezia unconsciously reveals, "Every one has friends who were killed in the War. Every one gives up something when they marry" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 58). Blindly submitting to the Symbolic ideology leads to the evacuation of subjectivity, ultimately bringing out the deconstructive nature of the gender system, where "men were trapped in mines; women burnt alive" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 78).

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Seeing British society fall back into reproductive futurism, Septimus warns, "It was turning into a man! He could not watch it happen! It was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man!" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 59), underscoring the danger of hegemonic anthropocentrism. Yet, his imaginative queering utopian is constantly interrupted by the persistent force of heterosexual ideology. Rezia, though positioned as the victimized female under patriarchy, repeatedly breaks Septimus's illusion of Evans by constantly calling him back—"Interrupted again! She was always interrupting" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 22). Rezia's words function as the paternal interdiction, the father's "No!" that repudiates homosexual desire for "the 'accomplishment' of heterosexual positioning" (Butler, "Melancholy Gender"168). Septimus becomes a failure of queer resistance. As a result, he committed a symbolic suicide, and through Clarissa's mourning for him, Woolf reclaims the right to *never-cease-to-write* for her female characters.

Being the next generation in the era of the absence of sons, Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth, initially demonstrates such fluidity and flexibility. Through Woolf's emphasis on her Oriental eyes—"Was it that some Mongol had been wrecked on the coast of Norfolk…had mixed with the Dalloway ladies, perhaps, a hundred years ago?... Elizabeth…had Chinese eyes in a pale face; an Oriental mystery (*Mrs. Dalloway* 106)—Elizabeth is empowered with the potential to perceive the world from peculiar perspectives. Though several scholars have criticized Woolf's depiction of Chinese eyes as falling into the "Orientalist stereotypes as a means for gender definition" (Barrows 237), I argue that Woolf's illustration of Oriental figures instead serves as an effective means of deviating from the Symbolic center. I contend that Elizabeth's Oriental eyes, while positioned as the object of desire, possess a subjective agency with their ability to return the gaze. Serving as the cause of men's desire, Elizabeth functions as the object *a*,

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positioned within the void of the Symbolic and simultaneously exemplifying the Symbolic's inherent lack. Her enigmatic figures demonstrate the obscurity and elusiveness of object *a*. Confronted with this anamorphic image, we are forced to "look awry[12]" in order to perceive a "positive existence to its 'nothing'" (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 12), thereby "preventing us from sliding into psychosis" (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 13). Just as the myth tells, who dares to see Medusa's eyes?

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous suggests, however, "look[ing] at the Medusa straight on to see her," and you will find that "she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (885). Cixous argues that Medusa has been historically misrepresented as a monster only because men "need femininity to be associated with death," allowing them to reject the feminine and relegate women to positions of negativity and inferiority (885). However, Woolf's emphasis on Elizabeth's Oriental eyes offers another way of looking awry.[13] As Woolf herself writes in *Three Guineas*, "though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes" (18). This pair of non-Western eyes casts a sidelong glance back at the West, ultimately creating a perspective of crossed gazes, continuously looking and pointing in different directions. James Naremore analyzes one remarkable example of the transition between Elizabeth's and Clarissa's perspectives, beginning with the moment when Elizabeth Dalloway is about to board a bus (87),

> Of course, she would not push her way. She inclined to be passive. It was expression she needed, but her eyes were fine, Chinese, oriental, and, *as her mother said,* with such nice shoulders and holding herself so straight, she was

[12] Žižek refers to Lacan's analysis of Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, underlining an "amorphous" spot at the bottom of the picture as a "signifier without signified" (*Looking Awry*, 90, 91). Looking steadily at this image, the viewer often feels its inexplicability; while looking at it from a certain right angle, the viewer sees a skull as a demonstration of death in front of them.

[13] While Žižek emphasizes the witness of death in *The Ambassadors* when viewed from the right angle, observing the painting from the left reveals a crucifix, which serves instead as a symbol of life or rebirth.

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> always charming to look at… What could she be thinking? Every man fell in love with her, and she was really awfully bored. For it was beginning. *Her mother could see that*—the compliments were beginning. That she did not care more about it—for instance for her clothes—sometimes worried Clarissa, but perhaps it was as well with all those puppies and guinea pigs about having distemper, and it gave her a charm. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 117; emphasis added)

According to Naremore, this paragraph initially directs our attention to Elizabeth. Then, suddenly, "we find ourselves reading Clarissa's meditation on her daughter," while we cannot precisely identify when or where this meditation begins (Naremore 88). Here, Woolf deliberately blurs the boundaries between different perspectives, enabling the subjectivity to fluctuate among the daughter, the mother, and the narrator. Finally, as Cixous claims,

> There is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have in common I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes-any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible. (876)

As Rachel Bowlby indicates, Elizabeth "is the bearer of new opportunities for her sex" (*Feminist Destinations* 82). Echoing Clarissa's omnibus contemplation, Elizabeth's London provides her with a rather "omnipotence" (Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations* 82) —"Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in

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front of everybody. She took a seat on top…She was delighted to be free" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 117). While Clarissa encounters the semiotic possibility in post-war London, Elizabeth herself "is a young woman without a past and with many possible future directions" (Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations* 97). As Miss Kilman tells her, "every profession is open to the women of your [Elizabeth's] generation" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 118). Elizabeth "might be a doctor…, might be a farmer…, might own a thousand acres and have people under her" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 118), and it is precisely these indecisive *mights* foreground her almighty queerness, refusing fixed identification and opening up "new urban opportunities" in post-war London (Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations* 97).

Oscillating between her mother and her tutor, Miss Kilman, Elizabeth nonetheless maintains a bond with her father. At Clarissa's party, Elizabeth "places herself on the masculine side of that valuation" (Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations* 97). She "go[es] to her father," as if "they are devoted to each other" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 168). This alliance with her father "draw[s] attention to the greater complexity of women's unroyal roads to a femininity," while simultaneously creating "a great openness from their very lack of fit with dominant masculine order" (Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations* 97). As McIntire claims, Woolf is the first one who portrays women "as instrumental as men" (80). In doing so, Elizabeth's identity transcends the binary signifiers of man and woman. She remains fluid, continually deviating from social norms and envisioning alternative futurities through her Oriental eyes. Identifying with women as a symptom, Elizabeth reconstitutes the Symbolic circles through the *sinthome*, that is, a power of never-ceasing writing.[14]

[14] In *To the Lighthouse*, a later novel published two years after *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf once again portrays a female character—Lily Briscoe, a painter—as having Oriental eyes. I argue that base on Lily Briscoe, Woolf further underscores women's creativity and ability to create multiple visions.

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Last, I will turn to Sally Seton, Clarissa's expressed "inner meaning" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 28), as well as one of the most complicated figures in contesting with marriage system. As the marriages illustrated in *Mrs. Dalloway* are so unsatisfying, we have to ask why, in the end, Sally Seton—"the last person in the world one would have expected to marry a rich man and live in a large house near Manchester"—enters heterosexual matrimony (Woolf 63). Moreover, she bears five sons! In Clarissa's remembrance, "she [Sally Seton] smoked cigars,…she ran down the passage to fetch her sponge bag," and "she stole a chicken from the larder because she was hungry in the night" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 157). She transgressed the social rules, behaving extremely unconventionally, but "everybody forgave her…everybody adored her," because everybody admires her ability to paint and write (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 157). Sally Seton once embodied an iconic figure of creative power and a transgression of femininity and masculinity. Yet, why in the end does she submit herself to the heterosexual system of marriage?

In doing so, I argue that Woolf aims to further deconstruct man/woman as a binary system of gender signifiers, reimagining futurism from a rather queer perspective. In the era of post-war absence of sons, Sally is the only character who bears sons in the novel. In fact, she is also the only character capable of bearing sons without reproducing the patriarchal narrative of deadly repetition and destructive futurism, for herself is so queer, so unconditioned. As depicted in Clarissa's memories,

> Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance. At Bourton they always had stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias—all sorts of flowers that never been seen together—cut their head off, and made them swim on the top of water in bowls. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 29-30)

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Sally's way of cutting the flowers' head off is a metaphorical demonstration of her French blood, an ancestor who "had his head cut off" with Marie Antoinette (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 29). If the decapitation of the French Revolution designates the end of the monarchy, the act of cutting off the flowers' heads symbolizes the eradication of the familial root. Her juxtaposition of those very different kinds of flowers also showcases the heterogeneity. As they drift wanderingly across the water, they have already in a way created their own routes.

In this way, I argue that Sally's five sons embody the potentiality of uprooted queerness. As Lacan's claim of "There's no such thing as a sexual relationship" (*La topologie* 1) underlines the incompatibility of Man and women, I suggest to move beyond—or even, if possible, deconstruct—the signifier of Man to explore new possibilities of seeing men, for instance, in this case of Sally's five sons. Instead of showcasing the traditional inheritance of the father-son relationship, Woolf reimagines post-war futurity through a queer figure—what might be called a queer-son relationship. It is noteworthy that Sally used to be Clarissa's "most exquisite moment of her whole life" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 31). As Clarissa describes,

> Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 31)

Elevated to the religious level, Clarissa's feeling for Sally illustrates the most precious moments in her life which she would never feel again for any man, nor for her marriage

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with Richard. Though she never valorizes such same-sex desire, she keeps this warmth—"something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 28). As Bond observes, "her memories of Sally integrate a sexual identity into Clarissa's present social role of wife, adding additional dimensions to her sense of self" (78).

As for Sally, marriage does not change her, for she does not "lose the power of feeling;" even more, "she felt more deeply, more passionately, every year" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 168). Minow-Pinkney's comment on Clarissa showcases that "childbirth can no more rupture her hymen outwards than the phallus could inwards," suggesting that Clarissa preserves her virginity by conforming to the patriarchal ideal of motherhood. (72). For Sally, however, the case is different. She has turned the institutions into a queer sense. That is to say, marriage—or heterosexual love—is not a compulsory destiny, but merely one of many possible ways of living. Neither the childbirth nor the phallus ruptures Sally's hymen, for this patriarchal metaphor of virginity is never inscribed onto her body in the first place. She is the one who "[runs] along the passage naked;" she shocks people and transgresses the very rule of gender (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 30). If Septimus's death "speak[s] out as protecting her [Clarissa's] private lesbian passion," then Sally Seton's entry into the heterosexual marriage system illustrates the fluidity of gender and desire (Barrett 162). Sexual identity is not a matter of fixed choice between heterosexuality or homosexuality; rather, individuals are always already heterosexually-homosexual, or homosexually-heterosexual.

At the end of the party, Clarissa slips out of the audiences' view. Some guests begin to leave, others search for her, yet Woolf deliberately withholds her reappearance. Clarissa remains only in Peter's and Sally's imagination. She is still "the extraordinary excitement" of Peter and still the Clarissa in white for Sally (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

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169). As Clarissa treasures the time that she "[comes] down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton," Sally remembers seeing Clarissa "all in white going about the house with her hands full of flowers" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 30; 164).

They are at the same time very aged and very young.

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Conclusion

The imagination of no future collapses both linear progression and cyclical repetition, giving rise to liminal temporalities in which subjects confront the Symbolic's grip on meaning. In Chapter Two, I examined Septimus and Clarissa as figures of suspense, lingering between two deaths—the physical and the symbolic—and thus reframing the meaning of life, death, and subjectivity in post-war society. Suspended in a state of temporal indeterminacy, we hear not only the authoritative chime of Big Ben but also the deviant resonance of St. Margaret's—and most crucially, our own voices. In Chapter Three, I further explore the possibility of demonstrating queer counter-histories and queer mourning that resist containment by war memorials, family names, or heteronormative futures. In Clarissa's mourning, Septimus's death becomes an ongoing narrative. Through Septimus's withdrawal, Elizabeth's wandering, and Sally's remembered desire, Woolf weaves a constellation of anti-patriarchal gestures—each refusing the imperial, heterosexual, and phallic norms of subjectivity. Collectively, they constitute a queer archive of resistance against war and symbolic violence.

Drawing on late Lacanian theory, I suggest that female and queer subjectivities, functioning as object *a*, ultimately emerge as symptoms that resist integration into the Symbolic order, thereby exposing the inherent incoherence of Symbolic naming. Yet, Woolf does not aim to annihilate the Symbolic order but instead seeks to reweave it—integrating incompatible, untranslatable subjects into new structures of meaning. This work of *sinthome,* unlike traditional symptoms that are seen as failures of the Symbolic, becomes a generative force that reconstitutes the Borromean knot and reconfigures subjectivity. As Woolf envisions peace through her imagined Outsiders' Society, I propose queerness not merely as an identity but as a mode of ethical refusal—a refusal

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of totality, of closure, of compulsory futurism; a refusal of the Symbolic economy of war, gender, and power.

In this thesis, I seek to foreground the ways in which psychoanalytic theory engages with questions of gender. I argue that psychoanalysis provides powerful tools for reimagining gender in the present, and to regard psychoanalysis as a theory of men is a fundamental misreading, since in Lacan's framework, man and woman always function as linguistic signifiers rather than fixed binary identities. From "There's no such thing as Woman" (*On Feminine Sexuality* 72) to "There's no such thing as a sexual relationship" (*La topologie* 1), Lacan demonstrates the impossibility of the binary logic of gender. And if Lacanian psychoanalysis has described such linguistic rule, the task of feminist scholars is to recognize the split nature of language, and within this very split, to allow for the emergence of multiple, heterogeneous subjectivities. Though psychoanalytic readings have been a recurring feature in prior scholarship on Woolf, these tend to focus primarily on Woolf's personal neuroses. Here, I aim to delve deeper into Woolf's writing by situating the concept of the symptom within a broader social framework, especially in the discussion of symptomatic gender. Conversely, while psychoanalytic studies often analyze literary works, mainstream criticism predominantly centers on James Joyce's symptomatic writing and has consistently lacked a thorough discussion of the aspect of gender.

This year marks the centenary of *Mrs. Dalloway*, first published in 1925. A hundred years on, this novel continues to resonate in our present moment, offering us a space to reimagine subjectivity beyond violence. It was almost by accident that I found myself writing on war. I certainly love reading Woolf, but war itself had never been a subject I was particularly drawn to. I suspect I was influenced by the global political atmosphere at the time I was brainstorming this thesis—for instance, the outbreak of

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war in Ukraine, the ongoing crisis in Gaza, and, most pressingly for me, the tensions in the Taiwan Strait. And so, standing on the brink of war, I refuse to be folded into the core of nationalism. I aim to walk onto the brink of nationalism, attempting to glimpse, from its turbulent margins, those historically invisible subjectivities and the possibility of rewriting the Symbolic order. As a woman, I used to have an instinctive tendency to shun politics, but now, I am always worried that I am not political enough. It is from this brink that this thesis begins—and refuses to look away. Also, as a Woolfian, I do not know how to prevent or stop a war. But at the very least, I know I can—and I must—respond to it.

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