INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 3
SECTION 1: VICTORIAN IDEALS AND INSANITY ............................................. 6
SECTION 2: TIME AND DEATH ........................................................................... 26
SECTION 3: GENDER AND INTELLIGENCE .................................................... 37
SECTION 4: THE WANING BRITISH EMPIRE ................................................ 46
CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................ 55
BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................................... 57
Introduction

“Those five years—1918-1923—had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different.” After living in India for five years Peter Walsh, a character in Virginia Woolf’s novel entitled *Mrs. Dalloway*, returns to post-war Great Britain on a summer’s day in June of 1923. Being away from the British Empire for such an extended period of time allows Peter to reflect on the changes that have occurred since the armistice. “Now for instance there was a man writing quite openly in one of the respectable weeklies about water-closets. That you couldn’t have done ten years ago — written quite openly about water-closets in a respectable weekly.” This increased flexibility in what was considered socially acceptable is reflective of a much larger change occurring in societal values. It also embodies Virginia’s attempt to “give life and death, sanity and insanity; to criticize the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense.” In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia describes Britain’s social system and shows how members of society are beginning to scrutinize enshrined Victorian values, such as will power and manliness. These intensely indoctrinated values, which were engrained in upper class boys from youth, are seriously being called into question. Virginia uses Septimus Warren Smith, a war hero suffering from ‘shell shock’, to debunk these values in addition to the gendered diagnoses and treatments of early twentieth century medicine.

Septimus, Great Britain’s ‘scapegoat’, is also used to portray the devastating effects the war had on soldiers and civilians alike. Having suffered herself from bipolar disease, analyzing Septimus’s mental illness and treatment in contrast to Virginia’s, allows us to understand what

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2 Ibid, 71.
being mentally ill was actually like. Because most accounts of Virginia’s illness are given by family members and close friends, the parallels between Septimus and Virginia, namely being their thoughts about rest cure, their physicians, and committing suicide, create a window through which we can understand Virginia on a more intimate level.

With Septimus’s suicide, Virginia recognizes the thoughts of death that run through her character’s minds. Set in Westminster, Virginia uses Big Ben to toll the hour, momentarily dislodging her characters from their current train of thought. Typically when this happens, death and the war are immediately brought to the forefront of characters’ minds. This repetition of the chiming and allusion to war, cause us to realize how the aftermath and carnage of the Great War weighed on British society. In Virginia’s next novel, *To The Lighthouse*, time is also a main theme. Lacking a grand timepiece to toll the hour on The Isle of Skye, Virginia instead utilizes the pacing of Mr. Ramsey and the idea of transience to capitalize on the passage of time and inescapable mortality. Virginia also does “this impersonal thing, which she was dared to do by her friends, the flight of time and the consequent break of unity in her design.”

In the section ‘Time Passes’, the impersonal passage of time brings the war into focus. The differences between the original typescript and the final published copy differ greatly, and these changes are mostly in regards to the war and male brutality that results from it. Regardless of which novel is being discussed though, the link between approaching death and fading time underlies most of the text.

As time continues to pass and values are questioned, Virginia shows how these long enshrined symbols of power and status, emblematic of the ruling class and upper classes, are also losing significance. Having entered the Great War as the world’s leading power, Great Britain

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exited disillusioned and weakened. The stalemates and bewildering number of casualties that resulted, in addition to the cost and strain the war put on their economy, made it clear to many of the British that their empire was on the decline. Virginia depicts this in the first few pages when onlookers lose interest in the royalty sitting inside of a motorcar in the middle of the street. At the end of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia epitomizes these sentiments by equating the Prime Minister to an empty symbol of what Great Britain used to stand for.

Virginia continues to ‘criticize the social system’, and ‘show it at work’, through analyzing the basic relationship between gender and intelligence. By examining the patriarchal hierarchy established during the Victorian Era, Virginia shows how the foundation for gendered education was laid and was being called into question in the post-war era. In addition to *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse*, *A Room of One’s Own* emphasizes how gendered education largely prohibited women from accessing the higher reaches of education and involving themselves in literary careers. In *To The Lighthouse*, males mainly view women as the weaker sex as incapable of participating in the realms of academe and creative lives. Intelligence is seen as blatantly manly and those who seem to subvert gender norms are criticized.
Victorian Ideals and Insanity

In *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf gives a good deal of attention to the effects of the First World War on British society, particularly those resulting in ‘shell shock’ and psychological maladies. These topics are personal for Virginia because she suffered from what was later termed bipolar disease, a mental affliction that was the female counterpart of ‘shell shock’ in the early twentieth century. In this era, the ways in which these mental conditions were diagnosed and subsequently treated were shaped in accord with Victorian ideals of manliness and will power. These two concepts set the stage for determining how soldiers and the mentally ill were treated during and after the Great War.

During the Victorian Era it was widely believed that a ‘real’ British man was one who exercised complete control over his thoughts and actions. British public schools were considered the ‘great schools’ of England in the middle of the nineteenth-century and were responsible for inculcating this control. Based on the assertion that “Wealth released the potential of character,” Geoffrey Best claims that, “[England’s] ‘economic miracle’… made possible that an unprecedented degree and diffusion of wealth that allowed its citizens, as consumers, to reveal their characters in the choices they actually made out of such an unparalleled variety of goods.”

Thus, after experiencing a financial boom in the 19th century, the middle classes were able to send their children to public school along with students from elite families. Due to the widely accepted notion that attributes such as manliness and will power, could be inculcated within the youth through sports, most of England’s ‘great schools,’ such as Westminster, Eton, Harrow, and

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Winchester, focused a significant amount of their resources on athleticism. As a result, British public schools were held responsible for instilling “character in the young by ‘programming’ (in today's parlance) the will ‘into the very structure of the nervous system, storing up through daily habit the capacity for active response in particular situations.’”8 This responsibility also fell upon student’s parents who became the primary financial source for maintaining the extravagant facilities through which boy’s characters were developed.9

Boys who exited the British public school system were perceived as fit enough to sustain a variety of mentally stressful events, such as the atrocities witnessed in the First World War, much better than recruits from the working class who lacked this public education. Dr. Joseph Wood, the headmaster at Harrow in 1905 celebrated the manliness of one of his students when he stated, “Within the last year I have seen a boy stand to have a dislocated shoulder reduced, and never move a muscle or utter a sound.”10 The boy’s lack of emotion represents the stoicism that was both valued and expected from British men.

Virginia points out other characteristics that British men were supposed to embody when she has Sally Seton express a certain amount of contempt by telling “Hugh that he represented all that was most detestable in British middle-class life. […] He was a perfect specimen of the public school type, she said. No country but England could have produced him. […] Hugh was the greatest snob—the most obsequious.”11 This vehemence felt towards Hugh can be attributed

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to the radical nature of Sally, who comes from the working class and detests the tradition and presumptuous nature of royalty. Sally continues and says:

[Hugh] thought of nothing but his own appearance, she said. He ought to have been a Duke. He would be certain to marry one of the Royal Princesses. And of course Hugh had the most extraordinary, the most natural, the most sublime respect for the British aristocracy of any human being he had ever come across [...] Oh, but he was such a dear, so unselfish, gave up shooting to please his old mother — remembered his aunts’ birthdays, and so on.12

Despite her disgust for Hugh, her thoughts show that he embodies the traits of a ‘true’ British man, one whom reveres royalty and puts much significance on maintaining an agreeable outward appearance.

A man who could not govern his feelings was seen as inept and cowardly. Mrs. Ramsey and Lily Briscoe emphasize abhorrence of the effeminate in Virginia’s novel To the Lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsey is the ideal hostess in that she pays particular attention to the needs of the men staying at the Isle of Skye. She believes that because men are responsible for tremendous tasks such as ruling countries that her role as a woman is to reassure them of their success. Despite her sentiments, Mrs. Ramsey holds a certain amount of contempt for her husband’s behavior and constant need of reassurance. Lily, on the other hand, rejects the conventional Victorian gender roles that Mrs. Ramsey embraces. At one point “an enormous need urged [Mr. Ramsay], without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy.”13 Lily considers Mr. Ramsey’s neediness embarrassing and ignores his repulsive outcry.

In Mrs. Dalloway Peter Walsh recognizes his effeminacy and, like Lily and Mrs. Ramsey, acknowledges its inappropriateness. At the sight of an ambulance, Peter thinks, “One

12 Ibid, 73.
might weep if no one saw. It had been his undoing — this susceptibility — in Anglo-Indian society; not weeping at the right time, or laughing either.”

Peter admits that there is a time and place for certain emotions and that those considered weak or sentimental were not to be displayed publically. But, since he has been away from England for five years, he must remind himself what is considered proper for his class. Alex Zwerdling claims, “that this repression of feeling is very much the product of upper-class training” and that “such unruffled self-control has everything to do with the ability to retain power and to stay sane.” This training becomes evident in Richard Dalloway, Clarissa’s husband. When he tries to tell Clarissa he loves her, he thinks, “But he could not bring himself to say he loved her; not in so many words.” By denying Richard the ability to express his feelings for his wife, Virginia shows that repression was revered to such an extreme, that it even affected the intimacy between men and women in the privacy of their home.

This repression is revisited when Septimus Warren Smith, a war hero, commits suicide. Dr. Holmes immediately tells his wife, Lucrezia,

She must be brave and drink something, he said, for her husband was horribly mangled and would not recover consciousness, she must not see him, must be spared as much as possible, would have not inquest to go through, poor young woman. […] But Mrs. Filmer pooh-poohed. Oh no, oh no! They were carrying him away now. Ought she not be told? Married people ought to be together, Mrs. Filmer thought. But they must do as the doctor said. ‘Let her sleep,’ said Dr. Holmes, feeling her pulse. She saw the large outline of his body standing dark against the window.

Because Holmes is a doctor, he and his treatments are carried out, despite their questionability.

He uses his power to act on his beliefs and sedates Lucrezia in order to spare her from seeing her

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16 Ibid, 72.
17 Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 118.
18 Ibid, 150-1.
husband’s contorted body. Mrs. Filmer does not agree with Holmes insistence that Lucrezia be sedated. Rather, Mrs. Filmer believes that Lucrezia should embrace this emotionally provoking moment with her deceased husband. Virginia sets up this difference in opinion by placing the working class and the upper class against one another, yet concludes that the doctor’s opinion is all that really matters.

Applying these Victorian ideals to the First World War allows us to understand how the symptoms of ‘shell shock’ challenged British values. Because “the abhorrence of violence, was assumed to be a form of effeminacy,”19 soldiers who became mentally unstable after taking part in the war effort were initially regarded as cowards, and in the most extreme cases were sometimes executed. The term ‘shell shock’ comes from the initial hysterics soldiers displayed after being concussed by exploding shells. Soon it became a catchall phase used to diagnose soldiers suffering from neurasthenia, “an ill-defined medical condition characterized by lassitude, fatigue, headache, and irritability, associated chiefly with emotional disturbance,”20 regardless of whether or not physical trauma was sustained. Due to its psychological roots, ‘shell shock’ challenged British values because psychological ailments, unlike physical illnesses, were thought to be controllable by humans, especially men who attended public schools and were indoctrinated with the notion of will power and self-control. According to Virginia, the travesties witnessed during the war proved otherwise, as she portrays in the war hero Septimus Warren Smith.

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Septimus is a World War I veteran suffering from shell shock. Prior to the beginning of the war he is described as a sensitive intellectual having matured from “vanity, ambition, idealism, passion, loneliness, courage, laziness, the usual seeds, which all muddled up, made him shy, and stammering, made him anxious to improve himself.” These characteristics, specifically his shyness and stammering, represent Septimus as an effeminate man and deter Mr. Brewer, Septimus’s boss, from giving him control of his business. At the onset of the war, Septimus eagerly volunteers for duty because he sees it as his responsibility to protect England, the source of Shakespeare and Miss Isabel Pole, a lecturer with whom Septimus has fallen in love. The enthusiasm with which Septimus volunteers for the war is common among British men. Susan Kent attributes this willingness of men to volunteer for duty to the Victorian ideology, which proclaimed, “Through war, the ‘effeminate’ could be weeded out, the manly preserved.” This ideal was an extension of chivalry and honor with an addition of social Darwinism, which romanticized the war and made it highly attractive for young men eager to fight for their beloved country. However, disillusionment became widespread as British society began to realize the carnage and numerous invalids that would result from the ensuing war.

In addition to the massive number of soldiers being killed in battle, many soldiers were also sent home before the armistice was signed in 1920. According to Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock’, “Two years after the Armistice, some 65,000 ex-servicemen were drawing disability pensions for neurasthenia; of these, 9000 were still undergoing hospital treatment.” When this number is added to soldiers who were sent home

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21 Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 85.
23 Ibid, 237.
24 Bogacz, War Neurosis and Culture Change in England, 239.
during the war, those who were never diagnosed with ‘shell shock’ and those who never or were no longer receiving war pensions, the number of soldiers affected with ‘shell shock’ is astronomical. In order to deal with the significant number of invalids, under which ‘shell shocked’ soldiers were categorized, returning home, the House of Lords created a committee responsible for establishing guidelines to efficiently diagnose and treat ‘shell shocked’ veterans in 1920.

The committee was composed primarily of upper class men who were products of public education. These men interviewed fifty-nine witnesses ranging from soldiers to officers and psychologists to neurologists, in order to gain a better understanding of the disease. These interviews exposed the wide range of beliefs held in regard to ‘shell shock.’ While some individuals, such as Lieutenant Colonel Viscount Gort, believed that ‘shell shock’ was disgraceful and rarely affected the upper echelons of society, a more progressive understanding was that taken by Dr. William Halse Rivers Rivers. Rivers believed that ‘shell shock’ stemmed from mental stress caused by passivity or the inability to defend oneself in horrendous situations and believed it to be curable by therapy.  

These two opposing theories epitomize the broad range of beliefs revolving around the meanings of ‘shell shock’. They also exposed the hurdles the committee encountered while trying to maintain their revered Victorian ideals of will power and control over one’s mind, all the while dealing with this crippling disease.

Because the state of psychiatry in the 1920’s was “Built on an ideology of absolute and natural difference between women and men,” the committee and its witnesses largely attributed ‘shell shock’ to ‘organic’ causes, because men were believed to be much more impervious to

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25 Ibid, 239.
mental illnesses as opposed to women. ‘Organic’ causes, or physical trauma, lent itself to scientific testing and logical treatment. Since mental diseases were largely categorized as illnesses that mainly affected women and thus the weaker part of society, sufficient attention had not been given to it. According to Joanne Bourke, “If breakdown was a ‘paralysis of the nerves’, then massage, rest, dietary regimes and electric shock treatment were invoked. If a psychological source was indicated, the ‘talking cure’, hypnosis, and rest would speed recovery. In all instances, occupational training and the inculcation of ‘masculinity’ were highly recommended.” Despite the implications, the committee came to a middle ground and asserted that ‘shell shock’ had both mental and physical roots. This gave some veracity to the psychological origins of this disease while still maintaining cherished ‘organic’ norms.

Still fixed on the belief that men could control their emotions through sheer will power, many witnesses believed the lower classes, such as conscripts, the Irish and Jews, were more likely to succumb to ‘shell shock’, since they lacked public school education. Since their recruitment process was not as in depth as that for professional soldiers, conscripts were in fact more prone to hysteric and other neurological manifestations. But due to the fact that many officers and soldiers who were products of British education suffered from ‘shell shock,’ the committee was compelled to conclude that ‘shell shock’ was a non-discriminative disease. This confirmed that men brought up with a sound character could not wield complete control over their will and mental health.

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The last topic that caused much concern among the committee members’ witnesses was the fear of malingerers. This suspicion became evident when the committee ruled that all cases of ‘shell shock’ should be given adequate attention in order to rule out any chance of misinterpretation. Witnesses were skeptical of ‘shell shock’ and believed that some soldiers may have feigned symptoms of the disorder in order to get out of the war.

After two years of deliberation the Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry Into 'Shell-Shock' was completed in 1922 with two significant conclusions. First, ‘shell shock’ was determined to be a non-discriminative illness, meaning that it could virtually affect anyone despite his class or rank. This statement upended the Victorian assumption that British soldiers who received a public education were impervious to the so-called feminine diseases of the mind. Second, the prevalence of ‘shell shock’ caused the military to examine its own values, most significantly its practices regarding cowardice. Prior to the war “cowardice was a military crime for which the death penalty may have been exacted.” Unable to detach itself completely from military values, the committee concluded that ‘shell shocked’ men could fluctuate between cowardly and courageous on a day-to-day basis. The committee ultimately failed to distinguish between soldiers who were cowards and soldiers who suffered from neurosis, thus leaving it open to a subjective, case-by-case basis interpretation. These two rulings are significant because they show that preconceived notions, regarding how men should act, were in question and that acceptable presentations of masculinity were beginning to diverge.

A plan of action for dealing with those afflicted with shell shock also emerged from the committee’s report, which identified “six forms of simplified ‘psycho-therapeutic treatment’

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33 Ibid, 245.
often used in the war: (1) persuasion; (2) explanation; (3) suggestion; (4) analysis; (5) re-
education; (6) occupation.” These steps were created to ensure that in future wars medical officers would be able to quickly relieve soldiers of ‘shell shock’ and reintroduce them to battle. The last step, occupation, was largely seen as a way to distract soldiers. Doctors and psychologists believed that if soldiers diverted their thoughts from the atrocities they witnessed, their fear would subside. ‘Shell shock’ was less common during big offensives and significantly higher in areas of stationary warfare, suggesting that a soldier’s inability to take action, or rather, a soldier’s passivity as argued by Rivers, was important in bringing on shell shock.

The committee’s findings were reflected in Septimus’s behavior in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Like many soldiers in the war Septimus succumbed to ‘shell shock’. After fighting on the front and witnessing his officer Evans, “whose affection he drew,” ripped apart by a mortar, Septimus considers himself lucky. At the age of thirty-five he had survived the war, was apparently unaffected by the death of Evans, had earned a promotion, and was soon to be married. In an attempt to preserve himself, Septimus, like many soldiers, tried to block out the war and the horrors he witnessed. Due to the concepts of will power, control, and other revered Victorian qualities, Septimus believed that his lack of emotion was a sign of strength and courage. However, after becoming engaged to Lucrezia, Septimus panics when he realizes the extent of his numbness. At this point a wave of sensation crashes down causing him to display severe symptoms of shell shock.

Septimus’s nervous condition is initially alluded to with a description of his eyes, which had “that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too.”

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34 Ibid, 243.
35 Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 86.
36 Ibid, 14.
This description is followed by Septimus thinking “The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?”  
Septimus evidently lives in a state of anxiety and fears the consequences of his actions in the war. He often sees his deceased comrade, Evans, reaching out to him from behind fixtures like gates. Septimus “drew the attention, indeed the affection of Evans” who was “undemonstrative in the company of women.”  
Septimus and Evans’ relationship, and the implied homosexual nature of it, was widely disparaged in Victorian times. After Septimus watched Evans die, Septimus “congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably.”  
Through War, as custom dictates, according to Nancy Bazin and Jane Lauter, Septimus develops manliness. But this manliness is contradicted by his guilt, which causes him to be struck by “thunder-claps of fear.” Bazin and Lauter also claim that Virginia, “identifies even more directly with the victims of World War One” in *Mrs. Dalloway*, specifically Septimus. Having been sent to a mental institution after the death of her mother and father, Virginia was familiar with mental illness and how traumatic losing a loved one could be. This familiarity highlights the possible association of grief with madness. Susan Bennett Smith claims that through Septimus, “Woolf tells a cautionary tale of the fatal results of the feminization and medicalization of grief.”

When Virginia’s mental illness is taken into account Septimus’s symptoms begin to resemble characteristics of bipolar disease, including manic and depressive cycles interspersed.

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37 Ibid, 14.
38 Ibid, 86.
39 Ibid, 86.
40 Ibid, 87.
with brief periods of lucidity. Septimus has depressive-like episodes in which he is restless, tired, and contemplates suicide. They also involve hallucinations, anxiety and convoluted thought processes. At one point during Septimus’s stream of consciousness:

A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death.\textsuperscript{43}

This passage exemplifies what Septimus’s manic phases consisted of when he was completely delusional. Bazin and Lauter argue that “[Virginia’s] character’s symptoms parallel her own.”\textsuperscript{44} Not only do their symptoms correspondence, but so do their hallucinations. For example, Virginia’s husband Leonard asserts that he “rather think it helped her once to hear the sparrows talking Greek outside her bedroom window.”\textsuperscript{45} Virginia, like her character Septimus, heard sparrows singing in Greek. These correlations show how death and trauma from World War One haunt Virginia, her characters, and more broadly, British society, long after the war ends.

Septimus’s treatment also mimics that of Virginia’s, which followed Victorian practice. Until the late twentieth century mental disorders were seen as a battle of wills between a physician and a patient. In order to overcome neurasthenia, patients had to surrender their autonomy to their doctor who, in return, would will them back to virtuous mental health. Due to the dictum that women were inferior to men both mentally and physically, it was believed that

\textsuperscript{43} Woolf, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, 24.
\textsuperscript{44} Bazin and Lauter, \textit{Sensitivity to War}, 17.
women were more prone to hysterics. Since doctors were mostly male, the battle of the wills can be seen as an extension of the control men wielded over women.46

In the late nineteenth-century, psychologist Mitchell Weir created the rest cure, which was widely used throughout the early twentieth century to treat mental and even some physical illnesses. This cure was prescribed to Septimus in Mrs. Dalloway, to Virginia, and to other prominent female writers, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The rest cure consisted of complete bed rest for six to eight weeks. Those being administered this cure were prohibited from engaging in any physical activity and in order to prevent muscular atrophy, they were subjected to electrotherapy, hydrotherapy, and massages. Another important component to the rest cure was weight. Patients were placed on a milk diet due to the belief that fat was important in fighting off mental illness and other diseases. This treatment paralleled the Victorian ideal of a healthy woman, one who was plump. After abdicating complete control over themselves to their physicians and being reduced to near-vegetable sates, women were then reeducated on how to suppress their emotions. Due to the preconceived notion of feminine inferiority and the belief that a finite amount of energy was endowed in each person, Weir believed that women should not extend themselves beyond the traditional domestic role they occupied, out of fear that exertion of energy in other areas such as education would deplete women of the vitality required for childbearing.47 Overall, the rest cure was a treatment that isolated a patient from his or her family and any kind of stimulation whatsoever. Although it was claimed to have worked on some patients, Virginia, Gilman, and even Virginia’s character Septimus, staunchly opposed this cure.

Gilman expressed her loathe for the rest cure in a short story entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper*, written in 1899. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator suffers from post partum psychosis and as a result is brought to a colonial mansion for the summer to cure her ‘slight hysterical tendencies’. While residing in the mansion, the narrator is prohibited from working, which includes reading and writing, until she is well. She is also forced to sleep and eat excessively in order to increase her weight in accord with Victorian ideals. It becomes evident through the narrator’s description of the ancestral hall and its “rings and things,” “the barred windows,” and the “gate at the head of the stairs,”48 that this hall was once some sort of oppressive institute. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar support the claim that these barriers indicate the narrator’s imprisonment.49 The narrator disagrees with her doctor’s, husband’s, and brother’s restrictions against writing because the stress of it may negatively affect her mental health. Being trapped in her room for hours on end, her creativity begins to pour out as she imagines a woman, sometimes many women, trapped behind the yellow wallpaper. By the end of the story she has succeeded in convincing her husband, that she was recovering until the very last day of her stay at the hall, when he returns from work to find her creeping around the room claiming to have escaped from the wallpaper.

The significance of *The Yellow Wallpaper* stems from the fact that Gilman suffered from severe nervous breakdowns, and as a result she tries to inform the public about the risks involved in the rest cure. Under the care of Mitchell Weir, the man who credited with inventing the rest cure, Gilman was subjected to the rest cure, which seemed to work promptly by restoring her

health. However, Weir advised her to “live as domestic a life as far as possible”, to ‘have but two hours’ intellectual life a day’, and ‘never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again’ as long as she lived.” Gilman claims that after three months of obeying Dr. Weir’s recommendations she “came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that [she] could see over.” As Gilbert and Gubar assert, “The cure, of course, is worse than the disease.” In an attempt to regain her sanity, Gilman began working again. Through working, she realized the importance of reading and writing to her mental health and claimed that without work, “one is a pauper and a parasite.” These activities provided her with a wealth of joy and intellectual stimulation, which largely accounted for her recovery.

Revisiting Virginia’s parallel between ‘shell shocked’ soldiers and mentally insane women is essential because it shows how patriarchal medicine was. In The Female Malady, Elaine Showalter claims

The nervous women of the fin de siècle were ravenous for a fuller life than their society offered them, famished for the freedom to act and to make real choices. Their nervous disorders expressed the insoluble conflict between their desires to act as individuals and the internalized obligations to submit to the needs of the family, and to conform to the model of self-sacrificing ‘womanly’ behavior.

The categorization of mental illness as a female malady allowed men to subjugate women as the weaker sex. With this categorization established, men became the self-appointed stronger and more dominant sex, thus better able to make decisions. Because women wanted a fuller, more enriching life, their desires contradicted the gender norms that were customary in the Victoria

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51 Ibid, 1.
52 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman*, 89.
54 Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 144
Era. One way for men to stifle this passion was to claim that because women were subverting the norm, that they were insane. Showalter claims,

> During an era when patriarchal culture felt itself to be under attack by its rebellious daughters, one obvious defense was to label women campaigning for access to the universities, the professions, and the vote as mentally disturbed, and of all the nervous disorders of the fin de siècle, hysteria was the most strongly identified with the feminist movement.\(^{55}\)

Despite what seemed like a high incidence of insanity, hysteria, and neurasthenia among women in the nineteenth-century, doctors focused neither sufficient time nor attention to the illness. It was

> Only when hysteria, under the new name it was given during the war, became a widespread malady of men did the talking cure enter English psychiatric practice. Not feminism but shell shock initiated the era of psychiatric modernism.\(^{56}\)

The fact that over 80,000 cases of ‘shell shock’ passed through the army facilities served as a catalyst for modern psychiatry and the transition from the rest cure to the talking cure. Since men were now recognized to be susceptible to hysteria, the patriarchy on which medicine had been established was forced to adapt.

Through the interactions Virginia creates between Septimus and his doctors, it becomes evident that these doctors

> Stand for [Virginia] as a complex symbol of everything she detests and does not quite understand: cold scientific thinking, intellectualism, devotion of a religious nature, the accepted sense of proportion and almost all the ills that afflict human nature and society at large.\(^{57}\)

Holmes, Septimus Warren Smith’s first doctor, blatantly ignores Septimus’s symptoms of ‘shell shock’ and tells his wife Lucrezia to make her husband “(who had nothing whatever seriously

\(^{55}\) Ibid, 145.

\(^{56}\) Ibid, 164.

the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself.”

The suggestion that Septimus should keep him mind active correlates with purpose of the sixth step listed in the War Committee’s report on shell shock, occupation and also resonates with the Victorian habit of ignoring emotions seen as unfit for display. On a later visit, Holmes notices how emaciated Septimus is and claims that if he “found himself even half a pound below eleven stone six, [Holmes] asked his wife for another plate of porridge at breakfast,” reinforcing the Victorian tenant that low weight was a plausible cause of the “funk” Septimus was in. Even Dr. Bradshaw recommends the rest cure “until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve.”

The same diet recommendation was also made to Virginia when she became mentally unstable. After suffering a severe bout of mental illness, Virginia wrote to one of her friends in order to assure them of her health and said, “I am really alright again, and I weight [twelve] stone!” This statement represents how Holmes and Bradshaw represents the prototypical doctor encountered by Virginia and Septimus, both whom detested their physician’s recommendations.

As Septimus’s condition worsens, his wife Lucrezia decides to visit Sir William Bradshaw, a doctor who specializes in mental disorders. Upon seeing Septimus, Bradshaw establishes that “it is a case of extreme gravity. It is a case of complete breakdown — complete physical and nervous breakdown, with every symptom in an advanced stage.” When Lucrezia asks Bradshaw if Septimus is mad, he informs her that he “never spoke of ‘madness’; he called it

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59 Ibid, 89.
not having a sense of proportion.\textsuperscript{62} This lack of proportion parallels what Virginia’s doctor claimed was troubling her. According to Leonard Woolf, Virginia’s doctor said:

‘Equanimity—equanimity—practise equanimity, Mrs. Woolf’. It was, not doubt, excellent advice and worth three guineas, but, as the door closed behind us, I felt that he might just as usefully said: ‘A normal temperature—ninety-eight point four—practise a normal temperature, Mrs. Woolf’.\textsuperscript{63}

This well-balanced life that physicians urged Virginia Woolf to achieve stems from will and control over ones emotions. Conversely, physicians took it as their responsibility to treat these hysterical patients as infants, isolating them from the world and subjecting them to their remedies.

When Septimus tries to speak to Bradshaw, the doctor says “Try to think as little about yourself as possible.”\textsuperscript{64} Septimus thinks “communication is health; communication is happiness, communication —.”\textsuperscript{65} He feels like England’s scapegoat and desperately wants to talk about the war and the travesties he has witnessed. But Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes disregard what Septimus has to say, choosing instead to block him and the war itself out of their consciousness and uphold the idea of repressing one’s feelings. In thinking of Bradshaw and the way he prevented him from speaking, Septimus says “he swooped; he devoured. He shut people up.”\textsuperscript{66} Bradshaw’s insistence that Septimus not think about himself likely stems from the War Committee’s plan of action. At Clarissa’s party “[Bradshaw and Richard Dalloway] were talking about this Bill. Some case, Sir William was mentioning, lowering his voice. It had its bearing upon what he was saying about the deferred effects of shell shock. There must be some provision in the Bill.”\textsuperscript{67} Virginia

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 96.
\textsuperscript{63} Woolf, \textit{All The Way Downhill}, 51.
\textsuperscript{64} Woolf, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, 98.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 93.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 102.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid, 182.
shows that Bradshaw is keeping himself informed about the Committee of War’s progress and recommendations that patients afflicted with ‘shell shock’ occupy themselves with something that diverts their attention from the war. After Lucrezia tells Bradshaw that Septimus said he wanted to kill himself, Bradshaw informs Septimus that he must go to into a home where he will lie in a bed in a beautiful country house. This enrages Septimus, who says “‘Must,’ ‘must,’ why ‘must’? What power had Bradshaw over him? ‘What right has Bradshaw to say ‘must’ to me?’”

Septimus does not understand how someone can exercise control over his thoughts and actions. This authority makes Septimus feel as if Bradshaw is trying to stifle him. Similarly, whenever Virginia became depressed she was immediately prescribed bed rest and was not allowed to read or write. According to Leonard, “in the period with which I am now concerned, our years at Richmond from 1919-1924, her writing was strictly rationed and often interrupted.” These years mark the period immediately following the war, which had a terrific effect on Virginia, thus preventing her from writing as arduously as she would have if she were healthy.

In the last moments of Septimus’s life, it seems as if he has temporarily escaped the symptoms of ‘shell shock’ when he has a moment of lucidity. As he and Lucrezia are packing to go to Bradshaw’s home, Holmes stops by to see Septimus. Thinking that Holmes and Bradshaw are ‘on him’ again, Septimus believes that this is the last chance to save himself from the mind numbing rest cure they wish force on him at Bradshaw’s home. Septimus chooses to save his soul from his doctors by jumping to his death from his bedroom window. Fortunately for Virginia, Leonard saw how mental homes affected her and thus tried to avoid placing her in one. He feared that institutionalization would cause her to fall apart and hinder any sort of recovery. It seems as if Virginia also believed this since she has Septimus kill himself rather than submit

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68 Ibid, 147.
69 Woolf, All The Way Downhill, 58.
himself to the will of his doctors. Septimus’s suicide can be understood as an extension of Virginia’s will, who believed that being stifled and submitted to the seclusion and isolation of the rest cure was worse than death.

In the spring of 1941, after living through a relatively healthy year, Virginia became ill once more. Although the cause is not described, Leonard took her to a doctor before she had an opportunity to harm herself. As Virginia undressed for her examination she stopped and pleaded her doctor to “promise, if I do this, you will not order me a rest cure?” Well aware that she was sinking into another fit of hysterics, the last thing Virginia wanted to be prescribed was a rest cure, which would smother her self-expression. Virginia committed suicide several days after the doctor’s visit, before which she wrote a letter to Leonard saying:

Dearest, I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that - everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer.
I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.

V.71

As she explained in her letter to Leonard, once she began hearing voices again, her ability to write suffered immensely. The ability to read and write was of incredible significance to Virginia, so tremendous that she decided she could not go through another period the numbing anesthetic the rest cure prescribed her. Instead of sacrificing her mind and her abilities, she placed stones in her coat pocket and drowned herself in the River Ouse.

70 Bell, A Biography, 225.
71 Bell, A Biography, 226.
**Time and Death**

Written in the stream of consciousness, Virginia Woolf uses *Mrs. Dalloway*, previously titled *The Hours*, to tell the story of a woman’s life in a single day. During this day, Virginia shows how the passage of time and the inescapability of death permeate the thoughts of many characters. According to Jörg Hasler, Virginia’s “biography reveals her deep and constant preoccupation with the phenomenon of time. With the exception of Marcel Proust […] Virginia Woolf can scarcely be paralleled in this respect.”

Through the use of Big Ben, a magnificent clock on the Parliament buildings in London, and other timepieces, Virginia emphasizes premonitions of mortality that haunt her characters. Hugh Davis argues in *The Horologium and Symbolism* that a new time-consciousness was developed during the medieval period because of canonical hours and the more frequent use of timepieces such as the sundial, water clock, hourglass, and pendulum clock. These timepieces literally marked the passage of time, while symbolically emphasizing man’s approaching death. Davis claims, “the symbolism attached to the medieval hourglass [is like the] tenuous sands [of] man’s life constantly slipping away.”

This statement vividly depicts the human inability to slow the progression of time. However, time consciousness was present in the West as early as the Julio-Claudian dynasty when Lucius Annaeus Seneca was emperor Nero’s tutor from 49-65 C.E. In 65 C.E. Nero forced Seneca to commit suicide for allegedly participating in a conspiracy to kill him. Before his death, Seneca wrote letters that were later compiled into a book, entitled *Epistulae Morales*. This project

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74 Ibid, 71.
focused on a “serialized reflection on death and the paradox of ‘dying each day.’” Seneca believed that we begin approaching death as soon as we are born. With this belief in mind, Seneca’s project can be summarized in two words, *cotidie morimur*. As Seneca explains, *cotidie morimur* means, “We die each day, since each day a part of life is taken away, and even as we are growing, our life decreases.”

A textual analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests that the First World War created in Virginia’s characters an intense consciousness of the parallel between time and death. This awareness can be attributed to the First World War because it was during this conflict that Great Britain and Europe witnessed death on a magnitude unknown since the bubonic plague, which killed up to half of Great Britain’s population from 1347-1348. British society’s more profound focus on death permeates the thoughts of characters, such as Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh. Every time a clock bell chimes, Virginia’s characters feel a sense of melancholy, gravity, and anxiety. For instance, as Clarissa heads toward St. James Park, she thinks, “for having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty, —one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, […] a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense before Big Ben strikes.” According to Hasler, “[Big Ben] constantly reminds us of the contrast between the external, quantitative time and the inner, qualitative time. The hours are far from equal in length, they have the elasticity ascribed to ‘time of the mind.’” The suspense created by Big Ben forces Clarissa to momentarily dislodge herself from her current course of action in order to reflect on the toll life continues to take on her. At the age of fifty-two, she has lived

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76 Ibid, 168.
78 Hasler, *Chimes of Big Ben*, 148-149.
through the First World War, dealt with the loss of both of her parents, and had the unfortunate happenstance of witnessing a tree fall on and kill her sister. Through Big Ben, Virginia reveals how sensitive her characters are to external time and how time causes them to recount the travesties of life.

These tragedies permeate Clarissa’s thoughts at the beginning of the novel. Upon opening a window in her house she thinks of the wind as “chill and sharp and yet […] solemn, feeling as she did, […] that something awful was about to happen.” It seems plausible that with the calamity of the war still on her mind, Clarissa perceives Big Ben’s striking as means of counting down the time until she, too, will have to face death. Her fear of how fleeting life is, is exemplified when she stops at a cross walk and “[has] 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.” These sentiments correspond to the fear that Virginia embodies. After having lived through countless air raids during one of which her house was destroyed, she and Leonard fled to the countryside not only because of their need for shelter, but also because of Virginia’s battle with mental illness. Virginia was well aware of the dangers that came with living so close to insanity, having attempted suicide twice by the time Mrs. Dalloway was published. Even though the violence of the war was over, the feeling of insecurity associated with it is perpetuated in Virginia’s life as well as British society more broadly.

While walking through town Clarissa stops to read an open-book in a bookstore that says “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun/Nor the furious winter’s rage.” These two lines are taken from a funeral song in Shakespeare’s play Cymbeline. “The Shakespearean quotation unites the

79 Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 3.
80 Ibid, 8.
81 Ibid, 9.
ideas of life and death”\textsuperscript{82} and cause Clarissa to recall the tragic loss England suffered during the war. In doing so she thinks, “this late age of the world’s experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance.”\textsuperscript{83} According to Virginia, the carnage of the war laid an everlasting guilt on the consciousness of the British. Seeing invalids walk through Westminster directly recalls the war for some individuals, but performing insignificant tasks like preparing for a party also reveals how the war permeates their consciousness in more subtle ways. These lines from \textit{Cymbeline} remain in Clarissa’s thoughts throughout the day and remind her that she is not alone in carrying the burden of the fallen soldiers. Living with the constant reminder of death is not unique to Clarissa, and although she thinks life is dangerous, she tries to find ways to endure and persevere.

Another character whose mind is plagued by the thought of death is Peter Walsh, Clarissa Dalloway’s teenage sweetheart. As the sound of St. Margaret’s bell chimes at half-past eleven, Peter thinks of

Clarissa herself […] coming down the stairs on the stroke of the hour in white […] Then, as the sound of St. Margaret’s languished, he thought, She has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room. No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried.\textsuperscript{84}

The tolling of St. Margaret’s bell immediately brings the thought of Clarissa’s illness to the forefront of Peter’s mind. Peter thinks that it is the bell itself that expresses suffering and languish, which then causes him to consider how quickly time has passed and how he too, like Clarissa, is aging. At the thought of his life escaping him, he begins to walk very briskly, as if

\textsuperscript{83} Woolf, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, 9.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 49-50.
increasing his pace will help him evade death. But, this does not put him at ease because he realizes that death has the ability to strike at anytime, usually surprising its victims.

This parallel between death and time consumes Septimus’s thoughts, when his wife, Lucrezia Smith tells him it is time to go. He thinks,

The word ‘time’ split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself.

As soon as his wife says ‘its time’, Septimus is immediately brought back to the war and thinks of Evans, his fallen comrade. Time has the ability to remind Septimus of his mortality in stark contrast to the immortality of time itself. This impermanence is especially stressful because Septimus watched as Evans was torn to pieces by a mortar and also witnessed countless other soldiers killed on the front. This has bred within Septimus a deep understanding of the sheer randomness associated with death and the limited time one has to live.

By the end of Mrs. Dalloway, Clarissa is the only character who comes to terms with death and the fleetingness of time. This newfound understanding stems from Septimus’s suicide, which is brought to her attention at her party. As the clock strikes the hour, Clarissa thinks

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. […] She repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. […] But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like 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.

Septimus’ decision to take his own life shows that although death can strike at any moment, one can also be in control of when they die. If one so chooses, they can end their life. This realization

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85 Ibid, 69.
86 Ibid, 186.
excites Clarissa causing her to appreciate life and its beauty, and as a result she ‘fear’s no more
the heat of the sun’. From beginning to end, *Mrs. Dalloway* focuses on time, which made its
previous title, *The Hours*, highly appropriate, yet too straightforward for Virginia.

An emphasis on time and the individual’s temporality is also a major theme in Virginia’s
novel *To The Lighthouse*. Since this novel does not take place in a city, such as Westminster
where timepieces like Big Ben can toll the passing hours, Virginia emphasizes time by having
her characters focus on the transience of time though how quickly they will fade once they die.
The novel is divided into three sections; the first section takes place during the pre-war period.
The second accentuates the passage of time and how insignificant death can be by covering the
passage of ten years, which includes the First World War and the death of numerous characters,
in a mere ten pages. The third section attempts to resolve the fear of fading into oblivion.
Through these sections, characters, such as Mr. Ramsey and Lily Briscoe, cling to their desire to
immortalize themselves through their work.

Mr. Ramsey, the paragon of a Victorian male, is the father of eight children and a
professor of philosophy. Because his most recent book was not as popular as his first, Ramsey
constantly seeks positive reinforcement and reassurance from his wife and friends. For a majority
of the novel he fixates on his progression through academe. He likens this progress to the
alphabet and thinks he has reached the letter Q, something not many people can accomplish. He
believes however, that his advancement to R is possible, but wonders, “How many men in a
thousand million […] reach Z after all?”\(^{87}\) The ability to reach Z or even the last few letters in
the alphabet represents one’s chance to immortalize oneself through academic accomplishments.
In thinking about persisting after death, Ramsey often refers to Shakespeare because long after

\(^{87}\) Ibid, 26.
Shakespeare’s death he is still revered and studied. Ramsey then summarizes that, “possibly the greatest good requires the existence of a slave class.” According to Ramsey, a slave class allows for societal tasks to be relegated to one class, thus providing upper class citizens with freedom from mundane tasks and the ability to engross themselves in academe. But Ramsey immediately becomes repulsed by his idea and tries to assert that society is tailored for the average man. Having recently published a book that was not successful, Ramsey is declining in power and fame, much like the fading British Empire. Thus, Ramsey reneges on his initial assertion in order to assure himself that he is neither part of the slave class nor will he be forgotten like a slave would be. Like Shakespeare, Ramsey wants to achieve immortality because he understands that if his contribution to this world is insignificant, his fear of intellectual oblivion will be realized.

Lily Briscoe also fixates on her temporality through her artwork, and is able to resolve its dilemmas in her painting by the end of the novel. In the first section of To The Lighthouse, Lily struggles to reproduce the scenery on her canvas. Through her struggle she thinks,

It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left. She might do it by bringing the line of the branch across so; or break the vacancy in the foreground by an object (James perhaps) so. But the danger was that by doing that the unity of the whole might be broken.

Lily wants to find a way to bring these different parts of life together. She sees Mrs. Ramsey and Jacob sitting on the steps in front of her, the house, the trees and the ocean all in her field of vision. Out of this chaos and conglomeration of objects and people, Lily attempts to extract order and paint things in relation to one another, but is initially unsuccessful.

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89 Woolf, To the Lighthouse, 39.
Upon returning to the Isle of Skye, Lily questions why she is consumed with her old painting. She thinks, “Why did she do it? She looked at the canvas, lightly scored with running lines. It would be hung in the servants’ bedrooms. It would be rolled up and stuffed under a sofa. What was the good of doing it then?”

According to Virginia, Lily’s doubt represents British society’s struggle with the transience of life after the Great War. This is resolved as the Ramsey’s reach the lighthouse, which allows her to see things with clarity. Ramsey’s opinions may have been was what originally obfuscating her vision and artistic abilities. In his absence, she finds a way to bring order out of the chaos out of life and is finally successful in creating something that she believes will last beyond her lifetime. She no longer cares that it may be hung up or hidden away, but appreciates the achievement of creating something that will outlive her.

In the second section, ‘Time Passes’, ten years pass in a matter of pages wherein the deterioration of the house and death are the main themes. This section gave Virginia, “more trouble than all the rest of the book put together” and even after publishing it she was “afraid it hadn’t succeeded.” After much revision, the published version differs quite drastically from the original version; these changes allow us to witness how Virginia’s ideas evolved as her novel matured. The two radical alterations that are most compelling are what James Haule identifies as how:

1. Direct reference to the war has been altered or drastically reduced and
2. Direct Identification of the war with male destructiveness and sexual brutality has been eliminated altogether.

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90 Ibid, 119.
The original typescript demonstrates Virginia’s attempt to tell the history of the Great War from a feminist’s point of view, wherein she exhibits clear rage, fear, and wonder about “how this preposterous masculine fiction [the war] keeps going a day longer—without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching through it?” This feminist point of view manifests itself when Virginia attributes the war to maleness, and the restoration of the order in the house, which is a victim of the war, to femaleness. In regard to McNab, the woman who takes care of the house while the Ramsey’s and their guests are absent, Haule claims “her intelligence and her position as a restorer of order to a decaying universe remain central to the typescript. She is the ancient symbol of life and regeneration.” Yet, in the final copy, McNab lacks her previously gallant role and is simply a cleaning woman.

In the original outline of ‘Time Passes’, Virginia lists “The Seasons. The Skull. The gradual dissolution of everything. This is to be contrasted with the permanence of – what? Sun, moon & stars. Hopeless gulfs of misery. Cruelty. The War. Change. Oblivion” as topics of interest. These points manifest themselves in the original typescript through vivid depictions of destruction, for example, “the tumble and the battering, the [?] drench & darkness of the sea, & the wind & the rain, & nobody moved.” This text represents the overall style of the section whose main purpose is to depict the “the mindless warfare, the soulless bludgeoning.” In contrast, the mention of warfare is nearly absent in the final text. Instead, it is replaced by the destruction nature wreaks on the house. War is further alluded to when Virginia writes “Now, gathering into a center as if all this prying & peering were but the work of spies, detached from

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93 Ibid, 166-168.
94 Ibid, 170.
96 Ibid, 153.
97 Ibid, 153.
army to bring news of the enemies depositions, where to attack they gathered in the middle of the house, & gave together one of those aimless gusts of lamentation.” Here, Virginia highlights the deception that comes with war by discussing spies and the individual work they performed. In the final text though, only the gust of wind is preserved, which Haule argues symbolically represents the coming and going of spies in the house. Lastly, when Virginia writes “The autumn trees ravaged as they are, take on the splendor of tattered flags, burning in the gloom church, where the gold letters & marble pages describe death in battle & bodies buried far away,” we are directly reminded of the fallen soldiers and weakening Empire.

The original typescript of ‘Time Passes’ directly mentions the war and what Virginia describes as the male brutality that made up the war. The typescript also has a woman act as an overseer who remedies the destruction and chaos the war inflicts on the house. Yet, these elements are almost completely removed from the final version and replaced with a much shorter and subtler text. Nonetheless, it is in this section that Virginia’s “abnormal sensitivity with regard to the transience of human life” is expressed. In essence, “The second chapter still represents the struggle between the forces of Existence and Order and Death and Chaos.”

‘Existence and order’ and ‘death and chaos’ are embodied by the decline and decay of the house, which alludes to war, and the deaths of Mrs. Ramsey, Prue, and Andrew, which replace the ‘soulless bludgeoning’. The war ebbs and flows, while directly and indirectly taking its preys in a coldhearted manner:

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98 Ibid, 156.
99 Haule, To the Lighthouse and War, 169
100 Dick, Original Holograph Draft, 157.
101 Hasler, The Chimes of Big Ben, 155.
[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]

[...]  
[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said, everything, they said, had promised so well.]

[...]  
[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]\(^{103}\)

The brevity with which these deaths are mentioned emphasizes how war casualties, despite the staggering numbers in which they amounted, could be brushed off or overlooked. Bazin and Lauter claim that Virginia does this in order to show, regardless how painful, that individual deaths were insignificant in the overall picture.\(^{104}\) Here we have the utilization of time to both overlook important events, yet stress the lingering after effects these events have on ones life. Whereas the typescript gives a more historical account of the war, the final version represents what Virginia aimed to do, and that was to implicate war in a subtler yet artistic manner.

\(^{103}\) Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 75.  
\(^{104}\) Bazin and Lauter, *Woolf’s Sensitivity to War*, 20.
Gender and Intelligence

During the Victorian Era, “definitions of femininity evolved whose qualities were antithetical to those that had warranted widespread male participation in the public sphere.”

Whereas men “possessed the capacity for reason, action, aggression, independence, and self-interest,” “women inhabited a separate private sphere, one suitable for the so-called inherent qualities of femininity: emotion, passivity, submission, dependence, and selflessness, all derived, it was claimed insistently, from women’s sexual and reproductive organization.” Thus, women were expected to remain in the domestic sphere wherein they were to cater to their husbands needs, care for their children, and maintain their home. Following in this vein, women lacked suffrage, property rights, and access to a free, non-gendered education. Women were denied the legal rights necessary to change their position in society, and it was not until 1890 that women achieved a minor legal break though with the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act, giving women restricted access to divorce. Women also lacked suffrage until the end of the First World War in 1918, wherein their war efforts were somewhat rewarded by affording property-holding women thirty years and older the right to vote. With regard to education, even women of the middle and upper classes, whose parents could afford an education for them, were constrained to the subjects of history, geography, and other non-controversial topics. Subjects like math, science, and writing were male-dominated and women who tried entering these fields were scrutinized and viewed as devious.

Virginia discusses these various gender-centered issues, 

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106 Ibid, 178
including marriage, intelligence, and more particularly, how male writers influenced their counterparts in *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*.

When Charles Tansley, Mr. Ramsey’s friend, becomes aggravated at being disturbed from his reading in order to take part in the gathering for dinner, he thinks,

> For he was not going to talk the sort of rot these people wanted him to talk. He was not going to be condescended to by these silly women. He had been reading in his room, and now he came down and it all seemed to him silly, superficial, flimsy. […] They did nothing but talk, talk, talk, eat, eat, eat. It was the women's fault. Women made civilisation impossible with all their ‘charm,’ all their silliness.  

Tansley’s assessment of women is a persistent theme throughout the novel and represents the way in which women were largely viewed during the Victorian Era and into the beginning of the twentieth century—as mindless beings capable of only femininity and domesticity.  

Tansley is not alone in his negative characterizations of women. When Mr. Ramsey watches his wife read a book he wonders,

> What she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful. Her beauty seemed to him, if that were possible, to increase.

The beauty that Mr. Ramsey is referring to is not based solely on physical appearance. Rather, the beauty he refers to is a societal construct that embodies the gender polarization present in the Victorian Era. As Mrs. Ramsey, in Mr. Ramsey’s mind, sits in front of him ignorant and unable to comprehend the text she is reading, her beauty grows because it is paralleling Victorian ideologies that claim intelligence is a male quality. Conversely, when women exhibit any form of intelligence, through reading for example, they are subsequently viewed as unattractive and deviant.

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110 Showalter, *Inventing Herself*, 156.
111 Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, 87-88.
Ramsey also feels this way about his daughter Cam. As they sail towards the lighthouse Ramsey thinks,

Women are always like that; the vagueness of their minds is hopeless; it was a thing he had never been able to understand; but so it was. It had been so with his wife. They could not keep anything clearly fixed in their minds. But he had been wrong to be angry with her; moreover, did he not rather like this vagueness in women? It was part of their extraordinary charm.\textsuperscript{112}

When Ramsey looks at his daughter, he assumes that her blank stare means that her mind is completely empty. However, like many children of her age, she is daydreaming about ships sinking and other catastrophes. But Ramsey assumes that she, like her mother and all other women, have utterly vague minds that are incapable of focusing the required attention on a particular subject of academic importance in order to make a significant contribution.

In \textit{To The Lighthouse}, Mrs. Ramsey upholds the conventional Victorian woman’s role when she reflects on intelligence and education on two separate occasions. As she ventures into town with Tansley, he begins to tell her how he established himself in academe even though he came from a poor family. Mrs. Ramsey however, “did not quite catch the meaning, only the words, here and there ... dissertation ... fellowship ... readership ... lectureship. She could not follow the ugly academic jargon, that rattled itself off so glibly.”\textsuperscript{113} She is not interested in hearing or learning about the path one must take in order to become a chemist. She finds this academic jargon repulsive, especially because of the ways in which Tansley throws words around so matter-of-factly.

Another instance in which Mrs. Ramsey thinks about academia is during dinner when square roots are mentioned. She immediately thinks,

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 125.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 9.
What did it all mean? To this day she had no notion. A square root? What was that? Her sons knew. She leant on them; on cubes and square roots; that was what they were talking about now; on Voltaire and Madame de Stael; on the character of Napoleon; on the French system of land tenure; on Lord Rosebery; on Creevey's Memoirs: she let it uphold her and sustain her, this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world, so that she could trust herself to it utterly, even shut her eyes, or flicker them for a moment, as a child staring up from its pillow winks at the myriad layers of the leaves of a tree.\textsuperscript{114}

As Mrs. Ramsey continues to reflect about these male-dominated subjects, she acknowledges how admirable and uniquely masculine intelligence is. Because Mrs. Ramsey is completely ignorant of these topics, she leans on her sons and husband to understand them for her. This valorization of male intelligence, however, is an essential tenet in Victorian thinking regarding education and makes women more and more dependent on men.

Women who dared to dabble in these male-dominated subjects were often discouraged and harshly criticized. According to Kent, this occurred because women were so exclusively represented by their sex in the nineteenth-century, “that any behavior on their part that deviated from that of wife and mother—such as making political demands or seeking an education—was denounced.”\textsuperscript{115} The patriarchy that was well engrained in British culture during the Victorian Era extended its reach into literature, the arts, mathematics, and other male-dominated subjects. In Victorian culture it was widely believed that “male sexuality, in other words, was not just analogically but the essence of literary power.”\textsuperscript{116} Focusing on literature of this era, Gilbert and Gubar show how literature is a male creation and how this causes it to be highly critical of women. Furthermore, unlike men, women lack role models to identify with when writing since not many women have achieved literary success.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 76.
\textsuperscript{115} Kent, \textit{Gender and Power}, 188.
\textsuperscript{116} Gilbert and Gubar, \textit{The Madwomen in the Attic}, 4.
In 1928 Virginia Woolf gave a speech, which was later turned into an essay entitled *A Room of One’s Own*. In this essay Virginia acknowledges the lack of role models women have and argues that women are no less capable than men when it comes to literary creation, specifically in fiction. She proposes that in order for women to write fiction they need a room of their own and a salary. A room would ideally afford them privacy to write without being interrupted by domestic chores and would also act as a barrier that could protect them from outside influences and scrutiny, which could negatively affect their creative process. A room is also a way of withdrawing from society and societal strictures in order to write from a more androgynous point of view. A steady salary or inheritance would allow literary women to avoid unnecessary distractions such as working and fussing over how to fiscally make ends meet.

These two items however, were also not necessarily afforded to male writers. Despite the dominant position held by men in society, a great majority of male writers were also wage earners. This is even present in *Mrs. Dalloway*, with Septimus Smith. Septimus immigrated to Great Britain from Strauss in hopes of achieving poetic success. In Britain he works during the day and attends lectures at night. Thus suggesting that Virginia’s assertions that women need a room of their own in addition to a steady salary, may be somewhat exaggerated. Virginia also argues that men are fearful of women because their position of dominance is reliant on having a subordinate gender. With women competing on the same level as them, dominance will no longer be gendered, but depend on creative ability. Virginia asserts that these fears are what cause men to insist that women refrain from writing and reading. Ultimately Virginia claims,

*Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of*
Athenian slaves. Women, then, have not had a dog’s chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one’s own.\footnote{Woolf, \textit{A Room of One’s Own}, Online Text.}

Although Virginia’s assertions concerning a room and money were somewhat unrealistic, her opinions on how males influence women are worth discussing.

Virginia captures the impact males have on women through the painter Lily Briscoe, in \textit{To The Lighthouse}, who struggles to capture her own artistic vision. As Lily tries to paint what she sees and interconnect everything as it is in nature, she constantly hears Tansley whispering, “Women can’t paint, women can’t write.”\footnote{Woolf, \textit{To The Lighthouse}, 35.} As a result of this scrutiny,

She could have wept. It was bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad! She could have done it differently of course; the colour could have been thinned and faded; the shapes etherealised; that was how Paunceforte would have seen it. But then she did not see it like that.\footnote{Ibid, 35.}

This criticism affects her deeply and causes her to think about how other painters may have solved her problem. In thinking of solutions, one painter, Mr. Paunceforte enters her mind, however, she recognizes that she does not see the way he saw. Lily is trying to create something new, something that is atypical, but struggles from a lack of guidance and self-confidence. Throughout the rest of the novel, whenever Lily paints, she constantly recalls Tansley’s comments and thinks,

Can't paint, can't write, she murmured monotonously, anxiously considering what her plan of attack should be. For the mass loomed before her; it protruded; she felt it pressing on her eyeballs. […] Charles Tansley used to say that, she remembered, women can't paint, can't write. Coming up behind her, he had stood close beside her, a thing she hated, as she painted her on this very spot.\footnote{Ibid, 119.}

Lily acknowledges that Tansley holds no position from which he can judge her, yet for some reason unknown to her, she cannot escape his criticism despite having escaped his presence.
Also, her lack of privacy gravely affected her ability to paint. Whenever someone approaches her canvas she immediately feels self-conscious and uneasy. These feelings exemplify Virginia’s assertion that women need a room of their own in which to work without being influenced by outside forces.

Lily continues to uphold her non-traditional beliefs when it comes to marriage and acts as the antithesis of Mrs. Ramsey. Mrs. Ramsey plays the typical female character in that she is cognizant of her domestic role and fills it with pleasure. She believes that every woman needs to be married and acts as a sort of matchmaker throughout the novel by encouraging and pressuring people to spend time together. She successfully has Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley, both of whom are considered family friends, engaged by the end of the first section of the book. Another couple that Mrs. Ramsey tries to marry is Lily Briscoe and William Bankes, a botanist. Throughout the novel Lily expresses her disinterest in marriage and through this disinterest, reveals how she is radically different from the typical Victorian woman. According to Kent, “domestic ideology rested upon the assumption that all women married and became mothers,”\textsuperscript{121} and by dwelling on this, Mrs. Ramsey indicates how conventional and traditional she is. When Lily realizes that she had been able to dodge marriage, she thinks, “She had only escaped by the skin of her teeth though... She had been looking at the table-cloth, and it had flashed upon her that she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody, and she had felt an enormous exultation.”\textsuperscript{122} When she realizes that her avoidance of marriage, something she views as stifling and harmful for her career, was successful, her artistic vision becomes clearer giving her painting the balance it previously lacked.

\textsuperscript{121} Kent, \textit{Gender and Power}, 184.
\textsuperscript{122} Woolf, \textit{To The Lighthouse}, 131.
Clarissa Dalloway, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, also struggles with marriage and the loss of identity and monotony that comes with it. When thinking about her life and her place in society, 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 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.\textsuperscript{123}

Because she has fulfilled the role of a woman, in that she is past the age of child bearing, she now occupies her time with parties and other things that make her feel insignificant and unable to contribute to society. She feels as if she has lost her identity when she acknowledges that she is no longer Clarissa anymore, but rather Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

When Clarissa was a teenager, she and Sally Seton, a dear friend with whom Clarissa spent the summer at Bourton “spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe.”\textsuperscript{124} Being radical as teenagers, Sally and Clarissa believed that marriage would ruin their passion and abilities. Unlike the majority of girls living in England, Sally was well read. Her passion for literature was passed onto Clarissa who claims she “was just as excited — read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour.”\textsuperscript{125} This engrossment however, died out when Clarissa married Richard. When Clarissa hears that Sally Seton is married and has five children, she thinks it would have been more suitable for her to die a martyr. Clarissa believes that Sally had so much courage and passion and that the constricting nature of marriage was unsuited for her and the radical way she wanted to change the world.

Lastly, *Mrs. Dalloway* also sheds light on how some males view marriage. Peter Walsh, another one of Clarissa’s radical friends, believes that Clarissa had so much potential at Burton

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{123} Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 11.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 34.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, 33.
\end{footnotes}
but that her marriage to Richard Dalloway allowed her to settle into the typical British norms as a mere housewife obsessed with the trivialities of life, like throwing tedious parties. When he visits Clarissa after living in India for five years, he thinks, “there’s nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a Conservative husband, like the admirable Richard. So it is, so it is, he thought, shutting his knife with a snap.” Peter, like Sally, believes that marriage was an institute that stunted the growth of women. Although Peter tried to marry Clarissa himself, he believes that her marriage to Richard Dalloway was a classist move and is embittered by his rejection.

\[126\] Ibid, 41.
The Waning British Empire and War Literature

During the Victorian and Edwardian Era it was widely believed that ‘war was the highest form of sport’. Teachers and Headmasters in British public schools compared cricket and football to war and used these sports to inculcate in young boys characteristics such as courage, leadership, and ideals of self-sacrifice for the greater good of the team. Game strategies were used for military education as well.\(^{127}\) This romanticizing and comparing of war to sport allowed civilians to believe on August 4, 1914, when England entered the war, that it would “involve cavalry charges and combat between heroic individuals.”\(^ {128}\) Instead of being a noble exhibition of heroism and chivalry, the Great War was a brutal force that indiscriminately killed more soldiers than any other war to date. Within a few months “casualties had been shocking, positions had been settled into self-destructive stalemates, and sensitive people now perceived that the war, far from promising to be ‘over by Christmas’, was going to extend itself to hitherto unimagined reaches of suffering and irony.”\(^ {129}\)

The war quickly wove itself into the everyday lives of the British, wherein much energy was focused on supporting the war effort through rationing, labor or fighting. As the war proceeded the number of causalities soared, especially in offensives, such as the Battle of Somme wherein 60,000 British soldiers were killed in a single day. Countless British citizens lost brothers, fathers, and or their husbands on the front. These deaths and the lack of progress made on both the battlefield and home front caused civilians and soldiers alike to become embittered and disillusioned with the Empire. As a result, Victorian ideals were being recognized

as out dated and thus, when the war ended, soldiers returned to what seemed like a foreign
country; class relationships were changing, the symbolism of royalty was fading, and a literary
offensive against the war, the older generation, and the current governing elite occurred.

Stark inequalities, a rigid class hierarchy, and a strong class-consciousness marked
British society at the beginning the twentieth century. Arthur Marwick claims that the chasm
between classes was so evident that “to meet a member of [the lower class] was to recognize him
at once, by his appearance, by his smell, indeed, by his size, since widespread malnutrition
resulting from working-class poverty meant that he was also characterized by his small
stature.”\textsuperscript{130} But these hierarchical divisions were blurred after the war. Whereas elite and many
middle class citizens were most notably distinct from the working class due to their employment
of servants, this was not the case after war, since many servants found better paying jobs in the
war economy.\textsuperscript{131} The war also reduced the size of the upper class and their ability to live as
lavishly as pre-war times. Income taxes were raised from “6 percent in 1913 to 30 percent in
1918, and never fell below 20 percent again.”\textsuperscript{132} This drastic increase was significant in
diminishing the upper classes’ overall wealth. Lastly, the long established parallel between the
upper and ruling classes and the British Empire was also called into question. According to
George Robb, “Blunders, mismanagements, and the extraordinary loss of life in wartime hardly
inspired continuing confidence in the established ruling class. The aristocracy’s own self-
confidence and belief in its invulnerability was also seriously undermined by the experience of
war.”\textsuperscript{133} As a result, members of the upper classes clung their diminishing prominence.

\textsuperscript{130} Marwick, Arthur. \textit{Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace, and Social Change 1900-
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 36-40.
\textsuperscript{132} Robb, \textit{British Culture}, 88.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 87.
After the First World War members of the Conservative Party were aware of their waning power. Virginia portrays this during a luncheon at Millicent Bruton’s house when:

Richard Dalloway strolled off as usual to have a look at the General’s portrait, because he meant, whenever he had a moment of leisure, to write a history of Lady Bruton’s family. And Millicent Bruton was very proud of her family. But they could wait, they could wait, she said, looking at the picture; meaning that her family, of military men, administrators, admirals, had been men of action, who had done their duty; and Richard’s first duty was to his country, but it was a fine face, she said; and all the papers were ready for Richard down at Aldmixton whenever the time came; the Labour Government she meant.\textsuperscript{134}

Lady Bruton understands that her party is on its way out of office and suggests that Richard wait to write the history of her family once the Labour Party comes into power, thus removing him from Parliament. According to Alex Zwerdling, “these references suggest that the class under examination, [the governing class,] in the novel is living on borrowed time.”\textsuperscript{135} Because this novel takes place on a day in June, 1923, conservatives like Richard, Hugh, and Lady Bruton, are well aware that the end of their reign is coming and thus, like Richard, begin planning what they will do after they are removed from their positions.

In a halfhearted attempt to maintain some sort of prestige in society as opposed to acquiescing, Virginia has the upper class defend one another’s faults. For example, despite the fact that Clarissa recognizes Peter’s superior intelligence and ability in comparison to Hugh, she looks for redeemable characteristics, which will allow her to defend Hugh, a member of the upper class, however simplistic and childish he may be. Clarissa protects Hugh while admitting to herself that,

\begin{quote}
Of course Hugh had the most extraordinary […\ldots] sublime respect for the British aristocracy of any human being she had ever come across. […\ldots] Oh, but he was such a dear, so unselfish, gave up shooting to please his old mother — remembered his aunts’ birthdays, and so on.\textsuperscript{136}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
134 Woolf, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, 122.  \\
135 Zwerdling, \textit{The Social System}, 70.  \\
136 Woolf, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, 72-73.
\end{flushright}
Despite agreeing with the negative comments made about Hugh, Carissa feels obliged to come to his defense in any way possible. Lady Bruton does the same. “She wouldn’t let them run down her poor dear Hugh. She could never forget his kindness — he had been really remarkably kind — she forgot precisely upon what occasion. But he had been — remarkably kind.”

Despite her inability to recall any kind gesture Hugh performed for her and the fact that she is easily annoyed with how ‘slow’ and ‘fat’ he is becoming, she feels inclined to speak of his good nature and come to his defense when others speak poorly of him.

The decline in reverence for the ruling class is also demonstrated when a lavish car backfires on a busy road in London. At once the curtains are immediately drawn in order to prevent the citizenry from peering inside. Rumors fill the street as onlookers become more interested in which royal figures occupy the car, “now mystery had brushed them with her wing; they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide.” Virginia uses this event to depict the opposing feelings British citizens have. First they respond with a natural proclivity towards patriotism and tradition, which is exhibited when the citizens immediately “stood even straighter, and removed their hands, and seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon’s mouth, as their ancestors had done before them.” Kathy Phillips claims that “for the sake of a vague, unifying emotion under the flag, not for any particular cause which could be named and argued, people are stupidly ready to act” in this manner. ‘Stupidly’, refers to the thoughtlessness behind onlookers’ responses. The way in which Virginia portrays this scene could refer to how this

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137 Ibid, 104.
138 Ibid, 14.
139 Ibid, 18.
reflexive reverence for the ruling class is why the British originally found themselves in a catastrophic war. Within a matter of seconds though, the war is remembered:

Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors’ shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire.\textsuperscript{141}

When onlookers recall the war and the carnage that resulted, they are brought back to reality where the flag and Empire are hollow shells, depleted of the meaning they once held. As opposed to being the strongest world power, the British Empire is now steadily declining.\textsuperscript{142} To further compound the fading importance of the Empire and royalty, Virginia immediately diverts the citizenry’s’ attention with something as trifling as an airplane. As soon as it flies overhead, everyone looks at the sky in order to figure out what the airplane is spelling while the motor car drives away completely forgotten.

In addition to the motorcar, Virginia’s responses to the Prime Minister show two opposing sentiments. For example, when Lady Burton, wants to complement Hugh for writing her a beautiful letter, she graciously calls him “My Prime Minister!”\textsuperscript{143} Yet, when Peter Walsh from the middle class wants to insult Clarissa he says “she would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said.”\textsuperscript{144} The use of the title ‘Prime Minister,’ varies depending on the social class of the person using it. When Lady Bruton calls Hugh her Prime Minister, she uses it as genuine attempt to show him her gratitude. However,

\textsuperscript{141} Woolf, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, 18.
\textsuperscript{142} Robb, \textit{British Culture}, 31.
\textsuperscript{143} Woolf, \textit{Mrs. Dalloway}, 110.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, 7.
when Peter tells Clarissa she will marry the Prime Minister, he does so in order to mock her frivolity and need to be perceived well by others.

When the Prime Minister comes to Clarissa’s party, few are impressed by his presence. Alex Zwerdling claims that this party is “a kind of wake. It reveals the form of power without its substance.”\(^{145}\) When Clarissa’s servants are informed that he is attending, rather than showing excitement, Mrs. Walker thinks, “Did it matter, did it matter in the least, one Prime Minister more or less? It made no difference at this hour of the night to Mrs. Walker.”\(^{146}\) Moreover, when the Prime Minister makes an entrance, Clarissa’s cousin Edith thinks,

One couldn’t laugh at him. He looked so ordinary. You might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits — poor chap, all rigged up in gold lace. And to be fair, as he went his rounds, first with Clarissa then with Richard escorting him, he did it very well. He tried to look somebody. It was amusing to watch. Nobody looked at him.\(^{147}\)

The upper class, as described by Virginia, is captivated by his presence while the middle and lower classes are simply amused or unaffected by it. Virginia emphasizes how the Prime Minister represents the fading power of British authority when Clarissa went on, into the little room where the Prime Minister had gone with Lady Bruton. Perhaps there was somebody there. But there was nobody. The chairs still kept the impress of the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton, she turned deferentially, he sitting four-square, authoritatively. They had been talking about India. There was nobody.\(^{148}\)

Virginia muses that the Prime Minister had completely faded away, leaving just the imprints on a couch, which could have been anyone’s. According to Kathy Phillips, “The repetition of the phrase ‘there was nobody’ not only registers a current absence but also hints at the presence of nullity a few minutes before.”\(^{149}\)

\(^{146}\) Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 165.
\(^{147}\) Ibid, 172.
\(^{148}\) Ibid, 292.
\(^{149}\) Phillips, *Woolf Against Empire*, 3.
In order to fight off the fatigue caused by the war, the government began to promote the idea that social change would accompany the end of the war. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge claim that

The disasters of war taught [soldiers] a gradual disgust for the ‘muddle-through’ politicians who spoke in the name of Britain; bitter anger against the General Staff, who from safe billets behind the Line condemned hundreds of thousands of men to useless butchery; and a contempt, mixed with envy, for all fit males of military age, even technicians in key-industries, who had escaped their share of front-line service.150

Aware of the potential for this resentment to manifest itself in a rebellion, the government occupied itself with how to prevent social revolution. But, far from building the new world that politicians had promised, Parliamentary bills were created to comfort and keep soldiers and civilians content. According to Robb, “The abrupt abandonment of the housing program was an important factor in the general postwar disillusionment stemming from the government’s failure to fulfill wartime promises.”151 Virginia suggests that the British government’s inability to keep its’ promises and the brutality with which the war was fought, were therefore important factors that led to the disenchantment of British society.

According to Marwick, although Victorian ideals were under attack before the onset of the Great War, it was the “nature of the war, murderous beyond all proportion to moral or material gains made, that fostered skepticism, irony, and irreverence.”152 The nature of the war served to deepen the rift between the older and younger generation, causing many of the Victorian values such as the British gentleman, chivalry, and traditional morality, to be called into question. Furthermore, Sandra Gilbert claims that

151 Robb, British Culture, 93.
152 Marwick, Britain in the Century of Total War, 114.
For as the early glamour of battle dissipated and Victorian fantasies of historical heroism gave way to modernist visions of irony and unreality, it became clear that this war to end all wars necessitated a sacrifice of the sons to the exigencies of the fathers-and the mothers, wives, and sisters.153

These feelings are not only expressed in Virginia’s writings but also in a number of contemporary works, like those produced by combatants Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.

Owen’s poems are laden with a sense of betrayal and anger directed at the older generation. His poem entitled The Parable of the Old Man and the Young, most notably captures the embitterment he and other soldiers felt toward the ruling class:

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
And builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an Angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him, thy son.  
Behold! Caught in a thicket by its horns,  
A Ram. Offer the Ram of Pride instead.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.154

This poem bears a striking resemblance to the Book of Genesis but is completely inverted with the integration of the war. The belts and straps that Abram uses to bind Isaac alludes to the uniform soldiers wore. In the following line, the inclusion of parapets and trenches, gives the reader a vivid image of the front and trench warfare. When an angel appears and tells Abram not

so sacrifice his only son, but the ram of pride, symbolic of British pride, instead Abram refuses and slaughters Isaac. The last line “And half the seed of Europe, one by one,” indications that Abram represents the governing body of England, whereas Isaac represents the ‘lost generation’, seemingly butchered without just cause.

Siegfried Sassoon, who was diagnosed with ‘shell shock’ during the war, directs his anger at the ‘older generation’ and civilians most visibly and cynically in *Suicide in the Trenches*:

> I knew a simple soldier boy.....
> Who grinned at life in empty joy,
> Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
> And whistled early with the lark.

> In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
> With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
> He put a bullet through his brain.
> And no one spoke of him again.

> You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
> Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
> Sneak home and pray you’ll never know
> The hell where youth and laughter go.155

In this poem, Sassoon expressed his anguish at the loss of youth soldiers experienced on the front. The war, according to Robb, acted as a catalyst for the modern literature movement. Writers like Virginia, Sassoon, and Owens, in addition to many others, were part of the budding movement that viewed war through much bleaker lens.156

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156 Robb, *British Culture*, 158.
Conclusion

Virginia Woolf is regarded as one of the most, if not the most, important women in the modernism movement. She was the nucleus of early twentieth century literary culture in Great Britain, which was most famously represented by the Bloomsbury group. As a writer, feminist, and literary critic, her contributions to literature were impressive and enduring. Her novels, written in the stream of consciousness mode, took James Joyce’s new form of writing, exemplified by his novel *Ulysses*, and perfected it for the public. Through Virginia’s novels we get a glimpse of how life was changing in post-war Great Britain. These changes, “This sense of the radical difference between the ‘modern’ world and the ‘Edwardian’ one, or more broadly the world before and after the First World War, became a major theme of Virginia's fiction”\(^{157}\) and are not only in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse*, but also in almost every single one of her works.

A variety of topics stemming from Victorian ideologies, which were subsequently eviscerated by the Great War, are portrayed in Virginia’s novels. For example, Virginia raises the question of what constitutes acceptable behavior for men and shows how the Great War cultivated a vast range of once tabooed alternatives that were becoming tolerable. She also shows how gendered medicine and education kept women in an inferior position in society. Through focusing on the relationship between death and time, Virginia accentuates how war casualties altered the way British society perceived life and death. Class hierarchy and social differences, and the importance of the ruling class are also satirized. Having touched on each of these topics, Virginia brings the changes occurring in Great Britain to her readers’ attention. British society after the war, as indicated by many historical sources, had a perceived inclination toward

revolution. This inclination stemmed from the want for change, change that was seen as long overdue.

Virginia’s persistent attempts to display and criticize the social system comes through her work subtly, and although these criticisms may have been more prevalent in her original transcripts, such as that for *To The Lighthouse*, her overall goal, to represent to social system while retaining the artistic and poetic voice in her novels, is realized. Virginia depicts what her characters see and think in everyday life and through this, she manages to highlight out directional changes in society without ever explicitly mentioning them. Her use of symbols and characters’ opinion’s of things like royalty, gender, and other characters are enough to suggest that the Empire is fading, that Victorian values are in question, and that class boundaries are not as rigid as they were in pre-war Great Britain. Virginia gives historical perspectives not only of the events in post-war Britain, but how people viewed and were affected by them.

Yet, because Virginia was not restricted like a historian would have been, she had the liberty of bringing more of herself into her work. This literary and artistic ability gives us a fuller, more vivid experience as readers. Virginia’s descriptive writing style causes us to feel the disappointment that courses through Clarissa when she is not invited to Lady Burton’s dinner party, and to feel the variety of emotions Septimus encounters as his mind races through his manic stages. This also allows us to understand what Virginia felt when she was hysteric and helps explain why she committed suicide. The description of the oppressive, domineering rest cure, and the refusal of Septimus to be sedated by British society any longer, reverberates within us and implicates the dangers of holding on to once valued ideologies that have lost their meaning. Virginia’s works serve not just as a depiction of society at its most intense, but also as a warning, very much like Charlotte Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*. 
Bibliography


