Mrs. Dalloway as a Window for Understanding Life

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Mrs. Dalloway as a Window for Understanding Life

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Mrs. Dalloway as a Window for Understanding life

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Abstract

Mrs. Dalloway as a Window for Understanding Life

by Kristen Venegas

Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway may be dismissed as fiction, and fiction consequently is dismissed as fantasy. However, the novel enables readers to practice an intellectual exercise of meta-awareness that extends beyond the pages and onto real world phenomena. Under a cognitive neuroscience perspective, Mrs. Dalloway is a literary masterpiece due to its hyper-realistic execution of the intimacies of life. Through the narrative style of free-indirect discourse, Woolf illustrates what occurs in the minds of characters as they develop their own perceptions of reality and identity, exposes the fear and inadequacies of mankind’s distress in times of chaos and disorder through the characters, and attempts to tackle themes of spirituality and cosmic transcendence when encountering death. Although these themes originate from analyzing the behavior of characters in the novel, this thesis serves as a foundation of cognitive neuroscience not exclusively to provide another perspective of the novel, but in order to argue and take into account that literature such as Mrs. Dalloway is evident in enriching our understanding of life.
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I. Introduction

“Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her…” (Mrs. Dalloway 3), the introductory line of the intimate novel, Mrs. Dalloway, prepares the reader for a twenty-four hour journey of a women’s day using free indirect discourse. According to Sharvit (2008), The stylistic approach of free-indirect discourse is homogenous to an omniscient entity that shifts from character to character and reveals the inner monologues and genuine thoughts which allows readers to craft a mosaic judgment of each character. Compared to the orthodox third-person perspective, the narrator will directly express internal thoughts through transitional phrases such as “they said/he said/she said”, but this often lacks fluidity and organic intimacy of thinking. With free indirect discourse, the divide between the character and narrator is blurred, resulting in a deeper exploration of consciousness (353). We see Clarissa drawing in a world of omnibuses, Big Ben, and social efforts. This style also allows for the exemption of committing exclusively to a single character. Passing characters, regardless of how relevant their role is to the central plot, also become social conduits that channel self-reflection and transparency in issues concerning personal identity amid a changing society. It is through this narration that Virginia Woolf executes life in the novel as a “parading of views, of attitudes, of feelings, and it is only with the greatest of effort that this pageant, this rush of impressions is held in place” (Howard Mrs. Dalloway X).
II. Establishing the Self

Free-indirect discourse explores personal reflection and self-identity by representing the world not through its material foundation, but through an abstract third space that holds cognition, mental processing, and emotion. Due to the array of characters that Clarissa Dalloway encounters throughout her summer's day in London, the reader vicariously engages with the dialogue and environment that manages to pull on their personal experiences and memories. The relationship between the reader and the novel’s characters is bilateral; we gravitate toward what we can relate to in order to improve an understanding of ourselves and discover truths of our essence. Furthermore, as the characters grapple with the idea of identity, so does the reader, which raises an essential question: What am I?

The search for the “self” has been a never-ending inquiry to settle on an absolute definition. One of the most commonly articulated theories comes from Plato's conception of the soul through “various experiences of thought, will, and emotion which we allude to by the term ‘physical activities’” (Roberts 372). Plato was a firm dualist, arguing that the body remains in the material world, but the soul stays akin to a spiritual dimension (Roberts 373). This view parallels Rene Descartes’ dualistic assumption of the human experience. In short, the iconic phrase, “Cogito ergo sum” or “I think, therefore I am,” from his Meditations presupposes that the exterior world results from a solipsistic internal reality that man conjures and manifests onto the material world. That is why anytime there is an affirmation of thought, “I think,” by virtue, there is a reaction of affirming one’s reality, “I am”, at any moment of conception (Young 13). In the end, Descartes attests that the essence of his being is capable of thinking, rationality, introspection, and intellectualizing. He relied on this presupposition as evidence to the argument that the self is
an absolute property of the mind and not the body. His criticism is that the body is subject to deception through the senses.

Refutations of dualism include whether a solipsistic experience can even be enabled without the physical vessel of a body. Also, what purpose would it serve us to retain conscious awareness of a body and have that sensory information referred to as reality? In contrast to dualism, Aristotelian philosophy advocates for the intersection of the mind and body. From his standpoint, the soul cannot transcend beyond a material plane of existence; the soul is a “substance in the sense of the form of a natural body which potentially partakes of life” (Miller 312). Monism gained more contemporary acceptance with William James’s publication of the Principles of Psychology (1890). This shifted the discussion from a philosophical foundation to attention to neural functioning. James ascertains that the realm of psychology needs to consider the impact of bodily experiences on mental health and vice-versa since “no mental modification ever occurs which is not accompanied or followed by bodily change” (Young 18).

Furthermore, James’s Theory of Emotion notes that an integral part of a person's sense of self can better be understood through the emotions that are triggered by “the body’s sensorimotor responses to the object world” (Young 20). The body follows through the state of mind, by generating smiles or tears. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung in Modern Man in Search of a Soul (1933) asks: “If we can reconcile ourselves with the mysterious truth that spirit is the living body seen from within, and the body the outer manifestation of the living spirit – the two being really one” (220).

Virginia Woolf’s stance on the matter lies much more acutely with monism. In another of her works, “On Being Ill”, Woolf refutes dualism by claiming:
“[T]he body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and save for one or two passions such as desire and greed, is null, negligible, and non-existent. On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night, the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February. The creature within can only gaze through the pane – smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant” (32-33).

As Woolf suggests, the body is a necessary component of the soul, and death is the only force strong enough to split our being. Although the debate continues, James and Woolf attempt to eclipse the discussion of what we are and instead shift their focus on who we are. It is said that human existence precedes human essence (Sartre and Priest 192), and one of the best ways to provide evidence of identity is by examining human action. The self is what it is known as, or found to be, what we do in practice, and Virginia Woolf uses this approach with her characters to foster an understanding of their identities.
III. **Theory of Mind in Relation to Personal Identity**

In connection with this concern for personal identity, *Mrs. Dalloway* exhibits the constant evaluation and foraging of personal identity through the characters of the novel by evaluating their actions and interactions under a cognitive function called “Theory of Mind” (T.O.M.). Lisa Zunshine, author of *Why We Read Fiction*, describes T.O.M. as “our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires” (13). This development is an evolutionary function for deducing a person’s mental state response through observing gestural or verbal behavior. Although we like to think of the world as a straightforward experience, the brain is constantly utilizing T.O.M. to continue navigating and accommodating to our fluid social environments (Zunshine 13). Although the novel centers around Clarissa Dalloway preparing for her party and going about the mundanities of her day, the reader is generously endowed with the ability to flow in and out of conversations and fleeting thoughts from characters at all angles. Free-indirect discourse allows the reader to follow Clarissa exercising T.O.M. as she preoccupies her free time in attempting to understand her neighbors, her family, her neighbors’ neighbors, and, as a result, herself. Although she admits her fondness for people: “It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 152), her genuine attitude regarding T.O.M. has a self-serving ulterior motive for Mrs. Dalloway. The attempt to understand the sentiments of others has the potential to open a passageway for manipulating an exterior image, as Clarissa briefly admits, “How much she wanted it – that people should look pleased as she came in” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 10). Through this truth, the novel raises an essential point of inquiry: how much autonomy does an individual have in cultivating their identity? Similarly, how does the Theory of Mind inform our judgments about others and ourselves?
According to James, the term “empirical self” is meant as an all-encompassing term for the version of the self-recognized through three mediums: the material self, the spiritual self, and the social self (Chapter 02 WHO AM I? - U.W. faculty web server). The material self concerns itself with the body and psychological ownership or association of tangible objects that are an extension of our being, such as friends, a home, a place, or possessions. The spiritual self consists of self-perceived attitudes, emotions, values, motives, and anything along the inner psychological self. Lastly, the social self is refined as “public and social” (Bayley 161-162). To say that the self is “public” was to address the need for an individual’s projected image. (Bayley 161). The self being “social” signifies that the self is conceptualized through a linguistic community. Only through social interaction and language can one differentiate “me” from “them”. However, the conceptualization of that self is constantly under evaluation depending on the social circumstance a person is within. In short, James claims that the self has no one-dimensional essence. Selfhood has now been split into public and private domains. It remains relevant that the preconceptions we form regarding ourselves are partly endowed to friends, family, and the community (Bayley 161-162).

Adjacent to the discourse of selfhood in relation to a community, Woolf periodically injects social satirization of British Nationalism through the creation of highly pretentious characters such as Lady Bruton and her belief in luncheons and the pretentious Hugh Whitbread are “almost too well dressed as always, but presumably had to be with his little job at court” (Mrs. Dalloway 6). Although these characters are persistent in their cultural assertion of social caliber and unity, they remain unaware of the post-war realities of the so-called “Lost Generation” of men who served during World War I. In one instance during the novel, both the Queen were riding past Piccadilly Square and an aeroplane soared through the sky while the
white smoke that trailed behind created an assortment of letters which everyone was attempting to decode. Everyone disagreed in what they saw as people guessed “Glaxo”, “Kreemo” or “Toffee” (Mrs. Dalloway 20). It is evident that these onlookers are desperate and overcompensate with their naive amusement to unite a nation after the attack of British culture and values not for the sake of the nation, but to assert their own importance and identity. As a result, fustian people like Lady Bruton, Whitbred and the Bradshaws cling to culture and decorum as a means of saying that is their contribution in repairing a nation, when in reality, their agenda is self-serving. They are regarded as “important” people of society and are the ones to be invited to Clarissa’s dinner party as fuel that continues feeding into this illusion of grandiosity. However, on the sidelines of these spectacles that are occurring, “the poor mothers of Pimlico… stood very upright” (Mrs. Dalloway 20). Devoid of any desire to celebrate, the mothers of these soldiers understood that the war enabled a projected ego of a nation and removed their sons from their home or left them damaged. Those who sympathize with the situation of Septimus Smith or show no concern for this enculturation of British ideals are outcast from society due to their lack of conformity in behavioral norms and receive no such invitation to dinner parties by mail. Similar to this, Lucrezia, Septimus’s wife, is associated with the shell-shocked veteran who compromises her position in society. Her moments of frustration seeped through when she claimed: “People must notice; people must see” (Mrs. Dalloway 15). Lucrezia’s observation is correct. People actively employ T.O.M. just as she did to raise that observation. People do notice, people do see. As a result, Clarissa will not spare a second glance in her decision to omit them from her guest list for the party. This presented attitude reveals Clarissa’s permeable identity; She is porous to desire, but not from her desire; instead, it is the desire of the ideal-ego, an idealized self-image created by the desire of how we wish other people see us (Žižek 80): “The time she did things
not simply, not for themselves, but to make people think this or that: perfect idiocy she knew” (Mrs. Dalloway 10).

The application of Theory of Mind beyond the novel reveals a ubiquitous issue of people relying on external validation to gauge their worth which results in a myriad of fluid personalities for the sake of fitting in. Once again referencing William James, recall that the self is to be found through practice and action; human beings recognize the self as a collection of experiences and attributes and create a “fourfold self” (Bayley 149). The self is an object of enduring interest, especially in adolescence and early adulthood; moreover, it is an interest observable in the conduct of life (Bayley 149). This indicates that the “self” lends itself to the eye of the perceiver as much as the perceived. In “A Phenomenological Reading of Virginia Woolf’s Fictions: The Process of Self-Formation” (2014), Saghar Nafaji explains that the core of phenomenology is consciousness, and central to consciousness is intentionality (437).

Intentionality in this context is provided through the definition of John Searle, “It is a conscious and unconscious state which is directed at, about, or concerned with objects that are in the world independent of our minds” (Najafi 437). So consciousness runs similar to meta-awareness; when we are conscious, we are conscious of something, which is comparatively different from recognizing or having knowledge of an object. Knowledge remains external to the object, while consciousness relates to the object and is a practical act that continues to change the object's relationship. This implies that phenomenological consciousness cultivates a process of intending reality, where its intentionality formulates an individual's subjectivity (Najafi 437). Awareness of subjective opinion within the public domain is an invasive reminder to continue playing an active role in response to our surroundings. When the ability to navigate our image becomes seamless and well received, we take pride in being creators of ourselves, a reward for social pretend play.
Nevertheless, many individuals have neurosis or depression resulting from the current self not being congruous with their “ego-ideal”. People often go to great lengths to bridge that gap. The cost of this is an epidemic of dysmorphic personal identities; in other words, as Peter Walsh thinks: “the death of the soul” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 59). Peter suggests that humans lose their souls trying to conform to social conventions.
IV. The Binding Problem: Introduction and Implications

Previously, the discussion has touched on the result of social convention and its influence on personal identity. To add to the discussion, this portion of the thesis will uncover why people decide to form these arbitrary rules and conventions in the first place. The binding problem is a uniquely human phenomenon that makes its way into the larger cultural discourse when discovering the underlying motives for why people feel the need to form these social constructs. A foundational neurological exploration explains that the binding problem allows us to experience a coherent world and integrate external objects to avoid seeing a world of disembodied or wrongly combined shapes, colors, motions, sizes, and differences (Jones 100).

Beyond a neurological level, the binding problem asks how neural unity can potentially yield consciousness (Jones 104).

At the highest level, individual consciousness expands onto a sociological scale with the creation of hierarchies and appeals to more extensive forms of order. Although the exact mechanisms of how this occurs at a neuroscientific level are still inconclusive, contemporary neuroscientists attempt to bridge this gap through the concept of lifeworld. A lifeworld is defined as “a subjective cognitive space in which the ‘I’ makes sense of the world, renders it meaningful, experiences it through its sense of self in the external environment, and shares its subjectivity with others” (Kelly 272). The introduction of the lifeworld and intersubjectivity were initially inspired by Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology; he posited that the foundation of phenomenology had been considered under the sciences but occluded subjective experience in knowledge making (Vargas 418). The Enlightenment posited that people could arrive at truths through reason and the scientific method; however, Husserl was convinced that the scientific approach should consider that reality was not an objective experience. During the Vienna Circle (1922-1936),
Husserl prompted a discussion of the “excessive formalization of the language of Science, drifting apart from human experience…this formalization that operates with models and in mathematical language does not represent real phenomena and converts knowledge into an objectivist process” (Vargas 418). Although Husserl had done justice to the field of Phenomenology by raising awareness of a shortcoming, providing a solution was another obstacle. The sciences can place things in empirical data, but how do you measure or center knowledge around subjective experience and consciousness?

To advance these questions and address the gaps, Austrian philosopher and social phenomenologist Alfred Schutz advances the questions and addresses the gaps Husserl posed within his research. One of Schutz’s published works, *The Phenomenology of Social World* (1967), illustrates his interest in how an individual becomes integrated into larger social systems, the importance of language and symbols in communication, and intersubjectivity to develop structures of consciousness that organize the social world (Vargas 419).

Because our perceptions remain our own, and they are the only things we come to know and understand, these direct experiences constitute our inner lifeworld, which is surrounded by events and people that are relevant to us. To put things more concretely:

“events or people [relevant to us] may be thought of as a series of concentric rings around the subjective self… these rings of relevance as metaphorically occupying a lateral plane. Then, conceptualize the generative models described by neuroscience as occupying a vertical plane crossing in the lifeworld. The higher level models operate at the social level and are derived from the social practices the person engages in” (Kelly 272).

The lifeworld is a web between all people that constitutes our social world. It is
cultural life because it is “made of meanings, symbols that we constantly interpret and institute through our actions; hence, it is space where life views, habits, values, customs, institutions form and solidify” (Vargas 420). An essential component of the formation of the lifeworld is *intersubjectivity*. Intersubjectivity is where social relations are built since life worlds are built as a public experience. Through coexisting, individuals confirm prior knowledge of navigating themselves throughout the world or adjust it to subsequent experiences to reform their understanding. In short, intersubjectivity is the “simultaneous expression of both poles of experiential tension, the individual-subjective and the social-objective, that happen in the making of the social world,” which is another assertion of the Theory of Mind (Vargas 423).

Through a negotiation of personal autonomy and social permeability using Theory of Mind, people create and expand their lifeworlds until they reach a unitary agreement of norms that constitutes “reality” and explains the process for the inclination of coherence. Examples such as Sir Bradshaw, Lady Bruton, and Dr. Holmes hold their own conceptions of a lifeworld that are forced onto individuals who do not follow until they cave under society’s pressure — such as what occurred to Septimus Smith. This motivation for unity gives birth to hierarchical social structures and tidy remedies such as “proportion” to ease interpersonal conflict since intersubjectivity has an influence on lifeworlds and vice versa indicating that hierarchical status is not only exclusive to the actions of a single agent, but it relies heavily on the reputation decided by the masses of others enforcing “multidimensional, largely context or group dependent, and self-reinforcing” power structures (Koski 04). Furthermore, those who reside at the apex of society are usually never found co-mingling with the lower levels. In contrast, people in lower stratifications strive for upward mobility because the position of an individual in this imaginary stratification is proportional to their quality of life. Those considered to be the
“elite” of society understand that their excellence opens doors, and they hold the influence of public opinion. By contrast, those of lower social stratification are burdened with a connotation of inferiority and face a life of isolation, humility, and degradation. Although the unethical stance of class stratification is apparent, it remains one of the most upheld because it is highly motivated by fear of isolation.

People practice T.O.M. to feel connected to part of a larger scheme and retain a sense of purpose. The excellence of Mrs. Dalloway comes through how unabashed it exposes the vulnerabilities of humanity and the ease of their crumbling existence through loneliness. A common denominator that most people do not take note of is that regardless of class and wealth, loneliness is a universal human experience: “Clarissa because of her experience of hatred and fear of death; Septimus because of the death of his friend Evans in the war; and Peter because of Clarissa's rejection” (Blanchard 301). When confronted with this potential void of existence, how do the characters of Mrs. Dalloway impose their Lifeworlds, and how do their Lifeworlds assert a reality?
V. Clarissa’s party: A Web of Social Relationships

Spanning twenty-four hours, the novel begins by following Mrs. Dalloway collecting flowers for her party until the climatic overture of the party itself. Her lifeworld has been dedicated to becoming the perfect hostess: a conduit of business, networking, and opportunity for her husband – a respectable man in a position of Parliament. Clarissa is pleased about her performative art of hostessing and desires to do it well. Nevertheless, these “frivolous” concerns regarding her dinner parties have been a source of criticism from the sardonic Peter Walsh. Peter had always despised Clarissa’s vanity and superficiality for the affairs she had placed her energy into.

She seemed to not care about the matters of political culture, and she was lackluster in sharpening her skills:

“And people would say, ‘Clarissa Dalloway is spoilt.’ She cared much more about her roses than for the Armenians. Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen, the victims of cruelty and injustice (she heard Richard say so over and over again) – no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? But she loved her roses” (Mrs. Dalloway 120).

This internal dialogue, paired with the exclusivity of her guest list, reveals that the intersubjectivity of her immediate domain with persons such as Hugh Whitbread, The Bradshaws, and Lady Bruton, has influenced Clarissa into believing that her desire to remain an active member amongst these “important figures” that envelop proportion. Considering that her husband Richard is also an active member of Parliament, the tension between maintaining an appearance that matches and compliments her husband’s, such as a hostess, was a narrative she had built her entire life around. But the reader begins to empathize with Peter’s frustrations as
the novel progresses — the Clarissa that was stuck mending her dress on the afternoon before her party was an insincere copy. Beyond this illusion of conformity, Peter recognizes Clarissa’s overwhelming love for life, and her desire to illuminate it once more.

For this reason, she adores stopping and thinking profoundly about the simple elegance and appreciation for flowers. The intentions behind the party, although executed apathetically, remain noble. The party had a more symbolic meaning for Clarissa:

“[I]n her mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pit; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?” (Mrs. Dalloway 122).

The final question, which Clarissa never formally answered, reveals her cultural awareness. London during the twentieth century is documented as a period of abolishing orthodox Victorian traditions and pivoting into an era of radicalism, searching for alternatives to create a new way of life. Literature also reflected the shift from the realist movement into modernism within the early 1920’s post-World War. Modernism extended the relationship between artists and the representation of reality, implying a reposition of “past artistic conventions which created a literature of crisis and dislocation, desperately trying to shape the new world” (Griesinger 120). The characters attempt to impose order in this new era of society, yet subconsciously, they are at a loss in their attempts to navigate through angst and existentialism. Life has suffered an epidemic of disillusionment after the war, and people in London are attempting to rebuild and recover from the physical damage and their spirits. Clarissa’s party is her contribution as a spiritual remedy.
VI. The Woman on the Periphery of Society

In contrast to the world of Clarissa Dalloway and perpetuating an aristocratic reputation, how do characters’ lifeworlds within the periphery of society form? How do they continue to generate purpose in the face of isolation? Although a minor character in the novel, Rezia’s lifeworld should not be excluded since her existence is synonymous with solitude. After having married Septimus Smith and immigrating to England from her community in Italy, she had been preeminently set up for a vacancy in familiar support. While Septimus undergoes episodes of dissociation due to his shell shock, Rezia undergoes desolation. Her marriage to Septimus began promising as he was a figure of admiration and stability. He was able to offer her an experience far different than she would find in her hometown, and this initial impression allowed her to confide in Septimus anything and everything, striking gold in the beautiful unfolding of love and understanding that come rare in relationships. After four or five years deep into their marriage, alongside the worsening of Septimus’s PTSD, society’s remedy was to keep the once admirable Septimus within the outskirts and Rezia along with him.

Rezia often reminisces about her life back home, yearning for the familiar touch of unity, but now, “[f]ar was Italy and the white houses and the room where her sisters sat making hats, and the streets crowded every evening with people walking, laughing out loud, not half alive people like here” (Mrs. Dalloway 23). Her assimilation in London had been poor as most of her association with Septimus had repudiated her chances of camaraderie; with sadness, she takes note of “the English people, with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way; but they were “people” now because Septimus had said “I will kill myself”’ (Mrs. Dalloway 15-16). Although Rezia is in awe of everyone in society, those that witness the uncanny pair in Regents Park do not share the same sentiment: “Both seemed queer... and now
how queer it was, this couple she had asked the way of, and the girl started and jerked her hand and the man – he seemed awfully odd; quarreling perhaps; parting for ever, perhaps…” (Mrs. Dalloway 26). Although both are bounded by marriage, the chasm in their marriage is not due to physical distance but because both members of the party are no longer connected to what is in front of them. Septimus has been consumed by humanity’s sadism and advocates for Rezia to commit suicide alongside him to escape it altogether. Rezia is lost in memories of her previous life in Milan, her nostalgia provides the faux comforts of a time when everything was better. For the present only held her being “surrounded by the enormous trees, vast clouds of an indifferent world, exposed, tortured; and why should she suffer? Why?” (Mrs. Dalloway 65). And it is through their own silent way, they are “parting forever” (Mrs. Dalloway 26).

However, suffering is not sustainable, yet Rezia refrains from joining Septimus in his death. Her isolation allows her to cling to anything with slight meaning attributing to her propensity for delirium, “[she] had given meanings to things that happened, almost felt sometimes that she must stop people in the street, if they looked good, kind people, just to say to them ‘I am unhappy’ and this old woman singing in the street ‘if someone should see, what matter they?’ made her suddenly quite sure that everything was going to be right” (Mrs. Dalloway 83). Her relief came from adhering to small coincidences to give her existence significance. She prays that her pleas won’t go in vain and that someone or something out there lends a benevolent ear. That someone or something of a gracious nature can release her from her isolation by acknowledging her sadness, then maybe things will be okay for one more day, and perhaps the rest of her days in the grand hopes to defy her previous notion that “[t]o love makes one solitary” (Mrs. Dalloway 23).
In addition to the narrative of Rezia, one of Woolf’s cruelest actions was the creation of Miss Kilman. Miss Kilman, an object of Clarissa’s disgust, is laid out on the sidelines because of her “ugly” appearance and her opposition to popular discourse for claiming that not all Germans were wicked. She had been fired from her previous position at Miss Dolby’s school when the War came, and they had decided that Miss Kilman would be happier “with people who shared her views about the Germans” (Mrs. Dalloway 123). However, she remains well-educated and puts her best foot forward as a working woman. These were far different from the concerns of Clarissa Dalloway who judged her for being “over forty; and did not, after all, dress to please. She was poor, moreover; degradingly poor” (Mrs. Dalloway 123). But regardless of these virtues, a person's agency is not enough to determine their social standing, and academic excellence was not a golden ticket for women in that era – beauty was of higher concern. It is the spite revolving around these superficial matters that had made Miss Kilman equally despise the woman that perpetuated it such as Clarissa: “She had been merely condescending. She came from the worthless of all classes —the rich, with a smattering of culture” (Mrs. Dalloway 123). But to no avail of her resentment, Miss Kilman still faces the prejudices of those around her.

Relating this to T.O.M and intersubjectivity, at a neurological level, Bayesian integration can explain why people behave the way they do and form these judgments. Bayesian integration, or Bayesian inference is predominant in the field of statistics and probability that provides a range of estimates with various plausibilities associated with them (Etz & Vandekerckhove 5). The implications of neuroscience come from the Bayesian Coding Hypothesis, a two-fold hypothesis claiming, “[t]he brain performs Bayesian inference to enable us to make judgments and guide action in the world... and [t]he brain represents sensory information in the form of probability distributions” (Colombo and Seriès 700). In short, the function of Bayesian modeling
generates predictive processing based on prior knowledge and previous probabilistic models encoded through the nervous system when encountering uncertain situations (Colombo and Seriès 698). Guided by previous research from Ernst and Banks (2002), their driving research questions were to understand if Bayesian models can be used within theoretical neuroscience to explain if “human observers behave as optimal Bayesian observers...and to assess the link drawn between behavioral evidence and the Bayesian coding hypothesis (Colombo and Seriès 700).

The experiment consisted of subjects required to make discrimination judgments by visually judging which of the two ridges was taller when presented sequentially. The study's results revealed that the subjects’ performance was similar to Bayesian integration and prediction, leading them to respond optimally.

“The [P]erception”, Colombo and Seriès conclude, “is Bayesian inference...the computing of set beliefs about the state of the world given sensory input...” (704). It is then our role to acknowledge that “Bayesian models are used as tools for predicting, systematizing and classifying statements about people's observable performance. Hence, claims about perception as Bayesian inference should be interpreted within an instrumentalist framework” (Colombo and Seriès 705). This notion of predictive processing takes on a sociological level through the constructs of social etiquette within discrete axes of social differences, which intersect and create a rich and nuanced web of social life in any given society or culture. In order to maneuver through these multiplicities of intersections, the brain forms typifications for people to employ habitually.

Nevertheless, these remain variable following the complex networks of power, discrimination, or disadvantages they experience in their lifeworlds (Kelly 273). In Miss
Kilman’s case, the beauty and affability of a woman is an indicator of status, which dooms Miss Kilman. Her awareness of this injustice has generated a bitter heart:

“She had been cheated. Yes, the word was no exaggeration, for surely a girl has a right to some kind of happiness” (Mrs. Dalloway 123). The sheer brutality of society had been condensed and personified through Clarissa’s Dalloway treatment towards Miss Kilman “Ugly, clumsy, Clarissa Dalloway had laughed at her for being that” (Mrs. Dalloway 128). This lack of empathy is not a novel phenomenon. Studies conducted by Galinsky et al. (2006) showed that members in the higher tiers of the social hierarchy were primed to feel high power and less likely to adopt another individual’s perspective. This suggests that individuals with elitist status might fail to understand the perspectives, intentions, and emotions of others and, as a result, make poor moral decisions (Koski 12). Clarissa typically battles through making ethically questionable decisions, even if her intentions are in the right place, but the “women in the novel compete in the realm of personal relationship[s]” (Blanchard 299). This can explain Clarissa’s persecution of Miss Kilman; the affections and time of her daughter, Elizabeth, are spent with Miss Kilman instead of her mother. This is enough to spark grounds of jealousy. But Clarissa remains unaware that apart from these occasional meetings with Elizabeth, Miss Kilman does not have much to rely on to prove her existence is meaningful. She does so through her daily comforts, “[h]er dinner, her tea; her hot water bottle at night. But one must fight; vanquish; have faith in God” (Mrs. Dalloway 129). And it is God to whom Miss Kilman ultimately turned to self-soothe as she convinces herself that you cannot possibly feel lonely in a room full of God. So when Clarissa Dalloway laughs in her face, and the feelings of hatred and fury begin to boil, “she thought of God” (Mrs. Dalloway 124). How can the tenacity for religion be explained from a cognitive neuroscience perspective?
Although science and religion seem to be binary oppositions – one being empirical and the other a doctrine, the branch of neurotheology understands that these are products of the human mind and are intimately linked to foster understanding between these links (Newberg 3-4). From a neuro-theological perspective, an essential element of religion is the experience of a “transcendent feeling of the divine and a feeling of ‘absolute dependence’... on the divine” (Newberg 72). Self-transcendence refers to an individual’s identification of a unified whole. Research has shown that the brain’s right hemisphere can perceive concepts holistically rather than its parts – cells and organs comprise the wholeness of the human body. On a macroscopic scale, intertwining this concept with theology or spiritualism, the concept of absolute oneness pertains to God, and everyone is a node of connectivity to this ultimate being (Sayadmansour 53). Miss Kilman's means of coherence relies on a system of thoughts and behaviors that orient her and reconnect with a cosmic scale to sublimate the fact that she remains ostracized from her immediate surroundings. In her mind, God is omnipresent, and regardless of the cruelty she experiences, his watchful eye allows her to respond with love.
VII. The Embodiment of Madness: Septimus Smith

The discussion has probed the lifeworlds of Clarissa Dalloway, Rezia Smith, and Miss Kilman to exemplify the result of T.O.M and intersubjectivity in evaluating and creating their modes of coherence. Admittedly, these characters seem to remain victims of the circumstances presented and continue to play that role by finding coping mechanisms to provide them with a sense of purpose. However, one character in the novel does not share the same insights with other people and suffers from an incoherent lifeworld that entirely abolishes all domains of social convention: Septimus Smith. Septimus had undergone horrors beyond comprehension during his service in World War I. This led to a reconfiguration of his initial impressions on humanity. Within the context of Septimus and those like him, war was foreign to men as young as sixteen years old who were drafted in with the pretense of a coming-of-age expedition. However, wartime opened Pandora’s box of carnal mutilation and psychological torment, leaving a generation of mothers without their sons. The psychological aftermath of those who returned from war included a pessimistic worldview following symptoms of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although at the time of publication there was no formal manual that described the ramifications of PTSD (called “shell-shock”), Post-traumatic stress disorder “is a psychiatric syndrome that develops after exposure to terrifying and life-threatening events including warfare, motor vehicle accidents, and physical and sexual assault… and is underscored by negative emotionality to cognitive functioning” (Hayes et al. 1).

Based on contemporary research published in the DSM-V, PTSD has been divided into three symptom clusters labeled B, C, and D. Cluster B “involves unwanted recollections of the traumatic event, intrusive memories of the event, and dissociative flashbacks” (Hayes et al.
During his strolls with Rezia, the beauty of the park rapidly evolves into “some horror [that] had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames… The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames” (Mrs. Dalloway 15). Furthermore, he undergoes intense hallucinatory episodes where he sees his dear friend Evans, who was killed during the war, “There was his hand, there the dead… Evans was behind the railings!” (Mrs. Dalloway 25). These manic symptoms become a stressor that frightens and disrupts his daily life while he drifts farther into a reality of his own, incongruous with the rest of society. In addition, Cluster C indirectly involves isolation: the need to avoid people, places, and activities that can trigger any reminder of the traumatic event, emotional numbing, difficulty experiencing a full range of emotions, and “diminished expectations of one’s ability to lead a long, fulfilling life” (Hayes et al. 2). Cluster D involves symptoms of “hyperarousal including difficulty with sleep, irritability and anger, poor concentration, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle response” (Hayes et al. 2). The novel notes these symptoms of irritability and hyperarousal through Septimus’s interactions with Rezia.

During one of his hallucinations of Evans, Rezia calls out to him, disrupting his inner world, “Interrupted again! She was always interrupting. Away from people – they must get away from people, he said (jumping up)...” (P.25). During these manic episodes Rezia and Septimus both agree to usher themselves into the forgotten corners of society. Rezia burns with shame as she does not want anyone to bear witness to the insanity, but Septimus's insights hold some profound truths which he calls “revelations”. One of the most lasting revelations was, “He would argue with her about killing themselves and explain how wicked people were; how he could see them making up lies as they passed in the street. He knew all their thoughts, he said; he knew everything” (Mrs. Dalloway 66). Septimus sees beyond the symbolic and imaginary
representations of people, past their masks and their falsities to virtue signals that make up their reality. The real intention behind the words they produced never surfaced; their true desires were never fulfilled; society was an infestation of empty vessels seeking validation from their neighbor. After these evaluations and discovering Septimus’s general distrust, his grand solution was to reject it altogether.
VIII. “Proportion”

Although Virginia Woolf asked profound questions of identity and criticized social systems through *Mrs. Dalloway*, she also raised awareness of the aftermath of unassuming young men who were pawns of a wartime agenda exposed to surreal levels of brutality through the characterization of Septimus. Woolf then exposes the callous attitude of the general population towards these lost individuals. Society does not want to be burdened with the responsibility and the scandal of madness they have catalyzed. Honestly, society does not even want to be reminded of it. This matter has been previously deliberated in *Madness and Civilization* (1961) by Michel Foucault. Foucault emphasizes that the “insane” pertained to the world of confinement (66). Anytime they were placed in the public eye, those labeled “mad” were the “object of the attention and curiosity of a frivolous, irresponsible, and often vicious public. The bizarre attitudes of these unfortunates and their condition provoked the mocking laughter and the insulting pity of the spectators” (Foucault 69). It seems convenient for people to spare themselves from the reality of torment and avoid addressing the psychological aftermath of warfare by incarcerating them in the periphery of cities with no means to find a solution. Prior to the seventeenth century, the discourse in addressing “evil” (in the context of Foucault’s text) was found to be most effectively dealt with by bringing it open to public discourse. It was believed that righteousness could overturn the darkness from which evil issued (Foucault 67). However, this is not to say that the case of Septimus Smith was due to any underlying vile motives. This is to say that the core issue was never addressed as a society, and the darkness that resides in the heart based upon power and greed had instigated warfare and an era of despair. Septimus was collateral damage, which society preferred not to be reminded of.
The inspiration behind Septimus Smith was Virginia Woolf’s reading of Mr. Hyde: both disavowed in the public domain (although we have to distinguish that Septimus, by virtue, is a victim of circumstance rather than evil). In one of Woolf’s journal entries for October 14, 1922, she admitted that she was split between the characters Clarissa and Septimus in “order to convey the proximity in human experience between the sane and the insane” (Griesinger 452). Woolf felt suspended between her inner conflicts: Clarissa always sought the beauty in the mundane, and Septimus held a cosmic paranoia. Nevertheless, the lore behind Septimus’s character development reveals a rich history. He had Byronically indulged in romantic and Shakespearean literature, suggesting that his life with Rezia perhaps was rose-colored. After the slaughter of war and the loss of his dear friend Evan, he was proud of his jaded reaction towards his death as this was conflated with the idea of what it meant to be a “man”. The suffocation of emotion in the face of tragedy was regarded as stoic, and with an audience in the backdrop, he was inclined to keep performing. Instead, this suffocation did not achieve any achievement of making peace with this intensity of despair; instead, a void manifested in the nucleus itself, resulting in madness.

The cure for the case of Septimus Smith was administered by the walking incarnate of unsympathetic accord: Dr. Holmes. Holmes had a superficial medical practice that only tended to external wounds rather than internal impediments. Instead of administering care for the patient’s PTSD, his unethical approach was never meant to “cure”. Instead, he invoked the useless remedy of proportion:

“Proportion; order rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months’ rest until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve” (Mrs. Dalloway 99).
Holmes’s desire to pursue medicine was not to advance human understanding but to preach an authoritarian role and gain financial success. His thoughts on Septimus and those alike are that they are a nuisance to society. It is easier to place a bandaid on the issue through social conversion and law (Blanchard 298). Moreover, Holmes is only part of the equation that adds to the anguish of people like Septimus. It is characters like Lady Bruton with her military instincts and Sir William Bradshaw with his sense of proportion that destroys the personality it attempts to control, “these are the established agents of conversion who conspire to turn the whole world grey” (Blanchard 298). Septimus felt that the only reasonable cure to an insane society is through suicide, preferring death of this physical plane rather than the death of his soul under the submission to proportion.
IX. **London as a Structure for Imposing Order**

So far in the thesis, we have covered T.O.M., introduced Husserlian phenomenology, and Schutz’s contributions to lifeworld and intersubjectivity. However, one final component is the introduction of the social being through external organizing principles. One of the most common organizing materials is language “as the medium used to divide-share the understanding of the lifeworld and contain[s] the typifications used to comprehend and be in the lifeworld” (Vargas 422). Additionally, language defines space-time boundaries and is a principal instrument that holds the power to grant meaning to objects within the lifeworld. In a context defined by language, the city of London is a similar external organizing principle. It is a product of expansive machination caused by intersubjectivity for people to be relieved of the burden of creating habituating order and instead follow the ebb and flow. Most of the characters in the novel maintain their citizen role without protest. Clarissa, for instance, is socially absorbed and likes to maintain social connections, while her husband Richard cements her approach through his “conventional respect for tradition and continuity” (Beker 381). Engrossed in the daily politics and sociability of the town, their involvement advocates for the face of London as a powerhouse pumping adrenaline and triumph as it rebuilt itself in all post-World-War ardor. Virginia Woolf also chimes her thoughts on London in her novel, *A Room of One’s Own;* “London was like a machine. We were all being shot backward and forwards on this plain foundation to make a pattern”(26). Regents Park acts as the nucleus of the city. People stroll or pass by, creating an invisible social web where the characters’ lives intersect: Septimus and Lucrezia sitting stolidly, the strolls of Hugh Whitbread, and the aimless wanderings of Peter Walsh reliving his past romance with Clarissa.
Using the analogy of language to relate to cognitive neuroscience, these external structures give rise and solidify *typifications* as passive associations operating in the natural attitude of the lifeworld and the awareness of the wide-awake person encountering others (and himself) in everyday life (Vargas 420). In the case of language, the formation of typifications is through the shared subjectivity with others to comprehend lifeworlds. These shared stocks of knowledge account for the comprehension and creation of the lifeworld, which supports “deliberate, organized meanings proper to the administration and implementation of day-to-day living” (Vargas 420). The formation of an epicenter, such as London, is the result of all its inhabitants forming typifications of geographical landmarks such as Regents Park, shops, bus stops, and Piccadilly Square and proceed with human activities that interest us without incessantly having to navigate over unfamiliar stimuli. In addition, London hosts the superimposed Big Ben, which influences time-space sovereignty and dictates the lives of its inhabitants. Although most day-to-day duties require us to be proactive in physical space-time, characters often lose touch with reality as they concern themselves with flashbacks, inner dialogue, memories, or daydreams. This comes to a halt when the hourly chimes of Big Ben prompt a return to reality. Big Ben is a cataclysmic agent that serves as a reference to “time and life itself” (Richter 239) and can influence subjective consciousness and *psychological time* (Watanabe 68). The organization of the outside world informs the internal organization of the inside world – that is why the toll of Big Ben had summoned “the old lady [to] move away from the window as if she were attached to that sound, that string... She was forced, so Clarissa imagined, by that sound, to move, to go...” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 127). People have quantified time through a series of twelve numbers further divided by minutes and seconds... so regardless of what joy or tragedy people face, time remains indifferent and will continue to pass. Through
having the superstructure of Big Ben, people have created an analogous prophet for the deity of time. Time has the most considerable following, along with its emblems of wristwatches, pocket watches, timers, and alarms. Time is ubiquitous, and its influence is heavy because we have deemed it necessary to establish high order. But, sometimes the hours can be suffocating due to its infallibility that contrasts human’s fallibility leading to that expression that keeps us all in a chokehold: “There isn’t enough time!”

After evaluating the physical aspects of how London imposes coherence, London also holds a collective spirit of patriotism. For supporting context, Mrs. Dalloway is set for June 1923– five years following the First World War (1914-1918). The bustling streets of London and its citizens have slowly let out sighs of release; the city “time and again...reveals how the myriad anxieties and overwhelming grief of the war were etched into every aspect of post-war life” (Bradshaw). The characters cling to national emblems that symbolize London’s endurance during turbulent times to relieve these anxieties. For instance, the characters are drawn into a collective sublimity because they assume the presence of the Queen in the streets: “people who might now, for the first and last time, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time...”(Mrs. Dalloway 16). Her majesty is only a figurehead of worship for those fragmented lives gathered by a unitary symbolic frame of reference (Beker 375). The Queen's authority is purely an effigy to the background executive decision-making of Parliament. People’s loyalty to her is a testament to the chokehold desperation of a nation constantly attempting to put hope into object space to minimize their angst. The entire spectacle is satirized through the “ruffling... faces in both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for the Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face had been seen only once by three people for a few
seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute” (Mrs. Dalloway 16). The novel exemplifies uniquely human qualities. We attach emotion, memory, fault, and motivations to objects or ideologies. This results in the pleasure of alleviating accountability or establishing a sense of purpose as a response to humanity’s avoidant behavior and the possibility that their lives are meaningless.
X. Spiritual Transcendence

So far, the discussion has covered how humans overcome isolation and prove their desire for sociability by creating lifeworlds as a means for coherence and the active operation of T.O.M. and intersubjectivity. These concepts illustrate a uniquely human quality of emotional and cognitive attachment to external entities or ideologies to alleviate the pressure of falling into isolation and idle existence. In addition, a prevalent topic within the novel that adds to the discussion is the theme of spiritual transcendence.

Although adjacent to the discussion, spiritual transcendence is not to be confused with the Transcendentalism movement of the Early 19th century with influences of Emerson and Thoreau. For this discussion, spirituality is a “transcendent dimension within human experience…discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context.” (Piotrowski 470). Furthermore, it is important to note that the context of the definition can vary, common elements remain in a search for unity and for meaning (Piotrowski 470).

Alongside spirituality, order and codes of virtue are typically preached through the dogmas of religion. However, Mrs. Dalloway has made Clarissa’s agnostic beliefs evident to the reader, especially with her sister’s fatal passing. She finds the practice of piety amusing, especially in the face of Miss Kilman, and is not subject to the idea that righteousness is achieved through prayer. Her moral code is succinctly summarized as: “She evolved this atheist’s religion of doing good for the sake of goodness” (Mrs. Dalloway 78). Her consideration of doing “good” means gathering those around her to rejoice in life. It is plausible to assume that Clarissa throws these festivities to assuage this primordial fear of death. Throughout the novel, Clarissa realizes
that her aging has finally reached her, and she cannot escape the confines of an eventual death. Clarissa employs classic Freudian defense mechanisms to counteract this to reach a psychical compromise for unresolvable conflicts. The subconscious anxieties, such as death or libidinal frustration, bubble into neurosis if left unresolved. The efforts of the ego to assuage these anxieties are employed through defense mechanisms: repression, reaction formation, sublimation, denial, and rationalization. In this case, Clarissa justifies her parties through reaction formation: “[r]eplacing one’s initial impulse toward a situation or idea with the opposite impulse.” (Bailey). After all, the way we die reflects how we have lived, and by filling the empty halls with beating hearts and conversation, we can say that filling a room with life is enough to ward off the grim reaper. Although a tempting argument, it is apparent that Clarissa's motives stem from a love of life and a desire for freedom rather than motivated by fear:

“Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely? All this must go on without her; did she resent it, or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?” (Mrs. Dalloway 9).

Her fear is not death. Death is an escape from the constraints of high society. Instead, her angst comes from owning a life never lived fully, and genuine autonomy is never granted. The reader follows along the same presuppositions that Clarissa follows since the beginning line of the novel, “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (Mrs. Dalloway 3). Strategically placed, the reader falls into the same illusion as the characters in the novel. There is a reduction of Clarissa’s identity into ownership of her husband which enables her defeatist attitude toward life at the novel's beginning as she significantly loses her self-esteem by not being invited to Lady Bruton’s luncheon. She began to acknowledge a self-perceived feebleness that came with age and illness. As she ascended the stairs to her bedchamber, she solemnly felt
“suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless…” (Mrs. Dalloway 31), leaving her with low spirits and retiring into a metaphorical deathbed. The reaction formula is employed by going against the grain of her true desires as she clings to the frivolous: the flowers, the silk, the invitations, and Lady Bruton's luncheon. It is a result of these limiting beliefs we impose on ourselves that form a false image that imprisons our soul.
XI. The Unity of Septimus and Clarissa as a Catalyst for Spiritual Transcendence

The imprisonment of the soul is a censored yet universal vulnerability that all humans empathize with. However, Clarissa embodies human resilience that overcomes this vulnerability through her spiritual curiosity and dramatic overturn which occurs at her party. When Clarissa overhears Bradshaw mentioning the suicide of Septimus Smith, she is momentarily appalled at the impropriety of such a topic at a party. However, she is quick to reevaluate the reason behind why this topic is so discerning. Death is a natural part of life but remains taboo in public discourse. Then, clairvoyantly, she witnesses Septimus’s death:

“Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from the window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes” (Mrs. Dalloway 184).

Naturally, her mind echoed with why. Why did he do it? The confusion lay in the “treasure” that Septimus held and discarded – his life, his soul. All at once, it was understood that the reason for Septimus’s death was Clarissa’s “disaster – her disgrace” (Mrs. Dalloway 185). Death’s finality has been deemed a tragedy for those who wish to continue a legacy and a connection. But Septimus's death defied this assumption by enacting it as a moment of revelation and communication to Clarissa. “Death was defiance” (Mrs. Dalloway 184).

Moreover, at that moment, a transference has occurred within the mind of Clarissa Dalloway. The moment marked the epiphany that life is fragile and hanging by a thread – so much remains at risk. What matters? It begins by asking, “human beings – what did they want?” (Mrs. Dalloway 149). What does it all mean? Clarissa exercises human traditions of inquiry and
creation as a facet of understanding the world. This is an “important dimension of exploring meaning [that] involve[s] understanding these traditions and… one's quest for meaning and ways to live” (Bailin 229). Clarissa realized her discontent with all her life’s choices, and she had been empathetic of the stoic route that Septimus had decided, but she would not follow suit. So what does that leave?

She then observed the life of her once free-spirited and dear friend, Sally Seton. Sally’s arrival at the party was marked with a noticeable loss of illumination in her spirit; [h]er eyes were wrung of its old ravishing richness; her eyes not aglow as they used to be, when she smoked cigars, when she ran down the passage to fetch her sponge bag” (Mrs. Dalloway 181). The homicide of her luminance was catalyzed by her unfulfilling marriage to a “bald man with a large buttonhole” (Mrs. Dalloway 182) and having five children. Her love for the spotlight and composition of her narrative had closed its curtain, and she exited the center stage of her autonomy. This moment was ironic due to her dissonance of being an audience member to a “wonderful play about a man who scratches on the wall of his cell, and she had felt that was true of life – one scratched on the wall. Despairing human relationships” (Mrs. Dalloway 192). Then, two conclusions were formed that evening: convention is the martyrdom of the soul, and death is defiance.

However, death is also instant gratification; death is circumventing the pain and potential for what could become and what a person can create. Clarissa does not seek defiance. Clarissa seeks to rise above it. Clarissa realizes what is important. What matters? Her answers lie in being an absolute sovereign of your life regardless of convention. Her spiritualism extends to understand the meaning of life through these shared experiences while enabling a view that looks “beyond man - to nature, the environment, the totality of things, the unknown, the ideal, the
ever-receding ‘something more’ which give transcendence to human experience” (Bailin 227). From a cognitive perspective, akin to the development of lifeworlds, spiritual transcendence brings T.O.M. into service to generate meaning and overcome isolation. Purpose has been argued to be a public matter embedded into the shared through language and way of life, and although a proponent of it requires an inward facet, it also requires “concern for that which lies outside of me” (Bailin 229). This moment of clarity negates the solitary existence, and everything remains in unison, blooming appreciation for the most essential thing in life– the sacred soul (Kapleau 22). With this revelation, she decides to rejoin the party, where Richard, Peter, and Sally are waiting.

Upon her return, Clarissa’s presence is illuminated as a catalyst for reviving humanity by enabling a time and location for the congregation of people in the past and present. A party is a dedication to the host and a reminder of the rich web of narratives that go into a multifaceted and complex individual. There was a past before this moment, a moment (considered the present), and a future that remains uncertain. The party entertains a quantum wonder; people are in the state of superposition, past, present, or future, in the same object space. It remains a shame that the intentions of her party remain duly misunderstood by Miss Kilman, Peter Walsh, and the remainder of the population who serve as critics who go on to pity women such as Clarissa Dalloway because of their inability to penetrate beyond the superficial waters of equating soirees with secularism (although understandably, there is a layer of unnecessary consumption).

However, there are vital moments when Clarissa wants to transcend beyond the ego’s desire and escape her secular lifestyle. She seeks to be released from the limitations and restrictions of the chain of causation pressing upon her to be what seems like a predestined identity - Clarissa Dalloway. Due to the increasing strain of an individualistic society, the negotiations of identity
have enabled a separation of our entities with subjective experiences: “black and white, life and death, you and them” (Kapleau 22). The transcendence of one’s habitual psychological experiences and daily circumstances can triumph over the encumberment of one’s limitations, psychological distress, or physical suffering (Seidlitz 441).

Cognitively, aspects of spiritual transcendence refer “especially to the influence of spirituality on one's sense of meaning and purpose, and affective components center on feelings of fulfillment and spiritual communion” (Seidlitz 441). The dissolution of these dichotomies reveals that everyone remains one and the same on a single spectrum; we can find that the balance between these polarities leads to harmony and unity. Clarissa notes in the small moments:

“But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibers with his own body… all taken together meant the birth of a new religion” (Mrs. Dalloway 23).

This can explain why Clarissa, when pondering her death, desires her ashes to be scattered so that she can return to everything all at once; she refuses to perceive death as a vacuum and, instead, something far more expansive than life itself. Perhaps post-mortem and pre-birth, we experience a oneness of existence that has no room to distinguish the “I” in the presence of being and flow.
XII. Love: Prologue

Although the novel makes a lasting impression regarding the freedom of the soul, Woolf answers one final question, “human beings… What do they want?” *(Mrs. Dalloway 149).* Although spiritual transcendentalism has veered into the direction of autonomy of the soul, another common theme is overcoming this illusion of isolation through the creation of coherence – of absolute oneness. One of the most complex concepts people undergo to achieve unison transcends time and space yet manifests itself into everyone – love.
XIII. Peter and Clarissa

In the context of the novel, love has been an overarching theme, although it has been explicitly expressed at the very end. Clarissa gives an initial impression of contentment and gratitude for her comfortable life owed to her husband, Richard Dalloway. Their marriage seems to be bound loosely, with each person acknowledging their independence during the waking hours only to regroup in the household through coexistence, “For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him” (Mrs. Dalloway 7-8). However, their marriage is not stale; instead, each member of the party is protective of the other. There remain many unspoken desires and misunderstandings of the type of life each would wish to have, but they remain a unit.

Partly, though, the decision for Clarissa's marriage to Richard Dalloway was one of convenience. Richard had assured Clarissa of everything she needed: a currency of materialism and comfort in exchange for her hand in matrimony. This is a standard narrative for those who engage in matrimony; the appeal of having a partner has shifted from romance to the safest economic outlook that ensures a stable quality of life. The novel reveals that the marriage between Clarissa and Dalloway has the potential to be compromised due to this noticeable dullness and platonic reciprocation. However, the audience is in no position to assign the blame to either one of them. On the contrary, Richard is admirable in his steadfastness, he is hard working at his government post, and is family-oriented. Clarissa shows loving devotion to her husband and his “adorable, divine simplicity, which no one had to the same extent” (Mrs.
Dalloway 120). They both have reached a period in their lives that resigns them to their circumstances as they experience the poetry of existence.

In addition, since the fateful night in the garden that announced the separation of Peter and Clarissa, each has been doing their best to continue life as they initially thought they had desired. Clarissa had married Richard as Peter had prophesied since the first day of his introduction to her life, and Peter went on an excursion to India. However, the truth had been buried under pride, for Clarissa had felt “she had been borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish…” (Mrs. Dalloway 8). During her youth, Clarissa refused to marry Peter because she believed in the limitation of their incompatibility regardless of the fortitude of their love. Clarissa was heavily concerned with the judgment of those around her. She realized that Peter would not be a stable partner or that he could become a respectable figure in London’s society. With this decision in mind, she makes peace with it by often saying to him “that she had been right not to marry Peter Walsh; which, knowing Clarissa, was true; she wanted support. Not that she was weak, but she wanted support.”(Mrs. Dalloway 117).

Since the novel's beginning, the reader has experienced Peter’s presence through Clarissa’s memories as she makes her way down the mundane tasks of London. Conflict arises upon Peter’s return to London from India, and he makes his eager way down to see Clarissa. The entire reunion is anxiety-inducing – more for Peter than Clarissa. Although the impromptu reunion stirs emotion within Clarissa, she manages to keep an aloof exterior while Peter stays loyal to his habit of fidgeting with a pocketknife. Most of the authentic conversation remains unspoken as both face paralleling feelings of inadequacy within each other’s presence. Clarissa feels inadequate due to her previous cowardice in living the life she truly wanted to live as she
continues to sit there “mending her dress; mending her dress as usual…for there is nothing in the world so bad for some women such as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a conservative husband, like the admirable Richard” (Mrs. Dalloway 41). Peter takes this resentment towards Clarissa’s feebleness with him for the rest of the day, trying to make sense of it: “For women live much more in the past than we do, he thought. They attach themselves to places…” (Mrs. Dalloway 55). On his part, Peter faces his inferiority and negative self-esteem because he is in the lavish establishment of the Dalloways serving as a reminder to remaining penniless and not having succeeded:

“And she would think me a failure, which I am in their sense, he thought; in the Dalloways’ sense” (Mrs. Dalloway 43).

The irony of the situation is that Peter and Clarissa, regardless of their paths are envious of the other person’s qualities, for they wish to echo that in themselves. However, reading between the lines, their standoffish attitudes are not solely accreditable to envy. Peter and Clarissa experience an inextricable catharsis when reunited. However, neither wants to admit their vulnerability since it has been decades of making amends for each other’s absence, despite the fact that they continue to remain very much on each other’s mind. Parallel to love is human yearning – yearning strengthens with the mental representations we create and carry of a loved one, even if it carries pain alongside it. Moreover, often, this is an inextricable feeling due to the euphoric nature of love. How does the existence of someone continue to manifest in the mind, even after they are gone?
XIV. Object Permanence Allows for a Yearning Heart

To address that earlier question, neuroscience lays the fundamental groundwork for exploring how love can be observed in the brain. It is said that the passion of love stirs exhilarating emotions described similarly to euphoria. The areas activated in response to these feelings contain “high concentrations of a neuro-modulator associated with reward, desire, addiction, and euphoric states, namely dopamine” (Zeki 2575). Both maternal and romantic love share a crucial evolutionary purpose of procreation and maintaining the species. In order to do so functionally, it requires that individuals stay together for a period of their lives as the brain creates rewarding experiences to ensure the formation of firm bonds between individuals (Zeki 2577). Through surveying the early years of infancy, researchers have noted the cognitive developments of forming mental representations of people. Before reaching eight months, infants live by the aphorism of “out of sight, out of mind”. To illustrate, if we place a toy under a blanket or in another room, it will lose its property of existence in object space as there is a failure to recognize that “objects continue to exist when occluded” (Baillargeon 1227). Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, who specialized in child development, had coined this phenomenon as object permanence. In layperson terms, it is the ability to understand that an object continues to exist even though it cannot be sensed (seen or heard). The development of object permanence is one of the primary steps for people to source other forms of symbolic representation and understanding. Through successfully unfolding object permanence within the sensorimotor stage of development, children can create mental representations of an object that is not actively present. This can foster memory development, pretend play, and language acquisition. Evolving these communication channels and inner autobiographical experiences (T.O.M.) allows for further progression of interpersonal subjectivity and expansion of their lifeworlds. Similar to
everything discussed in the thesis, such as the binding phenomenon and spirituality, it is a desire to overcome isolation. This explains why the natural inclination for humans to be a social species is to nurture connections for the potential of finding love.

However, object permanence can be an affliction in awry romantic circumstances. Similar to Clarissa and Peter, everyone must accept the knowledge that people continue to exist regardless of whether they remain part of your life. As Clarissa goes about her day, she frequently deals with Peter's mental intrusions:

“For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter, and his were dry sticks, but suddenly it would come over her, if he were with me now, what would he say? – Some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness; which perhaps was the reward of having cared for people; they came back in the middle of St. James's Park on a fine morning – indeed they did” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 7).

The body is a liminal zone between being at the service of the senses from allocentric information and navigating interoception such as memory. The formation of episodic memory concerns itself with the experiences of “subjective space and time”. It has a complex history of being traced back into neuronal connections due to nostalgic external stimuli (Tulving 67). The act of consciously recalling a personal experience is distinctive from other mental processes, such as daydreaming and imagining; there is an uncanny awareness of re-experiencing “here and now,” something that happened before (Tulving 68). Moreover, Clarissa is aware of that uncanny experience as she attempts to conceptualize it:

“There was a mystery about it. You were given a sharp, acute, uncomfortable grain – the actual meeting; horribly painful as often as not; yet in absence, in the most unlikely places, it would flower out, open, shed its feel of it and understanding, after years of lying lost” (*Mrs.
Having formed a symbolic representation of Peter Walsh, Clarissa attaches London’s backdrop as a reconstructing narrative for Peter Walsh to keep it alive. She remains aware of this defaulted tendency as a “reward of having cared for people” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 7). Clarissa Dalloway subscribes to a cosmic view of life in connection with the theme of transcendence. She avidly holds love as a fundamental life force and principle of nature that “puts everything into motion” (Cobham 149). Love is the foundation for the dinner party, of enjoying the view through the window of omnibuses, and why Peter Walsh remains in every street corner and fountain in London.
XV. Love

People often assume that believing love is the meaning of life is a daft interpretation due to its ambiguity. Scholars maintain their reservations and refrain from fully embracing it in academic realms due to its lack of objectivity to the degree which scientists desire to reproduce its effects through formulas and algorithms for those in the pursuit of it (i.e., modern-day smartphone applications used for finding potential matches and T.V. programs that hire contestants based on questionnaire responses utilizing the Likert scale). However, the mystique surrounding the aura of love is why it remains a cultural obsession. Philosophical understandings of love are ancient: Plato in one of his greatest works – Symposium, revealed that “love alone has the power to fix our brokenness, incompleteness and inevitable longing to be whole” (Zych 150). We can deduce that love holds tremendous amounts of potential energy and enables the capacity to make decisions that connect us to schemes greater than the individual self and, in so doing, can give us a sense of purpose (Cobham 150).

Furthermore, in Phaedrus, Plato comments on “the irrational desire that leads us toward the enjoyment of beauty and overpowers the judgment that directs us toward what is right, and that is victorious in leading us toward physical beauty when it is powerfully strengthened by the desires related to it, takes its name from this very strength and is called love” (Zeki 2577). Love’s irrationality is the source of inspiration to various writers who maintain their opinions on love based on their experience. For instance, Dostoyevsky claims, “I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love” (777) in his novel The Brothers Karamazov (1880) when he was asked “what is hell?” The absence of love is a root of suffering, it is a universal desire to love and be loved. Virginia Woolf was no stranger to romance either, especially considering the intensity of her romantic affair that is revealed in her letters to her lover, Vita Sackville-West:
“What can one say – except that I love you and I have got to live through this strange, quiet evening thinking of you sitting there alone. Dearest – let me have a line...You have given me such happiness” (West 161).

Love molds to the shape of the beholder and expresses itself through their strengths, which makes it an amalgamation of everything and everyone – which suggests why it is so difficult to define. Nevertheless, the commonality is that love has an intense life force for humans to reconcile with emotions that manifest into physical sensations and can propel them into action. Just for a moment, for the sake of the research and its application to *Mrs. Dalloway*, there will be an attempt to define love using the definition provided by the philosopher Simon May. May claims that love expresses what he calls “ontological rootedness”. *Ontology* is a study that deals with the nature of existence and the things we choose to channel our love into, whether it is ideas, art, people, knowledge, etc., that inspire that feeling of being present. Relating to its quality of irrationality, love persists past someone’s qualities of generosity, altruism, compassion, interest in our life and projects, and regardless of whether they value us. The overriding concern is to find a home for our life and being (Cobham 146). To explain how this occurs through a cognitive neuroscientific application, a small part of the brain known as the amygdala is engaged during fearful situations and is disengaged when subjects view pictures of their partners or during human male ejaculation; love provides an absolute sense of security (Zeki 2577). In addition, romantic love signals a suspension of judgment or relaxation of “judgmental criteria by which we assess other people, a function of the frontal cortex… along with the parietal cortex and parts of the temporal lobe, [which] has been commonly found to be involved in negative emotions” (Zeki 2577). This inactivation of brain regions in romantic and maternal states connects to Plato's observation of love's irrationality; when an individual remains deeply in love,
their cognitive defenses and critical judgments are lowered, leading them to take blind action. However, the same areas of the prefrontal cortex and the parietal-temporal junction contain networks that are active with “mentalizing’ or ‘Theory of Mind,’ that is, the ability to determine other people’s emotions and intentions” (Zeki 25777) from the perspective of May in finding “ontological rootedness” or what neurobiologist Zeki calls “unity-in-love” (Zeki 2577).

To achieve this so-called “unity”, a facet of mentalizing and using T.O.M. must be made inactive that distinguishes between self and the other due to the formation of critical judgment and instead develops a foundation of trust between individuals, resulting in the formation of deep bonds (Zeki 2577). This developed sense of security with an external being from ourselves gives justice to the soul for granting it freedom and authenticity, a home for our life and being. We see this experience when Peter Walsh describes his final happy moments with Clarissa, “He had twenty minutes of perfect happiness. Her voice, her laugh, her dress…her spirit, her adventurousness…And all the time, he knew perfectly well, Dalloway was falling in love with her; she was falling in love with Dalloway; but it didn't seem to matter. Nothing mattered. They sat on the ground and talked – he and Clarissa” (62-63).

In regards to Septimus Smith, the death of the soul came from having to adhere to a societal code of conduct; many people misconstrue self-improvement as a call to change themselves to belong somewhere and, in the end, face a bitter encumbrment of having to reapply a mask every morning. It is through love that people are able to subdue a similar fate; it is love that fosters an environment of encouraging individuals to accept that they already belong. Mrs. Dalloway poses a romantic tragedy lacking a concrete resolution as Woolf grips the reader with an impeccable job of describing longing and unrequited soulmates through Peter and Clarissa, but with much anticipation, the audience clings to the final lines of the novel where
Peter Walsh claims: “What is this terror? What is this ecstasy? He thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was” *Mrs. Dalloway* 194.
XVI. Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis has touched on three central sections of cognitive neuroscience: Theory of mind, the binding problem, and transcendentalism, with the extension of including love as a driving force of human passion. Traditionally, these lenses of analysis are used to derive a more introspective insight into *Mrs. Dalloway*. Instead, I intended to use the novel as an example of these real-world phenomena to contribute to understanding the larger context of life and bridging the gap between cognition and inextricable phenomena. What drives us? Why do we do what we do? Why is love so important? How does death play a role in our lives?

Although this thesis demonstrates understanding in the realm of the known and unknown, I remain humbled that I reside in the latter, as a limitation I have encountered is the attempt to format the unexplainable into terms supported by neuroscientific evidence. There is still so much pioneering in the field. I plan to address other areas of study, such as the impact of love on literature, the coding of memory, and its effects on developing an identity when memory remains fallible.

Virginia Woolf and her writings provide intricately crafted works that capture the multiplicity and nuance reflected in daily life. Cognition and literature work symbiotically in which human behavior motivates authors’ passion for its depiction through the arts, and the arts nourish the soul, which motivates human behavior. These three themes are united through an invisible thread of cultivating a rich inner world and constructing an individual.
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