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Silent Eloquence: Silence(s) in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

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ABSTRACT

Looking back in time, it could be perfectly asserted that “Virginia Woolf [was] the first woman novelist in Modernity to practice silence rather than speech” (Patricia Laurence Ondek, p. 1) and her lifelong fascination with the eloquence of silence is masterfully dealt with in her work. The aim of this thesis is to analyze the role of silence in her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway* following Patricia Ondek Laurence’s three-type division: the “unsaid”, the “unspoken” and the “unsayable”. In addition, I will suggest the possibility of a fourth silence which stems from the clash between the outer self and the inner self. For this I will use Lacan’s concept of the Symbolic and Kristeva’s notion of the Semiotic, as well as Butler’s argument of gender being performative. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the silence that I suggest might be resolved through Woolf’s concept of Androgyny; not a gender-obliterating individual, but rather a yin-rang relationship where both the external (masculine) and the internal (feminine) are balanced and in constant dialogue.

Key words: Woolf, Silence, Androgyny, Gender, Semiotic, Symbolic.

RESUMEN

Mirando atrás, bien podría afirmarse que Virginia Woolf fue la primera mujer novelista de la Modernidad en practicar el silencio más que las palabras (Patricia Ondek Laurence, p. 1) y cuya fascinación por la elocuencia del silencio se trata magistralmente en sus obras. El objetivo de esta tesis es analizar el papel que juega el silencio en su novela de 1925 *La Señora Dalloway*, siguiendo la división que Patricia Ondek Laurence establece entre los tres tipos de silencio: lo “no dicho”, lo “no verbalizado” y lo “indecible”. Asimismo, también sugiero la posible existencia de un cuarto silencio, resultado del choque entre el “yo interior” y el “yo externo”. Para ello, empleo el concepto del Simbólico de Jacques Lacan y el del Semiótico de Julia Kristeva, así como la idea de que el género es performativo, tal y como defiende Judith Butler. En *La Señora Dalloway*, el silencio que yo sugiero puede resolverse mediante el concepto de androginia definido por Virginia Woolf, es decir; no como la creación de un individuo sin género, sino como una relación de yin-yang en la cual lo externo (masculino) y lo interno (femenino) se encuentran en equilibrio y en diálogo constante.

Palabras Clave: Woolf, Silencio, Androginia, Género, Semiótico, Simbólico.

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHY SILENCE, MRS. WOOLF?

When Virginia Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own*, her process of research left her, in the least, unsettled. “Wherever one looked, men thought about women and thought differently” (Woolf, 1928/1972, p. 32).¹ Indeed, goes on Woolf, “if women had no existence save in fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance [...] when in fact [...] she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room” (*AROO*, p. 45). Women, Woolf realized, never wrote about their own lives and rarely kept diaries. History does not mention them, except for some queens here and there, “but by no possible means would middle-class women [...] have taken part in any one of the great movements which [...] constitute the historian’s view of the past” (*AROO*, p. 46). Women, then, were – and still are – trapped in silence.

If we accept Butler’s notion of gender as performative, “meaning and subjectivity are not produced once and for all, but continually created in social practice [...] A gap, then, exists between the cultural construct of Woman, which is fixed, and the specific historical and personal experience of the female person, which is the site of the engendering of the female subject” (Crater, 1996, p. 121). This gap enables this Silence around women that Woolf resented so much. It speaks beyond the Law-of-the-Father, and shares “certain qualities of the imaginal in the mirror stage as described by Lacan and Julia Kristeva’s notion of the Semiotic”. (Crater, 1991, p. 122). It is no surprise then that Woolf decided to write *through* silence; for, rather than imposing a fixed identity, it expresses the oscillation and weaving of the semiotic and the symbolic that people experience throughout their lives. And when balance is achieved between the masculine symbolic and the feminine semiotic, a sort of androgyny, a sort of inner peace, is born.

This gap Woolf found in *Mrs. Dalloway* for the first time. In her diaries, she mentions the “beautiful caves” she digs behind her characters, and how this book has “plunged deep in the richest strata of [her] mind. [She] can write and write and write now; the happiest feeling in the world” (Woolf, 1924/1982, p. 68). Therefore, before the great Lily Briscoe was “able to articulate her vision of being a woman other than the prescribed role of a Woman” (Crater, 1996, p. 121) through her boldly painting that famous line in the middle of the canvas; there was Clarissa Dalloway without whose first steps towards the gap, Lily Briscoe’s painting, androgyny and liberation may never have been reached.

¹ All further reference to *A Room of One's One* will come from this edition, written as (*AROO*, p. n).

2. PATRICIA ONDEK LAURENCE'S THREE TYPES OF SILENCE

According to Patricia Ondek Laurence (1991), Woolf's novels contain three main types of silence: the Unsaid – “something one might have felt but does not say” (p. 1), the Unspoken – “something not yet formulated or expressed in words” (p. 1), and the Unsayable – “something that cannot be said because it is a taboo or something that is ineffable” (p. 1). In this section, I will attempt to briefly analyse what I consider to be the most prominent examples of Laurence's three types of silence in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

2.1. *The Unsaid: Richard not saying “I love you” to Clarissa*

“The first type of silence” according to Laurence (1991), “involves various forms of self-address [such as] defined, focused inner monologue” (p. 99). In this instance of the Unsaid, we witness Richard Dalloway's state of mind after his reunion with Hugh Whitebread and Millicent Burton, we *feel* him recovering from his “lethargy” and setting now his mind “on his wife Clarissa, whom Peter Walsh had loved so passionately” (*Mrs. Dalloway, 1925/1996*, p. 126).² After envisioning their life together, he feels a sudden urge to tell her that he loves her; he sets to buy her flowers, and so setting forth with his “great bunch held against his body to Westminster”, like some sort of weapon against some evil, Richard goes home “to say straight out *in so many words*...holding out his flowers, “I love you”. Why not?”. (p. 127; emphasis added).

In this scene, we are presented with what Laurence (1991) calls Woolf's “lexicon of silence”; a series of “lexical configurations [such as] pauses, moments, gaps, suspensions, fixed moments, trances and repetitions” (p. 16). Here, we will focus on repetitions. There are a total of five repetitions of the sentence “to say to Clarissa *in so many words* that he loved her”, ranging from page 127 to 130. These repetitions, which Richard stubbornly reiterates to himself, appear as some sort of attempt to summon the courage to tell his wife, *in so many words*, that he loves her. And yet, when the moment comes, he does hold “out the flowers – red and white roses. (But he [cannot] bring himself to say he love[s] her; *not in so many words*)” (*MD*, p. 130; emphasis added). Instead, he sits with her, in silence, and holds her hand, thinking that “she understood without his speaking; his Clarissa...He had not said “I love you”; but he held her hand. Happiness *is this, is this*, he thought”. Again, this last repetition seems to act perform a calming effect on Richard, soothing his deep-hidden fears of Clarissa and Peter Walsh's old relationship.

² All further reference to *Mrs. Dalloway* will come from this edition, written as (*MD*, p. n).

But as they start talking to each other, Clarissa mentions Bourton, her childhood home, where she met with Peter Walsh. “Peter Walsh was back. Oh yes; she had had him. And he was going to get a divorce; and he was in love with some woman out there. And he hadn’t changed in the slightest. There she was, mending her dress... “Thinking of Bourton,” she said. “Hugh was at lunch,” said Richard. (*MD*, p. 131). Here, we slide into the Unspoken. Notice Richard brusque change of subject; both silences – the Unsaid and the Unspoken – become intertwined since reality, for Woolf, is something “put at different distances” (1980a, p. 50). There is no explicit explanation for Richard’s change of subject, yet the reader *knows*. These ellipses, these silences “invite the reader to fill in the details of Clarissa’s [and Richard] state of mind”. (Laurence, 1991, p. 108)

2.2. *The Unsaid: Clarissa Dalloway vs. Peter Walsh*

In this second example of Laurence’s three types of silence, we find Clarissa Dalloway and Peter Walsh interacting face-to-face for the first time. It has been five years since they last saw each other, and when Peter Walsh arrives by surprise, she is mending her green, evening dress for her Party that same night. This second type of silence is characterized by “communicative silences between characters that structure communication” (Laurence, 1991, p. 99). False starts, deviation from rules, changes of plan, pauses, afterthoughts and repetitions define the Unsaid; where assumptions about the other are constantly but silently made. As they resume their relationship, the old pattern that used to define Clarissa and Peter’s interactions resurfaces. He judges her, incapable of pinning her down; she *feels* his judgement and is tortured by it.

After living in India for five years, Peter Walsh returns to England and is faced with conventionality personified in the “inlaid table, the dolphin and candlesticks, the chair-covers and the old valuable English tinted prints” (*MD*, p. 49). So he thinks “she would think me a failure, which [he was] in their sense [...] the Dalloways’ sense”, and immediately he takes out a “large pocket-knife and half opened the blade” (*MD*, p. 45). Afterwards he relates all his adventures and exciting life in India, with his fist “clenched upon [the pocket-knife]”. Clarissa feels threatened, judged, fixed; and yet “Queen whose guards have fallen asleep and left her unprotected... [taking up her needle] she summoned to her help the things she did; the things she liked...all come about her to beat oof the enemy” (*MD*, p. 49). This is a silent battlefield, a “who-has-lived-more” contest, so “Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting side by side on the blue sofa, challenged each other” (*MD*, p. 49-50). “What is left obscure, open-ended...Woolf’s sense of what life is” explains

Laurence (1991, p. 99), is reflected in her use of punctuation, tense shifts of topic, and creation of internal zones that isolate characters and separate inner life for outer, daily existence.

2.3. *The Unsayable: Menopause, ShellShock and the Plane*

This third and last example of Laurence's three types of Silence contains "moments of being, fixed philosophical moments, marked by silence in arrested conversation" (Laurence, 1991, p. 99). Movement, or rather lack of movement, characterizes this third type of silence. The Unsayable, thus, appears in two forms: the taboo – what cannot be said because of social conventions; and the ineffable – that which escapes definition.

In *Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street* a short story that would later become – mixed with the unfinished *The Prime Minister* – the *Mrs. Dalloway* that we know nowadays, Woolf intended to "show Mrs. Dalloway as a woman going through menopause" (Showalter, 1992, p. xii). This becomes clear when, having met her old friend Hugh Whitebread, she compares herself with his ailing wife. "Of course, [Clarissa] thought, walking on, Milly is about my age – fifty, fifty-two. So it is probably *that*." (p. xii). Later, with the final publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, this fragment was revised, "and the reference to menstruation and menopause edited out" despite the essential role that such a topic plays in Clarissa's sense of aging, mortality and loss. According to Showalter, menopause was called the "little death" of women, so that "[it] not only could not be discussed in polite company, but was implicitly linked with illness" (Showalter, 1992 p. xii). Such is the case of Septimus and those soldiers who, suffering from Post-Traumatic Disorder or Shellshock, were "condemn[ed] as cowards or malingers" (p. xvi) These two examples, euphemistically mentioned in the book, represent the Unsayable because of social conventions; the taboo.

The ineffable, however, comes most clearly in the "Plane scene". While buying flowers for her party, Clarissa hears a bang and sees a motor-car stopped in the middle of the street; a car hiding a "face of the very greatest importance". It is stopped because Septimus, had stopped in front of it "blocking the way...rooted to the pavement...But for what purpose?" (*MD*, p. 18). After the chaos subsides, a plane appears in the skies of London, skywriting. "Everyone looked up... As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls" (*MD*, p. 24). For Laurence, the plane's

skywriting is a “metaphor for Woolf’s sense of writing as it appears on the page (presence) and disappears (absence) into the mind of the reader. But I am rather inclined to think that it is a metaphor for an imminent change in culture, society and, consequently, literature. As the plane skywrites, people try to read what the clouds it leaves behind. “wherever it did, whatever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letter. But what letters? A C was it? An E, then an L?” (*MD*, p. 23) These different interpretations, this fluidity of meaning, this participation of the reader is characteristic of Modernism. And as the plane goes one skywriting, slowly, everyone forgets about the the face of utmost importance. And so “the car went in at the gates and nobody looked at *it*), and shutting off the smoke, away and away *it* rushed, and the smoke faded and assembled itself round the broad white shapes of the clouds. *It* had gone; *it* was behind the clouds” (*MD*, p. 24; emphasis added). This *it* is essential here; it is deliberately ambiguous: what is gone? What is behind the clouds? The car? The plane? If, as I assume, it is the car, then, as Septimus thinks, although “he could not read the language yet; it was plain enough [...] [there was] the birth of a new religion” (*MD*, p. 26).

3. THE FOURTH SILENCE: THE UNTHOUGHT

Although Laurence does admit the possibility of a fourth silence – which she terms “the unthought” – she, nevertheless, does not develop nor mention it again in her book. I, however, having read several novels by Virginia Woolf, cannot help but feel the need to expand on this fourth silence; to explain it, as I feel it plays an essential role in her works.

It is a silent silence, one that operates on the unconscious level of the characters, even deeper than the strata that Laurence so skilfully illustrates in her work. It permeates Woolf’s novels as a constant, subtle feeling that there is something going on, not being told, perhaps not even consciously recognized by the characters, or even repressed by them. It is constituted, not by the “scenes of Silence” that Laurence uses to explain the Unsaid, the Unspoken and the Unsayable; but by the whole book. It is under it, behind the words, between them, inside of them, it is everywhere; and I wish I were as skilful as Virginia Woolf to be able to describe this ineffable feeling that I perceive every time I am fortunate enough to open and read one of her books.

This fourth silence – which I shall call, like Laurence, the Unthought – operates, as I mentioned, on the unconscious level of the subject and it is directed towards oneself as the result of the conflict between the inner self and the social self; a conflict that is rooted, essentially, in Judith Butler’s concept of gender being performative, but also on a series of other concepts, such as Jacques Lacan’s Mirror Stage and the “ideal-I”, and Julia Kristeva’s concept of the Semiotic. On the next chapter, I will suggest a possible solution for this fourth silence but, for now, let us focus on its nature, let us reflect on the essence of the Unthought.

3.1. Lacan’s *The Mirror Stage and the “ideal-I”*

In Jacques Lacan’s *Écrits*, he revises his concept of the Mirror Stage for the audience of July 17, 1949 in Zurich where, during the first few minutes, he explains that the human child, being at an age where he is still outdone by the chimpanzee in “instrumental intelligence”, is able to recognize himself – his reflection – in a mirror. “This recognition [is] an essential moment in the act of intelligence” (Lacan, 2006, p. 503). Indeed, according to Lacan, the child immediately embarks in a series of games with the images in the mirror during which the recognition of his own movements and those of his environment are reinforced. Therefore, Lacan declares that it “suffices to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*; namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image predestined to have an effect at this stage” (2006, p.503). From this *identification*, then, results the creation of the “ideal-I”, one that situates the “ego in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual” (2006, p. 504) or one which, at most, will only asymptotically come close to become the *I*.

This is all very well, I thought while trying to establish the base for my fourth silence, but Lacan’s theory implies the creation of a fixed subject whose “paternal law structures all linguistic identification, termed “The Symbolic”” (Butler, 1999, p. 101). And neither Virginia Woolf nor I could tolerate such a thought. That the subject born from that *identification* “becomes the bearer of this repressive law...whose language structures the world by suppressing multiple meanings and instating univocal and discrete meaning” (Butler, 1999, p. 101) appeared as something working against the very essence of any novel by Woolf.

And yet, at the same time, it also seemed perfectly fitted to express the repression, the conflict that her characters suffer from, specifically in *Mrs. Dalloway*. That conflict

which came from Lacan's *identification*, one that set the characters' ego into the impossible mission of seizing their "ideal-I". A mission which, according to Lacan, could, at most, only asymptotically approach them to their objective. Such a torture must surely cause some breaking within the subject, I thought. Specially, if the subject inhabits this world; or rather, this society, where the Symbolic suppresses multiplicity and instates distinct, fixed meaning. And so I came across Akiko Shimizu's critique of Lacan's Mirror Stage's. In *A body not of one's own*, Shimizu (2008) argues that the "oppressive, centrifugal force" of the mirror image results in both "the ego's "otherness"" and its peculiar insistence on "self-sameness"" (p. 24). That is, that the mirror image instates itself within the subject and that the moment of this insertions forms the subject, "who contains an "I" that is always an Other" (Shimizu, 2008, p. 24-25). To illustrate the effects of this centrifugal force that breaks the subject from within, Shimizu (2008) poses the example of those suffering from an eating disorder who "seeing their bodies in the mirror, think they are still [not good enough]" (p. 24). Thus, this imperious need to achieve "self-sameness" which is conditioned – if not dictated – by gender rules at a given moment in history is exacerbated by the increasing sensation of the ego's otherness; that is, that whatever the subject does, it can never comply with the performativity required of its body without repressing itself in the process. It is a circular process, an Ouroboros that will only stop eating its tail when we "cure ourselves of the illusion of a true body beyond the Law [of the Father]." (Butler, 1999, p. 119) and instate a dialogue, a balance between the Symbolic and something else in its place.

3.2. *Julia Kristeva's the Semiotic, and Judith Butler's Gender Performativity*

Before diving into the study of the different examples of the Unthought in *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is necessary to explain this "something else" that I have just mentioned. It is equally important to remark, however, that while I will be defining the "something else", at this stage of the paper, the balance referred to in the previous section has not yet been achieved, nor is it even thought of, although some unconscious attempts to achieve it may have been carried out by certain characters (e.g. Clarissa Dalloway).

While the appeal of basing my full concept of the fourth silence entirely on Lacan's Mirror Stage and Shimizu's subsequent critique of it was, indeed, considerable; I knew there was something lacking. What was, essentially, this something suppressed,

this multiplicity that the Symbolic wrecks and substitutes with “univocal and discrete meaning”?

“The boundary of the body as well as the distinction between internal and external” Judith Butler (1999) explains, “is established through the ejection of something originally part of identity” (p. 170). In other words, what Julia Kristeva (1984) terms the Semiotic: “a “kinetic functional stage [which] precedes the establishment of the sign [and which] does not reduce the subject to one, but instead opens up the subject” (p. 170) to other senses (rhythm, music, colors, sounds, space). For Kristeva, the Semiotic is that which expresses that multiplicity that Lacan’s Symbolic suppresses; a multiplicity “within the poetic language in which multiple meanings and semantic non-closure prevail” (Butler, 1999, p. 102). This non-closure, this leaving-it-to-the-reader, this rhythm that is essential for Woolf’s narrative, for once you have it “you can’t use the wrong words” (Woolf, 1980b, p.247) is what characterizes Virginia Woolf’s novels. She revels with ambiguities and contradictions. “Blank spaces” explains Laurence (1991), “emotional, textual, thematic, structural, are seminal to her work” (p. 172). Through these blank spaces the reader is invited into the text and dialogues with the author, participates in Woolf’s rhythm and sees, just like she once wrote in her diary, these spaces that build up between the sentences, going, with her rhythm, “far deeper than words” (Woolf, 1982, p. 34).

Therefore, this operation of ejection of the Semiotic by the Symbolic is what, for Judith Butler (1999), constitutes the boundary between the inner and the outer selves “maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control” (p. 170). For sameness is always far easier to govern than difference. That which is “different” is wrong, marginalized, *Othered*. And if one is *Othered*, then, it inevitably follows that, perhaps, there is something wrong with oneself; *within* oneself. And that “something” must be repressed, so that the subject is “right” again, “straight” again. But then, one need only look at the changing ideals of gender role throughout history to understand that gender is performative; that “what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts” (Butler, 1999, p. xv) so that, through repetition, the naturalization of this performativity is achieved. Therefore, as Dolores Ortega declares so clearly in her PhD Thesis, “in so far as bodies are gendered within society, gender stands as a socially functional limitation of a body’s connective and transformational potential” (p. 196).

3.3. *The Unthought in Mrs. Dalloway: Peter Walsh, Clarissa Dalloway, and Septimus Warren Smith*

3.3.1. Peter Walsh

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh is the eternal child; the boy who would not grow up; the one who always played with his pocket-knife. Elaine Showalter (1992) goes as far as declaring that “behind his mask of bravado, there is an immature man who cannot reconcile his alleged ideals with his real feelings” (p. iii). For Peter loves the Empire, worships the Empire, reveres that which is civilization and which he had missed while in the East; “the efficiency, the organization, the communal spirit of London” (*MD*, p.166). But at the same time, while reflecting on his life after having lunched, Peter Walsh admits to himself that “one might weep if no one saw. It had been his undoing – this susceptibility...I have that in me, he thought, standing by the pillar box, which could now dissolve itself in tears” (*MD*, p. 167). For people detected that “there was something unusual about him, or something behind him...He was the best judge of cooking in India. He was a man. But not the sort of man one had to respect” (p.172). Notice the juxtaposition of “cooking” and “man” in this last fragment. There is a silence in between those two sentences, with Woolf, building only the arc of the meaning, leaves it to her readers to reach their own conclusions.

If we remember Jacques Lacan’s explanation of the Mirror Stage as a formative process of the *I*, we might recall how he affirms that the “ideal-I” created by the *identification* of the child’s image (the *imago*) always situates the “ego in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible...or that will only asymptotically approach the subject’s becoming *I*” (2006, p. 503). In this fictional direction and the centrifugal struggle it creates, the total form of the subject “is a mirage of the maturation of [the ego’s] power given him in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted” (Lacan, 2006, p.503). Here, Lacan seems to give us the perfect portrayal of Peter Walsh. For this immature man seems to have experienced the Mirror Stage and remained stubbornly stuck in it. That is Peter Walsh’s fourth silence – his Unthought – his incapacity, being long passed fifty, to “reconcile his alleged ideals with his real feelings” (Showalter, 1992, p. iii).

Let us reflect upon this exteriority that Lacan mentions. In Peter Walsh, it is manifested through two metaphors: his old pocket-knife, and his attitude towards women. Several critics have discussed the role, the significance of Peter’s old pocket-knife and

they all seem to coincide in its phallic quality. Whenever his masculine identity is in danger, argues Dolores Ortega, Peter plays, fingers, clenches his pocket-knife. After visiting Clarissa – his young sweetheart before she chose Richard Dalloway over him –, Peter steps down the street drained, “his powers chafed and tossed in him” (*MD*, p. 50) because he has been reminded, against his will, that he is a failure. “which I am in their sense; the Dalloway’s sense. Oh yes, he had no doubt about that; he was a failure compared to all this – the inlaid table, the paper-knife...he took out his pocket-knife quite openly and clenched his fist upon it” (*MD*, p. 49). For all his aspirations, “as the cloud crosses the sun, silence falls upon London...feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within. Clarissa refused me, [Peter] thought. He stood there thinking, Clarissa refused me” (p.55). And later on, when he is in front of Clarissa’s house, ready to join her party, he declares that his “body must contract now...the soul must brave itself to endure. He opened the big blade of his pocket knife” (*MD*, p. 181).

Yet, this pocket-knife does not only appear when Peter is in need to remind himself of his masculinity – this “exteriority” that is “more constituent than constituted” – but also when dealing with women. Certainly, his battle with Clarissa when they meet each other for the first time in five years is, indeed, threatening to his projected, masculine, constituted identity and he ends up “weeping like a child” (*MD*, p.52). However, some pages later, having recovered himself, he uses his pocket-knife once again. Like in all her novels, standing still is regarded by Woolf “as incongruous with nature” (1980a, p. 250). Therefore, once threatened by the melancholia of his fourth silence by standing still as a “cloud crosses the sun, silence falls upon London...feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within” (*MD*, p. 55) , Peter Walsh emerges back into external reality and “march[es] up Whitehall, as if there rolled down to him, vigorous, unending, his future...As for caring what they said of him – the Dalloways, the Whitebreads and their set, he cared not a straw – not a straw.” (*MD*, p. 56). Notice here how the repetition makes the second instance stronger but, at the same time, shallow, as if it were Peter trying to convince himself that he really, *really* did not care at all.

As he moves now, he is inflamed with vitality and lustiness as he spots a young woman across the street. “But she’s extraordinarily attractive, he thought... Straightening himself and stealthily fingering his pocket-knife he started after her to follow this woman.” (*MD*, p. 59). The description that follows reminds us, undeniably, that of a hunter stalking his prey in the middle of the jungle. In his delusion, Peter reads the young

girl's glances towards him as an invitation: "'You', she said, only 'you', saying it with her white gloves and shoulders" (*MD*, p. 59), and only when she enters her home does Peter desist. "Well, I've had my fun; I've had it, he thought" (*MD*, p. 61).

Notice how the Symbolic is supposed to repress the chaos of the libidinal. Why, then, is Peter Walsh always said to "be in love" (*MD*, p. 134)? Because he is "always in love with the wrong woman" (*MD*, p. 134). These "loves" have destroyed him: first, Clarissa. Then his estranged wife. Now, Daisy, a young Indian married woman with whom he is planning to marry someday. Peter, stuck in his own Mirror Stage, infatuated with his *imagos* that presents him doubled-sized, masculine, with "his journeys; rides; quarrels; adventures...love affairs; work; work, work!" (*MD*, p.49), for him the mirror-image seems "the threshold of the visible world...so that the *imago of own's own body* presents in hallucinations or dreams" (Lacan, 2006, p.504). In the "solitary traveller" passage, Peter dreams of himself as "the hunter of lanes, disturber of ferns, and devastador of great hemlock plants" (*MD*, p. 63). Thus, in his fantasies, Peter attains that "ideal-I" denied to him and, according to Showalter, pictures "women as muses". But this passage also ends with an ironic note, as Woolf presents Peter Walsh as the man-child he still is by having "the elderly nurse knit[ing] over the sleeping baby. So Peter Walsh snored" (*MD*, p. 65).

Here we have the child in front of the mirror: a woman, an Arachne knitting her spider-web of dreams over the innocent baby Walsh. This mirage of the maturation of the power of the subject "appears to the child" explains Lacan (2006), "in a contrasting size (*un relief de stature*) that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it... [so that the ego] is pregnant with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue in which man projects himself" (p. 504). This statue, for Walsh, manifests in the form of the Duke of Cambridge, whose "statue he glared at...striding, staring" (*MD*, p. 56). Immediately after that, he spots some boys in uniform carrying guns and marching up Whitehall with their eyes ardent with "duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England" and starts to keep step with them. His virility is reinstated. But soon he stops, incapable of keeping up with them.

He is no child, and yet he still believes himself to be one. The only way in which his masculine identity can remain constant is by clinging to the Symbolic, to this mirage of the maturation of the power of the subject. "And how does one generate this imponderable quality of confidence in oneself most quickly?" asks Virginia Woolf, "by feeling that one has some innate superiority...over other people" (*AROO*, p.36). This is

why Walsh, despite clinging to the Symbolic, to the suppression of the chaos of the libidinal, is so obsessed with women. “Why are women” ponders Woolf, “much more interesting to men than men are to women? (*AROO*, p. 29). Because “women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size...for if [women] were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge” (p. 37).

This is why Peter Walsh metamorphoses women “into different clichés: the nymph, the Virgin Mary, a mermaid” (Ortega, p. 218). He creates them at his will into the archetypal three faced creature: the mother, the temptress or the maid. There is no other possible construction for him, no other possible perception. Peter fastens to the Symbolic, the masculine, the language with univocal meaning and clenches his claws to a fixed “ideal-I” that he will never achieve. Notice how the use of semicolons and strict control of the poetic language characterizes those parts of the novel in which Peter Walsh becomes the subject. The liberal use of the semicolon by Woolf is something that has been widely discussed, but if one looks closely, it is generally associated with the poetic, the sounds, the rhythm, the music. And thus, in a character that stubbornly rejects to embrace multiplicity, the semicolon has almost no use.

Finally, Peter’s inability to reconcile his two selves – his “ideals with his real feelings” – is reflected in his life-long attempt to fix – in all senses – Clarissa. Clarissa, who is “purely feminine; with that extraordinary gift, that woman’s gift of making a world her own wherever she happened to be” but, at the same time, has “always something cold in [her]... “The perfect hostess”, he [had] said to her, whereupon she winced all over.” (*MD*, p. 69). Thus, Clarissa serves as Peter’s looking glass. But it is an ineffectual one, a broken mirror, for Clarissa is fragmented, she oscillates constantly, and does not allow Peter – nor anyone else – to fix her, to say of her “I am this, I am that” (*MD*, p. 11).

3.3.2. Clarissa Dalloway

According to Showalter (1992), Woolf’s “original intention was to show Mrs. Dalloway as a woman going through menopause” (p. xii). The idea of *Mrs. Dalloway* being to examine “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (Woolf, 1994, p. 160), we meet Clarissa in a moment of her life where the precarious balance between her social self and her inner self is exacerbated by her acute awareness of aging and time. The banging, ringing, ticking of clocks permeates the whole novel. Even at the beginning, when we have just met Clarissa, who appears happy and content, going to buy flowers for her party, we

detect her fear of time passing. “Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable suspense before the Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable” (*MD*, p. 6). Irrevocable is the word, precisely; for now, Clarissa is passed fifty; “this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch painting), this body, with all its capacities; seemed nothing – nothing at all...there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn process with the rest of them, up Bond Street...That is all, she says; that is all” (*MD*, p. 13). The repetition here laying the heavy, melancholy feeling on the second part of the sentence. No marriage awaits her, no more childbearing; she is seeing her social role as a woman reduced to...what? “this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (*MD*, p.13). Once women are no longer wives or mothers, what are they in Clarissa’s society? What does it mean, then, to be woman? She asks herself, now, lost, searching for a meaning while sensing that her life was like “the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving [and which] were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them...and it was now over” (*MD*, p. 53).

Clarissa, at this stage of her life, is facing her fourth silence: what now? What is next now that I am no longer a Woman but, simply, a woman? Now that the Angel in the House is dead, what is next? Like Virginia Woolf in her essay *Professions for Women*, one would say that Clarissa would only need to be herself. “Ah, but what is “herself”? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know” (Woolf, 1931, p. 142), declares Woolf. And neither, being a woman myself, do I. For, as Judith Butler affirms, “to what extent is “identity” a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? ...In other words, the “coherence” and “continuity” of “the person” are not logical nor analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms” (1999, p. 23). How is one supposed to know what is Woman, or Man, if one’s bodily gender has been naturalised with certain behavioural characteristics? I remember very distinctly the day I realised I was a Woman and not a woman. It was similar to what Zora Neale Hurston explains in *How it Feels to be Colored Me*, for only when I was treated as a Woman I realised I was limited, tagged, *seen* as one. Never had it occurred to me before that I had to have limitations for who I was perceived to be. “That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler, 1999, p. 137). This leads to the conclusion that what we take for reality for “Woman” and “Man” is nothing but a fabrication. “That very interiority is an effect

and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of the subject” (Butler, 1999, p. 137).

And so, Clarissa finds herself facing the disintegration of the artifice of her social self. Never does she perceive it more accurately than when she physically stops since, for Woolf, “life moves and so, evidently, must the self” (1994, p. 250). When, on entering Regent’s Park, she meets her old friend Hugh Whitebread, whose wife has *that* female ailment (menopause). Ah, yes, Clarissa understands, of course. But then, standing in silence once her friend has left, she becomes extremely conscious of her hat, one that may have become a younger woman more than her. “For Hugh always made her feel...she always felt a bit skimpy beside Hugh; schoolgirlish” (*MD*, p. 8). Or later on, when she penetrates the stillness of her home, “feeling like a nun who has left the world and feels fold round her the familiar veils and the response to old devotions” (*MD*, p. 33), she learns that Lady Bruton, “whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing” (*MD*, p. 35) has invited her husband and not her. Mrs. Dalloway hands her parasol to her maid and goes upstairs “feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, *breastless*, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, outdoors...now failed” (*MD*, p. 35, italics are mine). And, finally, sitting down in her attic room, seeing herself in the mirror, she admits that “that was her self – pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort...drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world...never showing a sign of all the other sides of her” (*MD*, p. 42). For, as Virginia Woolf said, “how unpleasant it is to be locked out; [but] how worse it is, perhaps, to be locked in” (*AROO*, p. 25-26).

Because Clarissa Dalloway’s understanding of life is a transcendental, multiple one. She is presented to the reader “from a multiplicity of perspectives which, at the same time, reveal the complexity of her subjectification” (Ortega, p. 185). Clarissa, like Virginia Woolf herself, loves movement, fluidity, London. “One of these days I will write about London and how it takes up the private life and carries it on, without effort” Woolf declares on the 26th of May 1924, “Faces passing lift up my mind; prevent it from settling, as it does in the stillness at Rodmell (her home)” (1982, p. 61). Here, we begin to see how Clarissa’s transcendental view of life takes form. “She would not say of herself, I am this, I am that...what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab...did it matter that she must inevitable cease completely; ...but that somehow in the street of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived; lived in each other, she

being part, was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there; part of people she had never met” (*MD*, p.11). Notice the punctuation, the semicolons, the acceleration of the rhythm as she walks towards Bond Street to buy her flowers. This is life, this is movement, this is fluidity “like a mist between people”. So that, when she dies, she will go on existing because she is not “here, here, here” (*MD*, p. 168) as she tried once, while travelling on top of an omnibus, to explain to Peter, who however beautiful all may be, “never saw a thing” (*MD*, p. 9). “She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even places... [so that] she might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that...after death. Perhaps – perhaps” (*MD*, p. 168). Again the repetition, Clarissa’s hope clinging to that “perhaps”, those semicolons transmitting emotion, feeling, leaving the arc of meaning for the reader to complete, making us *feel*, perceive, Clarissa’s effort to be understood.

Up until this point, Clarissa’s attempts at maintaining her balance between the Symbolic and the Semiotic are precarious and extremely linked to movement. According to Nancy Taylor (1991), Clarissa fears being fixed, “when she perceives herself as fixed or fused, [she] feels threatened” (p. 369), as when she stops in the Park or sits in her attic room. “Her self-image” continues Taylor (1991), “depends on acceptance from [the social force]” (p. 370). Think about how *breastless* she feels when Lady Bruton excludes her from her invitation, how, in her quarrels with Peter – who loves the Symbolic – “she wanted his good opinion so much” (*MD*, p. 41). And yet, if the Symbolic is a threat to Clarissa because of its demands on fixed, univocal meanings and universal paternal values; the Semiotic, “a more feminine subjective mode of existence...threatens her with insanity” (Taylor, 1991, p. 370). Clarissa herself admits so, upon hearing of Septimus’ death. She declares that “even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the *Times*, so she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive...she must have perished” (*MD*, p. 203). It will not be until the end of the novel, when, standing still, Clarissa will be able to move on.

3.3.3. Septimus Warren Smith

During the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf records in her diaries “I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense” (1980a, p. 56) And no other character expresses this more clearly, more acutely than the young, thirty-year-old soldier Septimus Warren Smith who

returns from the War suffering from shell-shock, and whose mental health allows Woolf to feel that she can “use up everything [she’s] ever thought...[being] stuffed with ideas” (Diaries, p. 59). Septimus’ mental state also allows a complete dive into Kristeva’s Semiotic, “checked by the constraints of biological and social structures” (1984, p. 28), which drives back the Symbolic’s univocal meanings of language and reveals an “irrepressible heterogeneity of multiple sounds and meanings [where] the various material supports susceptible to semiotization are voice, gesture, colours.” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 28). The Semiotic, however, is also the place where instinctual drives run free and the libidinal chaos is liberated so that “destruction, aggressivity and death” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 28) become potential as well.

“London” tells us Woolf, “thought nothing of fantastic names like Septimus [whose] idealism, passion, loneliness [were] the usual seeds which made him shy, and stammering, in love with Miss Isabel Pole, lecturing in the Waterloo Road upon Shakespeare” (p.94). Being the sensitive young man that he was, Septimus’ social identity did not fit into the construction of masculinity defined under the Law of the Father. Therefore, his boss at Sibley’s and Arrowsmith’s detected that “something was up...and being paternal with his young men [declared] that he looked weakly; advised football” (*MD*, p. 96); a socially acceptable activity for a young man in order to cure him from his “effeminate” tendencies and his silly crush on Miss Isabel Pole. However, before Mr. Brewster’s advice could materialise, the War came and “there in the trenches the change which Mr. Brewster desired...was produced instantly” (*MD*, p. 96). Septimus’ best friend, Evans, was killed in front of him, just before the Armistice. But Septimus, “far from showing any emotion...congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. It was sublime” (*MD*, p. 96). And yet, when coming back to England, he suffered “these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel” (*MD*, p. 96). Patriarchy, the Empire had all raped him of his humanity; manliness had driven him mad.

Taylor argues that when society has become unhomelike, the retreat against that force is actually the most “sane” choice (1991, p. 47). Rezia, Septimus’ wife, witnesses that retreat, his disrupted relationship with language, seeing him always talking “nonsense to himself, or to that dead man Evans. But such things happen” she replies, “everyone has friends who were killed in the War” (*MD*, p. 74). In fact, Septimus’ dissociation from language dives him completely into the Semiotic. In what Virginia Woolf calls “the thick of the mad scene in Regent’s Park” (1980a, p. 59), we enter Septimus’ mind in the precise

moment when a plane is flying over London, writing letters with white smoke that, fluidly, magically, melt and mutate their forms. ““K...R...” said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say “Kay Arr” close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with roughness in her voice like a grasshopper’s which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke” (*MD*, p. 25). This is only the first time we witness how Septimus’ relationship with language has changed completely; the univocal meanings of the Symbolic no longer serve him, he is reading those letters in a new language of his own. “The excitement of the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling, with their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to green of a hollow weave, like plumes on horses’ heads, feathers on ladies” (*MD*, p. 26). Rhythm is now the main tool of expression for Septimus, colours and sounds as well. Up and down, up and down, colours being alive, sounds “mak[ing] harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them [being] as significant as the sounds” (*MD*, p. 26). Septimus, in the aftermath of his rape, has discovered a new way of understanding the world. One that escapes and rejects and divides “the linguistic function [and] which tends to fracture and multiply” (Butler, 1999, p. 104).

And yet, Septimus, in his complete submersion into the Semiotic, finds himself alone; deserted from his wife who still follows the Symbolic and thinks him “selfish. So men are. For [Septimus] was not ill. Dr Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him” (*MD*, p. 27). She has even organised an appointment with an expert on illnesses of the nerves, Sir. William Bradshaw. Therefore, in the middle of one of his revelations, she approaches Septimus, sitting in the Park, to tell him that “it’s time” to go and see the doctor. “Time”? like Clarissa, Septimus cannot deal with “Time”. “The word “time” split its husk; poured its richest over him, and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, *without his making them, hard, white, imperishable, words*” (*MD*, p. 78, italics are mine). Septimus finds himself now, suddenly, facing the Symbolic; words that he has not created, words that are “hard, white, imperishable”, univocal, fixed.

But that is not the first time. Some hours ago, before the plane silenced London, a car containing a “face of the very greatest importance” (*MD*, p. 16) was stopped in the middle of Bond Street. “Was it the Prince of Wales’, the Queen’s, the Prime Minister’s? Whose face was it?” (*MD*, p. 17). Why was the car stopped so suddenly, the face of the “very great importance” shutting the blinds violently? The answer is well worth quoting in its entirety:

Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to be the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for what purpose? But for what purpose? (*MD*, p. 18).

Septimus is standing in front of the Empire; he is stopping it; blocking it, making the passers-by aware of it with his silent defiance. It could even be argued that the Semiotic is standing there, making the Symbolic aware of itself, language aware of itself, so that its mask is revealed. “The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?” (*MD*, p. 18). The whip, it seems, is destined to descend on Septimus because, as he says, “it is I who am blocking the way” (*MD*, p. 18). Therefore, for the system to go on working, alien creatures like Septimus must be extracted from society, marginalised, othered, locked in.

As they enter Sir. Bradshaw’s consultation, Septimus retreats more into himself. Sir. William Bradshaw, whose distinction of presence bestowed him the reputation of being the best in dealing with nerve cases, “was certain as he saw the man; it was a case of extreme breakdown... [all this] he ascertained in two or three minutes” (*MD*, p.66). No need for the patient to speak of his symptoms, the doctor just *knew*. And as Septimus recoils more and more and loses his already weakened capacity to speak, we see how there is no place for the Semiotic in Sir. William Bradshaw’s consultation: he knows unequivocally. So, when Septimus, feeling he had committed an appalling crime for not feeling a thing when his friend, Evans, died in front of him, tries to confess, he is shushed for “he has done nothing wrong whatever” (*MD*, p. 107). Gradually, Septimus loses the Father’s language completely: “the patient repeat[s] the word “war” interrogatively. He [is] attaching meanings to words of a symbolic kind. A serious symptom to be noted on the card” thinks Sir. William Bradshaw. This is the Symbolic repressing the Semiotic.

The cure for Septimus' ailments? For Sir. William Bradshaw does not like to call it madness, he prefers to call it "not having a sense of proportion" (*MD*, p. 107), was to be sent to a rest home, alone. For if the patient threatens, "as they often do, to kill himself, you invoke proportion; order rest in bed; rest in solitude" (*MD*, p. 113). Virginia Woolf herself was very well acquainted this "sense of proportion".

That Goddess [proportion] whose list is to override opposition, to stamp indelibly in the sanctuaries of other the image of herself. Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the imprint of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up. (*MD*, p. 113).

If, like Dolores Ortega (2013) suggest, we are to read Septimus' "rejection of proportion and moderation in gender terms, we can affirm that...the representatives of masculinity force Septimus into death. Bradshaw's confining treatment is nothing but a little piece of a whole patriarchal machinery" (p. 217) that dictates existence. According to Theresa Crater, "Septimus desperately searched for alternatives to the gender roles [he] had been handed, but [was] destroyed by the effort" (p. 121). But if one reads closely enough the scene in which Septimus, seeing himself assailed once again by the Symbolic personified in Dr Holmes and Sir. William Bradshaw, kills himself, it becomes clear that Septimus is not destroyed whatsoever, rather his death becomes defiance. For "the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence...are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish [fixed] gender" Butler explains (1999, p. 23).

Therefore, when he hears the rapist preparing again, coming for him to take him to his cure of rest, Septimus "refuses to be violated... [killing himself] allows him to preserve his self, though he must relinquish his life" (Taylor, 1991, p. 372). It is the life under the Law of the Father that he relinquishes, it is a defiance. "(He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot...Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" He cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down" (*MD*, p. 164). He did *not* want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Precisely because he does not want to die, he kills himself. For him, death is Bradshaw, death is Holmes, death is the Empire and the Prime Minister and the patriarchal system

and whatever dares fix one's identity and, in the process, destroy your soul. "One of the triumphs of civilization" (*MD*, p. 166), Peter Walsh says.

So, ultimately, Septimus is not destroyed, as Theresa Crater affirms. Instead, he chooses life. He lives when he jumps out of the window, he lives when he dies. He chooses defiance, he chooses an alternative. And when, at last, during the Party, Clarissa learns of Septimus' death, although they have never met in person, she needs to retire alone, in silence, and reflect. Terrified, she wonders "But why had he done *it*? ... She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung *it* away" (*MD*, p. 202; emphasis added). Notice here the use of the pronoun *it*; how ambiguous it is. Edward Bishop (1991) explains that, in that ambiguity, "both life and death are bound indistinguishably [...] what has Septimus lost and to what must Clarissa return? The confusion is deliberate" (p.65). Later, when she has reached her conclusions, Clarissa does it again, uses the impersonal pronoun to signify both life and death. But now she is "glad that he had done it" (*MD*, p. 204), because it is only when Septimus offers her an alternative, that Clarissa can, standing still, in silence, move on.

4. ANDROGYNY

It is more than probable that, when Coleridge declared that "a great mind must be androgynous" back in 1892, he did not anticipate the huge debate that those six words would generate: with even Virginia Woolf writing one of her most famous essays about it. The term, however, predates both Coleridge and Woolf, and the ambiguity of its definition plagued Woolf from the beginning of her life who, according to Elaine Showalter (1982), "found the achievement of a coherent and comfortable sexual identity an urgent problem" (p. 265). While occupying the body of a woman, Woolf herself believed that "she was the heiress to two very different and in fact opposed traditions [which] dashed together and flowed confusedly but [did] not harmonized in her blood" (Showalter, 1982, p. 265). It is normal, then, that her urgency was so excruciating. If one were to think of the Victorian/Edwardian period – focusing on its emphasis on rationality, stoicism and binary, univocal gender roles – one could even dare to equate (in very general terms) that same period with Jacques Lacan's the Symbolic; a place where "the feminine is never a mark of the subject [but] rather the signification of lack" (Butler, 1999, p. 37). The Woman, both in the Victorian/Edwardian period and Lacan's Symbolic,

are either the nurturing, protective Mother – in the pre-Mirror Stage – or the Other – after the Mirror Stage. By being excluded from the system, “the feminine constitute[d] the possibility of a critique and disruption” (Butler, 1999, p. 37).

Here is when Julia Kristeva makes her appearance and declares that both the Semiotic and the Symbolic are “inseparable within the *signifying process*. Because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities, *both semiotic and symbolic*” are constitutive of the subject and no signifying system the subject creates “can be either “exclusively” semiotic or “exclusively” symbolic, and it instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both” (1984, p. 24; emphasis on the original). The subject is now complete; “indebted to both notions of the signifying process, oscillating between them in [Kristeva’s] notion of the “subject-in-process”” (Schippers, 2011, p. 36). It is highly fluid, it rejects fixed subject positions and, instead, emphasizes the oscillation between the semiotic and the symbolic. This subject accepts the importance that the paternal law plays in its own creation, but at the same time, transgresses it with its oscillation and fluidity. This could be a first definition of the idea of androgyny that I will be dealing with. But long before Kristeva and Butler, Woolf had already defined her own concept and it would bring peace to her characters and solve my fourth silence: the Unthought.

Historically, “androgyny appears to be either an interplay of separate and unique elements or a fusion of one into the other” (Farwell, 1991, p. 434). To understand Virginia Woolf’s concept of androgyny, it is necessary to carefully analyse the last two chapters of her famous essay *A Room of One’s Own*, since the difference between balance and fusion is essential to understanding what I am dealing with in this section. For fusion indicates absorption, while balance means equality and dialogue. There have been several readings of Woolf’s definition of androgyny. But after having re-read her essay of the umpteenth time, I affirm that Woolf’s androgyny is a relationship of balance, of equality, of oscillation and dialogue, instead of a fusion into just one sexless, genderless individual. “For if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with only one?” (*AROO*, p. 87).

“In its most basic sense” explains Nancy Topping Bazin (1974), “the experience of androgyny is the experience of wholeness” (p.185), with the word “androgyny” being derived from Greek words *andros* (male) and *gyne* (female). This is what Woolf was referring to when she declared that, to create, “some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man...if we are to get the sense that the writer is

communicating experience with perfect fullness” (*AROO*, p. 103). Woolf calls this collaboration the consummation of “some marriage of opposites” and for a marriage of any kind to be successful, communication, dialogue, and balance; some sort of tolerance and cooperation between the two parts, must always be present. Otherwise, in “some mixture of the kind the intellect seems to predominate, and the other faculties of the mind harden and become barren” (*AROO*, p. 97). Just like the male and female elements collaborate and play “equal roles in the creation of human life, so too the Masculine and Feminine responses to reality must be balanced and harmonized” (Bazin, 1974, p. 190) within the subject. As Woolf’s consummation of opposites that leaves “the whole mind [lying] open”, with the blinds shut and enjoying the pleasure of fullness, so too the subject, the human derives from male and female elements so that “the true human personality is androgynous, contain[ing] both male and female, [being] potentially capable of both Masculine and the Feminine responses” (Bazin, 1974, p. 190) to life. Let me reproduce a small fragment of *A Room of One’s Own* so that there lays no possible doubt about Woolf’s definition of androgyny:

The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two [masculine and feminine] live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. [...] Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine [...] It is fatal to be man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. (pp. 97, 102).

Perhaps, as Bazin (1974) explains, the clearest way to express Woolf’s idea of androgyny, that “harmonious relationship that should exist between the Masculine and Feminine principles” (p. 190) can be found in Taoism. Here, with the Yin-Yang relationship, we may finally come to understand this balance that I have been referring to all the time. “Yang, the male principle, and Yin, the female principle, signify two archetypal roles of nature...Yin represents death, darkness, secretiveness, evil, demons, earth, and the invisible world. Yang represents life, light, righteousness, gods, heaven,

and the visible world. The two principles, although they appear to be conflicting opposites, define existence through a creative relationship. For Yang contains the seed of Yin and Yin that of Yang” (Bazin, 1974, p. 190). This balance between the inner and the outer world, the feminine and the masculine traits within one, is what will stop the struggle between the inner self – fluid, oscillating – and the social self – fixed, binary and, thus, break the fourth silence.

4.1. *Androgyny in Mrs. Dalloway*

From what has been established in the previous section, then, inevitably follows that, though, traditionally, the Masculine has been designated to the male and the Feminine to the female, such assignment, based on cultural and social heritage, should not, in fact, be so. This dichotomy, according to Bazin (1974), and its association with the sexes, “reflects, not innate qualities but rather the difference in how boys and girls are educated” (p. 188).

“Thrusting itself outward, the male element – fast, penetrating, and aggressive – belongs to the outer conscious world. The female element – hidden, inert, and receptive – evokes darkness and inward repose, the unconscious world” (Bazin, 1974, p. 189). This is why, perhaps, the Masculine and Feminine values have been linked to human biological traits. But, like Nancy Taylor states, Woolf does not doubt when assigning traditional masculine values to female characters and traditional feminine traits to male ones, so that “no longer [does the subject’s] genitals determine what society expects in terms of personality, behaviour and work” (Bazin, 1974, p. 186). Woolf herself admits in her diaries that, while writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, she discovered her “tunnelling process” in which she “dig[s] out beautiful caves behind [her] characters...that give humanity, humour, depth. The idea [being] that the caves connect, each com[ing] to daylight at the present moment” (1982, p.59). In those beautiful caves, we see how many Symbolic, masculine traits are portrayed within Clarissa’s conscious thought while, for example, she admires the “courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing [of] Lady Bexborough, opening the bazaar the day after her son died in the War. [She] was the woman she admired most” (p.12). Or her love for the outside world, going out and about London, being active, moving, never stopping unless forced to. Whereas in Septimus, having retreated completely within himself, withdrawn from the conscious world into the unconscious, Semiotic realm, with his darkness and death and passivity, we witness the display of traditionally feminine values within a male body.

In the introduction to the 1928 edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* that Virginia Woolf herself wrote, she declared that “in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be [Clarissa’s] double, had no existence; and that Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps, merely to die at the end of the party” (Woolf, 1994, p. 549). This change in her original planning of the novel reflects Woolf’s own discovery of her voice and how she could, according to Showalter (1982), create her version of “female aestheticism and androgyny [by projecting] the disturbing, dark, and powerful aspects of femaleness onto maleness” (p. 264). Therefore, throughout the novel, we are given clues of the relationship that unites Clarissa Dalloway with Septimus Warren Smith who, despite never actually meeting in person, are each other’s alter-egos.

We have, for example, repeated words such as “rasped, trees, time”, among other instances. When Clarissa is thinking about the puritan Miss Kilman, with her pretended altruism and Christian faith, declares that “it *rasped* her, thought, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster” (*MD*, p. 15); later we find Septimus thinking of the nursemaid’s voice like a “grasshopper’s, which *rasped* his spine deliciously” (*MD*, p. 25). Their affinities with nature and trees is also repeated several times. How Clarissa’s transcendental understanding of life, connecting her “to people, places, trees” (*MD*, p. 11) is reproduced in Septimus’ “new religion” which makes the trees alive with sounds and “the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body...when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement” (*MD*, p. 26). Or, finally, how they both prepare themselves, simultaneously, to face the Symbolic on their own: “it was precisely twelve o’clock; twelve by Big Ben; whose stroke was wafted over the northern part of London...as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street” (*MD*, p.104). Clarissa, then, puts on “her rich apparel” (*MD*, p. 35); her green dress, the symbol of her socially successful self, for her Party; and Septimus enters Sir. William Bradshaw’s consultation.

4.2. *The Party*

To analyse this last scene, I will base my arguments on Elaine Showalter’s claim that Woolf created her “female aestheticism and androgyny [by projecting] the disturbing, dark, and powerful aspects of femaleness onto maleness” (1982, p. 264). Therefore, I will equate Clarissa Dalloway to the Yang (which, let us not forget, also contains the seeds of the Yin), and Septimus to the Ying (which, again, contains the seeds of the Yang). Remember how Clarissa lives mainly in the Symbolic world, particularly during her

Party, where she wears the symbol of her social success: the green dress. Whereas Septimus, who is completely submerged into the Semiotic, still has reason enough within him to understand that what society demands of him would be his own death as a fluid subject. And precisely because “he did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot” (*MD*, p. 164), he chooses to physically die in order to live.

The final scene of the Party, according to Woolf’s diaries, was to be “a most complicated, spirited, solid piece, knitting together everything and ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to sum up Clarissa” (Woolf, 1980a, p.65). It is precisely in the final stage of the staircase, where Clarissa and Septimus unite, and their balance, one of life and the other of death, enables Clarissa to go on.

4.2.1. First Stage – Oscillation

In this stage, we witness the beginning of the party. We start in the kitchen, as Virginia Woolf recorded in her diaries, with the maid’s wonder at the opulence and glister of the decorations. This first stage brings us back to the beginning of the novel, when Clarissa has just stepped down the street to buy flowers for the party. She is immersed in the Symbolic, enjoying her self within it, her role in it, until her encounter with Hugh Whitebread reminds her that she has reached a certain age when women cease to be Women through Menopause. This shows us how fluid Clarissa’s self is, and how she constantly oscillates between the Symbolic (movement, society) and the Semiotic (stillness, transcendental understanding of life). This first stage, therefore, reproduces the part of Clarissa that oscillates between her social self – clothed with her “rich apparels” and her green dress – and her inner self, the one that appears every time she *feels* that something in her Party might go wrong and, in consequence, her social self might fail. When Clarissa feels her social identity – her self within the Symbolic – threatened, her fears and doubts about what is to become of her now that she is no longer a Woman but simply a woman – with “no more marrying, no more childbearing” (*MD*, p. 13) – re-manifest and depress her further into the depths of the Semiotic.

When Peter arrives to the Party, he is greeted by the hostess. ““How delightful to see you”” said Clarissa. She said it everyone. How delightful to see you” She was at her worst – effusive, insincere” (*MD*, p. 184). In her role of the perfect hostess, Clarissa Dalloway is no longer Clarissa, but Mrs. Dalloway and she is performing the gender role that has been written for her. “Oh dear” she thinks, “it was going to be a failure; a complete failure, Clarissa felt it in her bones as dear old Lord Lexham stood there

apologizing for his wife who had caught cold at the Buckingham Palace Garden Party. She could see Peter out of the tail of her eye, criticizing her, there, in that corner. Why, after all, did she do these things?" (*MD*, p. 184). Now that something unexpected threatened the success of her Party, Clarissa's social-self totters while she spots the master, the critic of her life, Peter Walsh, in that corner, judging her. "She did think it matter, her party, and it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong, all falling flat" (*MD*, p. 185). Because, for Clarissa, her parties are her art. They are Crater's "gap": the way through which Clarissa expresses her transcendental understanding of life, connecting people, making them all – herself – survive, overcome death through their connections to each other, to places, to trees. For how "could any man understand what she meant...about life?... [for those people scattered around London] she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create...it was her gift" (*MD*, p. 134).

And yet, when she sees Ralph Lyon "beat [the curtain] back and go on talking" and realizes that her party "wasn't a failure after all!" (*MD*, p. 187), she does not recover her social self completely. "It was too much of an effort. She was not enjoying it. It was too much like being – just anybody, standing there; anybody could do it...she had this feeling of being something not herself" (*MD*, p. 187). Again, doubting her social self leads her to question her future and dread Time and the approaching death. Who was she now? She had nothing special according to society; she was past fifty, already married and incapable of bearing a child again. Nothing to look after. She could be just anybody. There was nothing to look forward to now.

But then, just like the motor car with the face of the highest importance in it in Bond Street, the Prime Minister arrives, and Clarissa occupies her social self once more, "having this gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed; turned, caught her scarf in some other woman's dress, unhitched it, laughed, all with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element" (*MD*, p. 191). Yet Clarissa, despite all those people "rather incline, perhaps, to envy" (*MD*, p. 192), feels a hollowness; and it might be that she was growing old, but [this parties] satisfied her no longer as she used" (*MD*, p. 192).

4.2.2. Second Stage – The Past

In this second stage, like in the book, we get a glimpse at Clarissa's past at Bourton, where she met Richard Dalloway, was kissed on the lips by Sally Seton in the garden, and

rejected Peter Walsh for good. “And really Clarissa’s eyes filled with tears. Her mother, walking in the garden! But alas, she must go. For there was Professor Brierly and Jim Hutton” (*MD*, p. 193). At this point in the party, Clarissa faces her past. She sees young people dancing and having fun and thinks that “the young could not talk. And why should they?” (*MD*, p. 195). She is remembering better times. By now, both Peter Walsh and Sally Seton – now Lady Rosster – have arrived. They embody Clarissa’s happiest days of her life. But at this stage, she cannot face them yet. They “shared [Clarissa’s] past, the garden, the tress...A part of this Sally must always be; Peter must always be. But she must leave them. There were the Bradshaws, whom she disliked” (*MD*, p. 199).

4.2.3. Third Stage – Androgyny

This last stage is the most difficult and exquisite of them all. Here, we witness Clarissa and Septimus relationship; we witness their balance; we witness androgyny. After having greeted the Bradshaws, lady Bradshaw – wife of Sir. William Bradshaw – takes Clarissa into a corner and “sinking her voice, drawing Mrs. Dalloway into the shelter of a common femininity...murmured how a young man had killed himself” (*MD*, p. 201). In the middle of her Party, there it was: death. The irrevocable boom of Time. “Always her body went through *it*, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; *her dress flamed*, her body burnt” (*MD*, p. 202; emphasis added). What are we to make of this impersonal pronoun here? This *it*? Is it to mean death? Does Clarissa die every time she is told of someone’s death? The symbol of her social success *burning down*. “But why had he done it? She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away” (*MD*, p. 203). Here again, this *it*, this confusion between life and death. “somehow it was her disaster – her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress” (*MD*, p.203).

This last quote is, probably, the one that has caused me more headaches in the reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* than any other. Why was Septimus’ death Clarissa’s disaster? Was it because it spoiled her party with mundane atrocities like suicides? No, I said to myself. Woolf is not so shallow; she digs beautiful caves behind her characters. Look there, my girl; look at *it*, I thought. And then I understood. This confusion between life and death, like Edward Bishop affirms, is deliberate. Yes, it is Clarissa’s disaster, her disgrace, that Septimus, this young man, has managed to escape the Bradshaws “whom she disliked” (*MD*, p. 199), this life bound by performances of gender that do not agree

with one's inner, fluid, oscillating self, and assignments of (fe)male values according to one's genitals. Of course it was her punishment to see them escape this prison that leaves her breastless, that makes her feel unreal, like a Mrs. Richard Dalloway and not Clarissa anymore. Had this young man gone to Sir William Bradshaw? "a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil...capable of some indescribable outrage – forcing your soul, that was it – [if] this young man had gone to him...might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make it intolerable; men like that?" (*MD*, p. 203). And so, for her lack of courage to be herself – fluid, oscillating, woman-manly or man-womanly – she must witness Septimus' success, Septimus' defiance, while standing there, clothed with the symbol of her social success.

How many times had Clarissa felt like Septimus? "She had felt *it* only this morning...Even now, quite often, if Richard had not been reading the *Times*, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive...she must have perished" (*MD*, p. 203). In this line we are told how Clarissa has felt Septimus' terror, "the overwhelming incapacity...this life, to be lived to the end" (*MD*, p. 203), but when she feels herself losing her self in the Semiotic, her oscillation towards the Symbolic – conventional, grey Richard reading the *Times* – brings her back. Yet it is temporary, for, until her encounter with Septimus, she has not reached interior balance.

Having just learnt of Septimus death, despite never having met him, Clarissa needs to leave the Party and retreat to the small room, alone. There, still thinking of Septimus, she walks to the window and spots "in the room opposite the old lady star[ing] straight at her!" (*MD*, p. 204). In the middle of a death, we witness another. This is Clarissa facing her future self; this old woman, looking straight at her across the street. "It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed alone. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking". This blind pulled down, this woman going to sleep. Does it not suggest some sort of death? But Clarissa faces it all without any fear. Instead, in her tone, there seems to be curiosity, awe. How the life of this woman ends, while the party goes on, seems to confirm her transcendental idea of life; that we are all connected and that we survive through the others that we have met, through the places that we have been; through the trees that we have breathed. It does not matter that the clock strikes the hour. Not to her. Not anymore. "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...There! The old lady had put out

her light! The whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun” (*MD*, p. 205). This last quote from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1611/2009, p. 84) sums it all up:

Fear no more the heat o’ the sun,
Nor the furious winter’s rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta’en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Now Clarissa fears Time no more. Through Septimus death, she has witnessed her own death too. She has felt it in her bones and has face it bravely staring to the old woman across the street turning off her light. Now, Clarissa feels “glad that he ha[s] done it; thrown *it* away while they went on living” (*MD*, p. 204). She feels happy with Septimus’ defiance to the system; it has renewed her faith in her transcendental understanding of life and the meaning of her creations. Now, she can go back to her party. Now she can be woman-manly or man-womanly, she is free, she is renewed; no more gender roles for her now that she is outside the system, now that she is not a Woman, but what is better; a woman. Now she can face her past. “She must go back to them...She must find Sally and Peter” (*MD*, p. 205). Now, it all makes sense again.

And it is only normal that Septimus death should bring life to Clarissa. For she embodies the Yang, and she has now met that who embodies the Yin. Thus, the seed of death within the Yang reactivates it and the seed of life within the Yin frees it. Therefore, when Septimus and Clarissa come together, the Yin-Yang becomes whole, the individual has found balance and is able to experience wholeness, the “collaboration between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished” (*A Room*, p.103) has taken place, androgyny has been achieved and broken the fourth silence. Now that the death of one has enabled the life of the other, the wheel of life goes on spinning and spinning and spinning.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Once, reflecting on the nature of human life, Virginia Woolf wrote: “I see that there are 4? dimensions; all to be produced; in human life; and that leads to a far richer grouping and proportion: I mean: I: and the not I: and the outer and the inner” (Woolf, 1980a, p. 353). These four dimensions that Woolf felt, she managed to capture in her writings through her different uses of Silence (Laurence’s the Unsaid, the Unspoken and the Unsayable, together with my fourth silence; the Unthought). First gingerly developing them, swirled in a mental revelation, in *Mrs. Dalloway*; later, boldly navigating through them, easily whooshing through the waves of the human mind.

Due to her lifelong preoccupation with the absence of women in history, she chose to write in the only language that could escape the Law-of-the-Father; the gap from which all “middle-class women with nothing but brains and character at their command” (*AROO*, p. 46) could have expressed their female subjectivity. One that, as Butler would affirm, differed, and clashed with the “fixed, and the specific historical [...] female person, [but rather captured] the [true] engendering of the female subject.” (Crater, 1991, p. 121). This clash between the outer self – the Individual/Woman/Man – and the inner self – the individual/woman/man – is what creates the Unthought, and the subjugation of either side to the other leads to fatal conclusion. Woolf noted an oscillation of humanity’s daily experience between the Individual and the individual, which evokes Lacan’s Symbolic and Kristeva’s Semiotic, and wondered what one meant by “the unity of the mind” since she felt that “there are severances and oppositions in the mind, as there are strains from obvious causes on the body” (*AROO*, p. 95).

For Woolf, then, the normal and comfortable solution to this fourth silence, this clash between the fixed Individual and the oscillating individual, was “when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her” (*AROO*, p. 97). For does not life, mutable, dazzling, come from the mutual and equal participation of male and female? “One must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (*AROO*, p. 102) if one is to create. For “perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine [...] Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous” (*AROO*, p. 97).

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