

Doubling and Asymmetrical Responsibility in *Mrs. Dalloway*

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[Abstract]

This paper examines the doubling structure between Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as a narrative form that enacts the ethical possibility of responding to the suffering of the other. The doubling that Woolf constructs through her tunneling technique functions not as mere formal juxtaposition but as a structure through which the subject is involuntarily unsettled by the other's suffering before any cognitive recognition. Drawing on the concept of Judith Butler's grievability, the paper analyzes how postwar medical authority expels Septimus's trauma beyond the boundary of socially recognizable grief, determining which lives are acknowledged as livable and which are not. Against this structure of exclusion, Clarissa's empathy emerges as an ethical event in which the self-enclosed world of jouissance is ruptured by the other's appeal, performing a passive and asymmetrical response without cognitive mediation. That this empathy remains incomplete and asymmetrical is not a failure but, in Levinasian terms, the very condition of ethical responsibility. The paper ultimately argues that the doubling in *Mrs. Dalloway* figures ethical relation not as an achieved understanding but as an

irreducible vulnerability before what cannot be fully known.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, doubling, Judith Butler, grievability, Emmanuel Levinas, asymmetrical responsibility

1. Introduction

In our contemporary moment, war is broadcast in real time through media and consumed as spectacle. Footage of airstrikes in Gaza and frontline images from Ukraine appear in social media feeds alongside photographs of food and trending memes, and millions of users encounter images of war with numbing regularity. In such an environment saturated with images, the suffering of others is not a site of direct implication but a spectacle consumed from a safe distance. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag argues that repeated exposure to images of war progressively desensitizes audiences, and that the very act of image consumption operates as a substitute for ethical response (105). Sontag writes that “our failure is one of imagination, of empathy” (8), diagnosing the ways in which viewers “truly can’t imagine what it was like” to confront the suffering of others (125). For the act of viewing war photographs, she contends, does not draw the viewer into existential implication with those who suffer; rather, it confirms the viewer’s own position of safety, securely removed from that suffering. The result is that the pain of those affected by war is consumed as data and imagery, while the reality of what individual human beings endure is effaced and erased. What Sontag diagnoses as a failure of imagination is, at its core, a failure to remain open to the other’s suffering—to be genuinely affected by it before retreating into the safety of aesthetic distance.

It is precisely this structure of closure that Woolf's novel seeks to make visible and to contest.

In this age of ethical vacancy, the work of Virginia Woolf—who engaged in sustained literary reflection on what it means to respond to the suffering of others—offers an important point of reference. The postwar London in which Woolf composed *Mrs. Dalloway* was a space in which the emotional wounds and lasting trauma of returning soldiers remained inadequately addressed in public discourse. Yet British society at the time, preoccupied with restoring imperial prestige and rebuilding social order, was comparatively negligent in mourning or attending to the interior wounds that individuals carried home from the front. The pain of war was compelled into silence, and those who made it visible were classified by the language of the establishment as unbalanced. It was precisely this structure of silence—the mechanism of power that pathologizes and erases suffering—that Woolf sought to render visible through the devices of the novel. It is at this juncture that *Mrs. Dalloway* poses an ethical question that retains its urgency today: the question of the suffering of the other and the possibility of mourning. Rather than representing the war as a grand external event, the novel delicately captures the traces of fracture that its violence has left in the interiors of individual lives. The logic of an imperial medical power that sought to reduce Septimus Warren Smith's trauma to a pathological category of "unbalance" and thereby efface it calls to mind the logic and violence of all totality—any system of thought that seeks to subsume the suffering of the other within a recognizable order.

Critical engagement with *Mrs. Dalloway* has expanded considerably over the decades, moving from early formalist analyses of technique through feminist and psychoanalytic turns, and since the 2000s drawing on a range of critical tools including postcolonialism, new historicism, and trauma theory. Among these,

discussions centered on the impossibility of mourning in postwar society and on Clarissa Dalloway's modes of empathy are most directly relevant to the concerns of this paper. Karin E. Westman has analyzed the ways in which postwar society silences and marginalizes the suffering of veterans; Annalee Edmondson has conceptualized Clarissa's empathy as radical sympathy, evaluating it as an ethical force capable of fracturing a rigid social order; and Youngjoo Kim has argued for the value of the embodied mourning that Clarissa performs, while critiquing the fraudulence of public mourning as enacted by war memorial discourse. Maria DiBattista reads *Mrs. Dalloway* through the theme of memento mori, arguing that Septimus's death—cast into the midst of the party, the apex of life—compels Clarissa to perform an interior act of mourning on behalf of another. Yet in these studies, the doubling structure has largely been understood as a formal frame that organizes the novel's narrative, and its ethical implications have not been independently pursued in depth. In particular, the question of whether Clarissa's empathy functions in Emmanuel Levinas's sense of asymmetrical responsibility, or whether it amounts to an appropriation that absorbs the other's experience into the interior of the subject, has not been sufficiently examined in existing scholarship.

The historical context surrounding *Mrs. Dalloway* is concretely embodied in the figure of Septimus. He enlists to serve his country but returns from the front in a state of severe psychological collapse. Yet the medical establishment—represented by Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw—makes no effort to understand or to mourn the wounds of his inner life; instead, it reduces his suffering to a pathological category of 'unbalance' and compels him toward conformity with the social order. This is directly connected to the problem of grievability that Judith Butler raises in *Frames of War*. Butler analyzes the mechanisms of power that determine which lives are recognized as worthy of mourning and which are not, noting that lives that

cannot be mourned are those that were never recognized as ‘livable lives’ to begin with. Septimus is hailed within the imperial war narrative as a heroic sacrifice, yet the trauma concealed beneath that sacrifice is pathologized and silenced by the establishment. Ultimately, his death lays bare the ways in which postwar society excluded the suffering of those who had fought.

What is particularly striking is that Clarissa, despite sharing no physical point of contact with Septimus, recognizes his death the moment she hears of it as an event intimately bound up with her own interior life. By deliberately deferring the encounter between the two characters, Woolf shows that empathy is not a cognitive act that subsumes the other as an object of knowledge or pity, but an experience in which the world of the subject is interrupted by the other. This doubling enacts a structure in which ethical implication in another’s tragedy becomes possible without reducing that suffering to an object of knowledge or pity. It is thereby distinguished from the understanding or sympathy of the same—the tradition within Western philosophy that seeks to absorb the other into the horizon of the self. As Levinas insists, any attempt to understand the other through oneself involves a violence of the same: the negation of the other’s absolute exteriority and its reduction to my own interiority.

This paper aims to examine how the distinctive mode of empathy that Woolf figures—at a moment when the suffering of others is increasingly consumed with indifference or reduced to an occasion for moral self-congratulation—might offer an alternative possibility: one that responds to the pain of the other without violating the other’s otherness. It is at this juncture that the doubling Woolf presents functions not merely as a narrative device that places two characters in parallel, but as a structure in which the body of the subject is involuntarily unsettled by the other’s suffering prior to any cognitive recognition—a dynamic this paper will trace through Levinas’s

concepts of exposition and substitution.

Within this framework, the paper reads the doubling of Clarissa and Septimus as an ethical mode of responding to the suffering of the other. Despite the fact that the two characters never physically meet, the process by which Septimus's death unsettles Clarissa's horizon of understanding testifies to the fundamental implication that subjects share with one another. To this end, Section 2 draws on Butler's work to critically examine the mechanisms by which Septimus's postwar trauma is excluded from the domain of socially grievable suffering. Section 3 then employs Levinas's ethical philosophy as an analytical framework to trace the process by which Clarissa exposes herself in 'exposition' and responds to the call of the other that reaches her beyond this structure of exclusion. In so doing, the paper illuminates the contemporary significance of an asymmetrical empathy that bears unlimited responsibility for the suffering of the other without possessing that other as an object of knowledge—asymmetrical in the sense that it demands response without reciprocity.

2. Doubling and Non-Cognitive Resonance

The heart of the non-cognitive resonance that sustains the narrative structure of *Mrs. Dalloway* lies in what Woolf herself called the "tunnelling process." Refusing the linear order of the sentence, Woolf excavates deep caverns beneath the consciousness of her characters, unearthing what straightforward narrative cannot capture. This technique of tunneling draws up the inner lives of subjects submerged beneath the surface of everyday time, causing beings who live in apparent disconnection to cross each other's lives along an invisible dimension. J. Hillis Miller describes the

tunnelling structure of *Mrs. Dalloway* as opening into “the general mind for which the narrator speaks,” whereby the characters’ private memories connect to a shared, transpersonal consciousness (90). The process of tunneling thus functions as a narrative device that connects characters not through encounter in the external world, but through the meeting of each individual’s isolated interiority.

The structural logic of this tunneling connects directly to the way in which Woolf conceived the novel. Her original intention was to show “the world seen by the sane and the insane, side by side,” and realizing this required holding the two visions together while keeping them distinct (DiBattista 41). Boosung Kim, surveying the prior scholarship by Elaine Showalter, Alex Zwerdling, and James Naremore, characterizes the relationship between Clarissa and Septimus as the most important and radical relation in the thematic dimension of the novel (20). Woolf’s sustained deferral of any physical meeting between Clarissa and Septimus is thus not a narrative deficiency but a deliberate choice to preserve both visions simultaneously. The author herself makes clear that Septimus was “intended to be her [Clarissa’s] double” (“Introduction” vi)—a statement that reveals the tunneling process to be not merely a vehicle for psychological exploration but a sophisticated doubling device that binds the two characters into a single existential trajectory. By replacing the suicide she had initially envisioned for Clarissa with the death of Septimus in a form of what Miller terms “a substitute suicide” (98), Woolf confers upon their relationship a deep existential connection that holds even in the absence of any physical encounter.

The novel’s ending—in which Clarissa feels an immediate sense of kinship upon hearing of the death of a man she has never met—risks appearing contrived. Indeed, Woolf herself worried that the realm of madness (Septimus) and the realm of the everyday (Clarissa) might fail to cohere organically (H. Lee 29). Yet the

radical contrast between the stable upper-class life Clarissa enjoys and the collapsed interiority of a veteran undone by war trauma functions, through the mediating force of tunneling, as a pair of opposites that simultaneously illuminates the contrasting conditions and dimensions of human existence. The doubling of these two characters is thus best understood not as empathy grounded in mutual understanding, but as a relationship of non-cognitive resonance formed through the tunneling structure.

The novel opens with “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (3; all subsequent references to *Mrs. Dalloway* will be cited parenthetically by page number), establishing the party as its central plot. Clarissa exists firmly within the social framework of a Member of Parliament’s wife, having left behind the radical aspirations of her youth. In her alienation—the feeling of having become invisible—she acutely perceives a self that is dwindling into “not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (14). Since witnessing the tragic death of her sister Sylvia, a thoroughgoing skepticism has taken hold of her interior, yet this has not erased her attachment to life. On the contrary, the more conscious she is of the shadow of death, the more intensely she is drawn to the streets and flowers and people of June in London. Her love for life and her knowledge of its emptiness coexist within her without separation, and this double consciousness makes her someone who is “very young; at the same time unspeakably aged” (11).

Peter Walsh’s recollections capture Clarissa’s doubled perception of the world with precision. For him, Clarissa is a woman who sees human beings as a “doomed race, chained to a sinking ship,” and yet who believes that one must “mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners,” must “decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions” (117). Yet this paradoxical duality does not simply resolve itself into outwardly directed action. Woolf describes Clarissa’s interiority in the following

terms:

That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps. (55)

This passage reveals the fundamental tension between Clarissa's social self and her intimate self. The "one diamond" she fashions for others is a social construct designed to conceal an interior fragmentation. Her party, accordingly, functions as a site in which this internal tension is exposed within the structure of social relations. That Sally Seton and Doris Kilman dismiss Clarissa's party within the novel, and that critic Zwerdling analyzes it as an integration that is "horizontal, not vertical" (151), premised on class exclusion, are both observations directed at these external limitations. Yet for Clarissa herself, the party is not a mere social occasion but an active attempt at communication—a reaching toward the reconstitution of the self in and through relation with others. Within this context, Woolf places Septimus, a figure occupying an entirely different social position, as Clarissa's double, showing how two characters of different classes and psychological states experience and express the same era's anxiety and interior fracture in altogether different ways.

One of the most central literary devices linking Clarissa and Septimus is a line from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun" (H. Lee 31). The line is simultaneously the language of the life-rhythm Clarissa senses in the morning streets, and the language of rest that seeps into the consciousness of Septimus as he

lies on the sofa moments before his suicide. Septimus responds to the movements of leaves and the song of sparrows, sensing that “leaves were alive; trees were alive” and that they are “connected by millions of fibres with his own body” (32). For Clarissa, the line pervades the sensory rhythms of the everyday as the language that makes life endurable; for Septimus, it arrives in the dying moments of consciousness as the language of rest, promising the end of suffering. As H. Lee notes, the two characters share a condition of serene detachment from the body, anticipating death and resting within the same sensory rhythm (31). B. Kim also draws attention to the fact that Clarissa and Septimus repeat the same passage from *Cymbeline* in different contexts, discussing the significance of the sensory rhythm the two share across their temporal separation (21). The fact that *Cymbeline* reverberates asymmetrically through the consciousness of both characters reveals that the doubling is not mere juxtaposition but a structure of resonance in which the same language is transformed and reaches the other with a different existential weight.

Yet the meaning of this passage for Septimus is fundamentally different from what it holds for Clarissa. Septimus acutely perceives his own numbness—the fact that he felt no emotional response when he witnessed the death of his comrade Evans on the battlefield—and believes this to be the complete ruin of his humanity. For him, the line is not an acceptance of life but something closer to a hallucination drifting from a world of deadened sensation. He had originally enlisted “to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays” (130), yet the literary values he loved were disfigured amid the slaughter of war, and all that remained was the demand that he prove himself according to an imperial masculinity (Goldman 55). Postwar British society regards his wounds not as suffering to be healed but as error to be eliminated in the name of imperial dignity, and even his wife, Rezia, suppresses his pain by universalizing it: “Every one has friends who were killed in

the War" (99). As Zwerdling observes, Septimus is not only a victim of the war but also a victim of the peacetime society that denies his wounds (156). The same Shakespearean line is thus transformed: for Clarissa it becomes the language of 'connection,' binding together the fragments of a life; for Septimus it becomes the language of 'disconnection,' severed from society—and in so doing the line throws into relief the tragic doubling of the two.

The doubling of Clarissa and Septimus can thus be read as a tension between two subjects who respond to the world in entirely different ways under the same existential conditions. Hermione Lee explains the difference between the two characters—who respectively symbolize sanity and madness—in terms of one's capacity to perceive external reality (30). While Clarissa perceives and responds to the real, constructing her identity through the modulation of her relations with others, Septimus, unable to reconstruct a self shattered by war trauma, grows progressively disconnected from life and the world. This contrast is rendered more vivid through symbolic imagery the two characters share. B. Kim notes that the bird imagery—Clarissa's perception of herself as a jay and Septimus's perception of himself as a young hawk—functions as a symbolic device that binds the two characters into a single mirror image (21), suggesting that two figures situated in different times and spaces share a single existential fate.

The allusion to *Cymbeline* thus functions as the formal device through which the doubling of the two characters is most fully realized: the same language reaches each without shared knowledge of the other, enacting at the level of the text the novel's central claim that existential implication precedes understanding. The dirge sung by Imogen's brothers when she feigns death after being banished from society corresponds precisely to the situation of Clarissa and Septimus, who share a sense of solidarity without being aware of their connection to each other (H. Lee 31). The fact

that this song of mourning resonates for and operates upon both without either knowing the other represents Woolf's formal enactment of the idea that existential implication with the other is possible before understanding and contact. Yet the possibility that Septimus could receive this passage as the language of rest was foreclosed from the outset by the demands of the establishment.

The social pressure directed at Septimus is concretized through the medical authority represented by Sir William Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes, and this corresponds precisely to Butler's concept of grievability.¹⁾ According to Butler, it is "frames of recognizability" established by power that determine the value of a given life, and lives that cannot be captured within these frames are denied recognition as "livable life," their very loss going unrecorded in the social order (*War* 1, 25). In the novel, this mechanism operates through Bradshaw's concept of proportion. Diagnostic terms such as "depression" and lack of "a sense of proportion" are "euphemisms with sinister intentions," reducing Septimus's war trauma to a generic pathological category and thereby concealing the national violence of war (J. Lee 122). Bradshaw and Holmes process Septimus as a socially and politically absent being even while he physically survives. Septimus's act of throwing himself from the window can thus be read as a final resistance to a distorted frame of recognition, and as an attempt to leave the trace of his death—thrust beyond the boundary of the grievable by the establishment—in the consciousness of someone.

If Bradshaw's proportion is a 'violence of the same' that erases the suffering of the other by reducing it to pathological categories, then Clarissa's world, prior to Septimus's death, occupies a different but equally enclosed position. Clarissa, who is preparing for the party and sensing the fullness of life in the streets of June London, is in the state Levinas describes as *jouissance*—a stage of ego-centered self-enclosure in which the subject absorbs the world as its own and remains within the comfort of

sameness, not as a moral failing but as an ontological condition prior to the other's appeal (*Totality* 112-13). Bradshaw's proportion and Clarissa's jouissance are, at their point of departure, equally structures of closure that have not yet been opened by the suffering of the other. Yet news of Septimus's death, delivered to the party, operates as the face of the other that disrupts this world of jouissance. For Levinas, the face is not a visually perceptible form but an event that fractures the subject's comfortable world and demands ethical response. The fact that Septimus's death interrupts Clarissa's jouissance even though she has never laid eyes on him shows that the face's appeal is not a physical encounter but an event in which the world of the subject is opened by the other. This fracture serves as the catalyst that sets Clarissa on the path of responding to the other's death.

3. The Death of the Other and Asymmetrical Responsibility

At the moment the news of Septimus's death reaches the party, the two characters who have never met but who have been connected through Woolf's tunneling finally cross each other's paths. Clarissa withdraws from the party to a small room upstairs, and it is in that isolated space that she undergoes a vicarious experience of Septimus's death. Harold Bloom suggests that the doubling of Clarissa and Septimus functions as an "apotropaic gesture" (3). However, he finds it "difficult to defend *Mrs. Dalloway* from moral judgments that call Woolf's stance wholly nihilistic" (4). In contrast, E. M. Forster praises Woolf for "conveying the sublimity of Septimus's apocalyptic visions, without sentimentalizing his madness" (qtd. in DiBattista 62). This divergence of judgment precisely captures the ambivalence of Clarissa's

response. Bloom's nihilistic reading attends to the fact that Clarissa's empathy occurs without any logical basis or mutual recognition. Yet this is precisely the point that Bloom's reading misses. The fact that Clarissa's response lacks a logical foundation does not mean that it is ethically meaningless. From a Levinasian perspective, ethics does not begin on the ground of reciprocity or rational justification, but in an asymmetrical relation in which the appeal of the other reaches the subject before the subject's cognitive system.

For Levinas, exposition²⁾ is not an act intentionally chosen by the subject but a passive state in which the subject is undone by the external stimulus of the other's face. In *Otherwise than Being*, he describes exposition not as a "showing of oneself" but as a "vulnerability"—an "exposure to the other" that places the subject in a "defenselessness" before the call of the Other (49). The concept refers to an asymmetrical and passive ethical event in which the subject surrenders the aesthetic distance of contemplating the suffering of another and is instead stricken by that suffering. The fact that Clarissa responds somatically to Septimus's death without knowing him demonstrates that this structure of exposition is at work within the novel. Whether this exposition constitutes a genuinely ethical response or an appropriation of the other's suffering for one's own consolation, however, requires separate examination.

In this regard, Karen L. Levenback identifies the possibility that Clarissa's empathy functions as an appropriation of another's tragedy for the purposes of her own existential consolation (81–82). Levenback critically examines the way in which Clarissa's empathy focuses less on Septimus's individual suffering—the wounds of war—than on using his death as a vicarious experience through which to affirm her own life. To mythologize Septimus's death, Levenback suggests, risks covering over the concrete reality of the war's tragedy and social exclusion he actually experienced

with an abstracted idea.

Levenback's critique cannot be entirely dismissed. Clarissa's reconstruction of Septimus's death in her own terms—naming it “defiance,” casting him as “the Lord who had gone from life to death”—does involve a degree of translation that risks subordinating his concrete suffering to her own existential framework. The question, then, is not whether this appropriation occurs, but whether it exhausts the ethical significance of Clarissa's response. From a Levinasian perspective, the very fact that Clarissa's self is fractured and dissolved in the process—“her dress flamed, her body burnt” (280)—suggests that what takes place is not a seamless absorption of the other into the self, but an exposition in which the self is undone before it can begin to reconstruct meaning. Appropriation and exposition thus coexist unresolved within Clarissa's empathy—a coexistence that, in Levinasian terms, is not a failure of ethical response but its condition, since the face of the other demands a response that the subject cannot fully discharge or complete.

What remains to be examined, then, is the specific movement through which this coexistence unfolds within Clarissa's consciousness. DiBattista notes that his death brings Clarissa to feel a sense of guilt and self-questioning: “Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace” (282), which suggests that her empathy is not directed toward the affirmation of her own life but toward the exposure of the self's fractures (41).

In this way, the process by which Clarissa receives Septimus's death as ‘her own disaster’ connects with what Levinas calls involuntary substitution. For Levinas, the subject is defined as a “hostage” singled out by the other's suffering and unable to escape that responsibility (*Otherwise* 112)—a state that arises not from the subject's deliberate choice but from the fact that the other's appeal has already arrived before any such choice can be made. The fact that Clarissa—without knowing Septimus personally—feels, the moment she hears of his death, that she is already implicated

in the tragedy is the novel's figuration of this prior arrival. Butler extends this passivity to the somatic register, explaining responsibility as "not a calculation I perform but a being-summoned to find myself already responding" (*Oneself* 88).² In the end, rather than appropriating the other as an object of cognition, Clarissa becomes a subject of ethical exposition—one placed in a vulnerable state before the suffering of another.

It is worth noting, however, that this exposition does not remain entirely passive within Clarissa's consciousness but provokes a movement through which she attempts to receive its impact in her own way. Clarissa names Septimus's act of throwing himself from the window "defiance" (280), reconstructing him as a man who "had flung it [life] away" (281) while holding something precious within. Yet the way in which Clarissa symbolizes Septimus's 'choice'—as "the criminal who faced his judges; the victim exposed on the heights; the fugitive; the drowned sailor; the poet of the immortal ode; the Lord who had gone from life to death" (146-47)—reveals that this interpretation is less a product of Septimus's own experience than a meaning constructed in Clarissa's own terms. Miller's identification of not the party but the moment of Clarissa's retreat upstairs as the novel's climax (96) demonstrates that this moment of doubling functions as the novel's core structure. Woolf figures this moment through the stream of Clarissa's consciousness as follows:

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter; defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt at communication, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them;

closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (280–81)

What governs Clarissa's consciousness in this scene is not identification but a sense of difference. The contrast between "she had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more" and "he had flung it away" shows that Clarissa is not absorbing Septimus's death into her own experience but becoming implicated in his death while sensing the fundamental distance between herself and him. Clarissa cannot become Septimus. She must return to the party; life goes on. Yet it is precisely this gap—between what it means to be able to return, and what it meant to have had no choice but to fling oneself away—that becomes the condition enabling Clarissa to experience Septimus's death at the level of sensation. The "private and intimate mourning" that Y. Kim describes (145) is constituted upon this very gap. As DiBattista analyzes, the hidden message Septimus discovers in the language of Shakespeare—"how Shakespeare loathed humanity—the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly!" (133–34)—is mistranslated and transformed in the course of reaching Clarissa. Yet DiBattista does not view this mistranslation itself as failure. By reconstructing Septimus's death in her own terms, Clarissa reconstitutes the emotions of pain and loss within a structure of meaning, performs the work of mourning, and returns to life (DiBattista 63). This reveals at once that Clarissa's empathy is fundamentally incomplete and asymmetrical in character, and that precisely that incompleteness constitutes an ethical possibility—the possibility of responding to the suffering of the other without fully possessing or identifying with it.

In the attic room scene, Clarissa's perception becomes still more complex at the moment she gazes at the old woman in the house across the way. Unlike Septimus, who looked outward through his window in the moments before his suicide without

arriving at any recognition, Clarissa witnesses in the old woman's repetitive daily movements the simultaneous operation of life's continuation and its interruption. What deserves attention here is that Clarissa's gaze and Septimus's gaze structurally correspond to one another. Septimus, too, had looked out the window before throwing himself from it. Yet at that moment, Holmes's knock at the door transformed the external world into the pressure of the establishment, and the world beyond the window could not connect itself to his will to live. Clarissa, by contrast, gazes from the attic window on the ordinary life of an old woman. The sight of her "moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window" (283) is neither a remarkable event nor a dramatic action. It is the scene of someone's day quietly drawing to a close, and it is within that ordinary continuity that Clarissa senses that life goes on even after Septimus's death.

This contrast renders visible the arguments of Butler and Levinas simultaneously. That the world beyond the window remained closed to Septimus is because the establishment had processed him as a being who could no longer be socially addressed. In Butler's terms, he had been placed outside the category of grievable life; his connection to the external world had been structurally severed. Clarissa, by contrast, can sense the continuity of life in the old woman's daily routine because Septimus's death has already unsettled her senses and her consciousness. It is only after his death that the old woman's window is perceived by Clarissa as a scene that recalls the continuity of life. Woolf's figuration suggests, in terms broadly consonant with Levinas's account of the face as an event that reorients the subject's relation to the world (*Totality* 197-201), that it is the prior disruption of the subject by the other's appeal that makes possible a renewed perception of what surrounds her.

Clarissa's perception that "here was one room; there another" (193) is therefore not a mere confirmation of spatial separation. It is a sensing of the condition of

existence in which each life persists in its own separateness while remaining capable of entering the gaze of the other—a condition in which connection and disconnection operate simultaneously. Clarissa does not know who the old woman is or what life she has lived; no point of contact exists between them. And yet that Clarissa can sense the possibility of life's continuation in those unfamiliar everyday movements is because Woolf figures here the possibility that the other can intervene in my world without being incorporated into my cognitive system. The fact that this sensing, which never opened for Septimus, opens for Clarissa shows that the death of the other transforms the very manner in which the subject senses the world. From a Levinasian perspective, the appeal of the other has already arrived before the subject can perceive or understand it, and it is precisely this prior arrival that becomes the condition enabling the subject to sense the world anew.

Ultimately, the scene in which Clarissa murmurs once more “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun” (283) as she returns to the party can be read as an ethical response—a willingness to receive the death of Septimus, the other, within her own existential horizon. More than this, it is an attitude of affirming the value of the “privacy of the soul” (192) that Septimus sought to preserve to the last, and of making meaning of his tragedy—which the social order had classified as madness and excluded—within her own experience. Clarissa looks squarely at the violence of the uniform proportion demanded by a rational order, and it is perhaps through Septimus’s death—his withdrawal from that establishment—that she arrives, paradoxically, at a sensing of the dignity of individual life beyond the reach of the enforced social order. In other words, the scene in which Clarissa revisits Septimus’s death extends into an act that, on an individual level, crosses the boundaries of grievability as set by power. Her return to the party is therefore not a simple return to the everyday but a re-entry into the world through a transformed sensibility and perception, one that has passed

through the death of the other.

4. Conclusion

Doubling in *Mrs. Dalloway* stages the unsettling moment in which one subject becomes ethically implicated in the suffering of another whom she can never fully know. Clarissa and Septimus remain radically separate throughout the novel, yet Woolf's tunneling structure draws their isolated consciousnesses into relation across that distance. The doubling between them does not erase the boundary between self and other; instead, it exposes the instability of that boundary and the vulnerability produced when another's suffering enters the subject's world. Clarissa's response remains marked by the risk of appropriation, yet Woolf locates ethical possibility precisely within this imperfect and asymmetrical translation. Responsibility emerges before understanding and remains unresolved even in the act of response itself.

This structure of doubling raises a fundamental question about how subjects respond to suffering in the modern world. The imperial medical authority that pathologizes Septimus's trauma and the contemporary media culture that transforms suffering into consumable images both operate through structures that render pain distant, manageable, and ultimately excludable. Woolf's text therefore remains deeply relevant to the ethics of witnessing. Clarissa's response to Septimus does not grant her mastery over his experience. His death interrupts her ordinary world, exposing her to a suffering that cannot be fully absorbed into her own framework of meaning. What emerges from this encounter is not comprehension, but a form of ethical implication grounded in vulnerability.

In this sense, *Mrs. Dalloway* leaves its readers with an unresolved ethical question

rather than a final answer. Clarissa inevitably translates Septimus's suffering into her own idiom, and this translation remains partial, unstable, and incomplete. Yet Woolf suggests that ethical response begins precisely within this incompleteness. The value of Clarissa's response lies not in achieving perfect understanding, but in her willingness to remain exposed to what exceeds her own frame of recognition. When Clarissa returns to the party, Septimus's death has not been redeemed or fully transformed into meaning. The encounter has instead altered the way she inhabits the world around her. *Mrs. Dalloway* figures ethical relation not as a condition achieved through comprehension or reciprocity, but as a structural openness to what exceeds the subject's frame of recognition—a relation that the novel's formal organization, through its sustained deferral of encounter and its asymmetrical distribution of the *Cymbeline* allusion, enacts rather than merely describes.

Notes

- 1) Butler develops the concept of grievability in *Frames of War* and related texts. For Butler, grievability is not simply a response to death but a precondition for recognizing life as valuable in the first place: "without grievability, there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life" (*Frames* 15). A life that falls outside the operative "frames of recognizability" is one that was never fully acknowledged as a life worth living or mourning. This structure of differential recognition is not accidental but politically produced—certain lives are rendered ungrievable through the systematic operation of power, which determines whose suffering counts as suffering and whose death registers as loss. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus occupies precisely this position: his trauma is legible to the establishment only as pathology, and his death, while physically witnessed, leaves no sanctioned space for mourning within the social order.
- 2) The French term *exposition* in Levinas carries the sense of being laid bare or left without shelter before the other—a condition of radical passivity that precedes and exceeds any voluntary act of empathy or understanding. It should be distinguished from the everyday sense of exposure as mere visibility; for Levinas, *exposition* names the structure by which the subject is constitutively vulnerable to the other's claim before any cognitive or moral response becomes possible (*Otherwise* 49–51).

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국문초록

『덜러웨이 부인』의 더블링과 비대칭적 책임

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본 논문은 버지니아 울프의 『덜러웨이 부인』에서 클라리사 덜러웨이와 셉티머스 워런 스미스 사이의 더블링을 타자의 고통에 응답하는 윤리적 가능성을 구현하는 서사 구조로 탐색한다. 울프가 터널링 기법을 통해 구현한 더블링은 두 인물을 물리적으로 만나게 하지 않으면서도 실존적 차원에서 연결하는 서사 장치로, 주체가 타자의 고통에 의해 인지적 인식 이전에 동요되는 윤리적 구조를 뒷받침한다. 전후 의료 권력은 셉티머스의 트라우마를 병리적 범주로 환원함으로써 그의 고통을 애도 불가능한 영역으로 추방하는데, 이 지점에서 버틀러의 애도 가능성 개념을 통해 권력의 매커니즘을 규명한다. 나아가 셉티머스의 죽음에 대한 클라리사의 공감이 레비나스적 관점에서 자기 충족적 향유(jouissance)의 세계가 타자의 호소에 의해 균열되는 과정임을 밝힌다. 클라리사는 더블링을 통해 타자를 인식의 대상으로 전유하지 않으면서도 그의 고통에 연루되는 공감의 형식을 구현할 뿐 아니라 타인의 고통 앞에 취약하게 노출되는 수동적이고 비대칭적인 윤리적 응답을 수행할 수 있게 된다. 이 공감이 불완전하고 비대칭적인 성격을 띠는 사실은 윤리적 응답의 실패가 아니라, 레비나스적 의미에서 타자를 완전히 알 수 없음을 전제로 한 책임의 조건 그 자체다. 본 논문은 궁극적으로 『덜러웨이 부인』의 더블링이 윤리적 관계를 상호 이해의 성취가 아니라 인식의 지평을 초과하는 것 앞에서의 환원 불가능한 취약성으로 형상화한다고 주장한다.

주제어: 버지니아 울프, 『덜러웨이 부인』, 더블링, 주디스 버틀러, 애도 가능성, 엠마누엘 레비나스, 비대칭적 책임

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