

Mrs. Dalloway: A Modern Hamlet

ALINA ARTENIE

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Abstract

With its many direct and subtextual references to William Shakespeare's work, Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, not only contributes to Shakespeare's survival but also gives a different, enriching perspective upon his subjects, especially Hamlet's dilemmas. I plan to bring together Shakespeare and Woolf through a parallel analysis of *Hamlet* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, focusing on how the novel manages not only to tell Hamlet's story but also to live it. Thus, both works reveal the characters' struggle to understand and identify themselves as individuals and also in relation to those with whom they bond; both capture the characters' inner thoughts, transform "nothing" into something or even everything; both present ghosts that trigger not only action but also questions on every aspect of life; both introduce death to shed light upon life; both value language as a means of creating reality. In the pursuit of discussing these aspects they have in common, I plan to follow a number of antinomies, to blend close reading with elements of quantitative research and to present *Mrs. Dalloway* as a recreation of *Hamlet* with a modified contextual scenery and with partly different, partly similar resolutions.

Keywords: close reading, dichotomies, quantitative research, Hamlet, Horatio, Clarissa, Septimus

This article brings together two literary works belonging to different genres, written in two distant periods of time, one by a man, the other by a woman. Associating them may seem puzzling at first, but once the connection is perceived, the process of moving back and forth between them brings to light an increasing resemblance. In my demonstration that *Mrs. Dalloway* enriches the reader with a new perception of *Hamlet*, I draw on three literary theories: Harold Bloom's theory concerning influence, T. S. Eliot's views on the relationship with tradition, and Hans Robert Jauss' reader response theories. William Shakespeare influenced Virginia Woolf in her thinking and writing and all her novels stand proof to this. Bloom defines influence as "a matrix of relationships – imagistic, temporal, spiritual, psychological" and introduces the concept of anxiety into the larger notion of influence (*Anxiety* xxiii). He establishes a special connection between young writer and old master, drawing on the Freudian Oedipus complex. This relationship is described as similar to that between son and father, and, thus, the creative process is compared to a subconscious act of parricide. Literary influence also means to balance tradition and originality, and regarding this aspect, Eliot emphasized the idea that all that was written in the past is in continuous dynamics with the changeable literary present, his best-known example being the multiple staged re-evaluation of metaphysical poetry over the years. The openness to literary legacy is highly determined by general and individual factors shaping what Jauss termed "the horizon of expectations" (46). Social context, historical circumstances, family background, education, life and reading experiences, various emotional and intellectual interactions influence how a literary work is perceived by different readers, and, moreover, how the same reader perceives a certain text in different moments of life.

Hamlet left a dent in human consciousness with his immortal question – *to be or not to be?* – and often people use it to illustrate how apparently complex situations can be dealt with by simply making basic choices. But is it in fact that simple? Is Hamlet's tragedy a problem of indecisiveness or one of self-perception?

Shakespearean voices are easily traceable in Woolf's novel: the playwright's name appears twenty-one times, some plays are mentioned by title – *Anthony and Cleopatra* four times, *Othello* two times, two lines from *Cymbeline* echo throughout the play with slight alteration "Fear no more the heat o' the sun/ Nor the furious winter rages" (Woolf 7). There are moments when some themes and motifs bring to mind *Macbeth* or *King Lear*, but it seems that *Hamlet* haunted Woolf the most in *Mrs. Dalloway*, as I set out to demonstrate below. Although the title of this play is not mentioned in the novel, I have detected co-relations between the two literary works, established by means of allusions and in the way the main characters evolve or appear to the reader. My method is to bring a feature under discussion, to start by analyzing the way it is rendered in *Hamlet*, and then to contrast and compare Woolf's vision upon it the way it appears in *Mrs. Dalloway*. As I envision Septimus and Clarissa as two facets of Hamlet, I find it useful to follow dichotomies in my comparative analysis, in an attempt to demonstrate connections and continuity between the two literary works. My sets of binary terms to discuss are: to be – not to be, young – old, connection (love) – alienation, past (memory) – present (consciousness), mother figure – father figure, mind – body, written – spoken language.

1. To Be – Not to Be

In one of his soliloquies, Hamlet delivers a few memorable lines that capture his struggle throughout the play: "To be or not to be: that is the question: / Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?" (3.1.64-68). The predicative verb "to be" is essential both to the play and to the novel. It captures the very struggle the main characters are going through, and it carries, like a linguistic flag, the aspect upon which the reader remains meditating after closing the two books. The first line of *Hamlet*, spoken by Hamlet, is "Who's there?" (1.1.1). The last words in Woolf's novel come in a monologue for: "What is this

terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" (139). What about the beginning of the novel? No trace of the predicative "to be." There are other verbs in the first two paragraphs, action verbs, and then there are a few clauses with an implied copulative "to be" – "What a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach. . . . What a lurk! What a plunge!" Later on, in these opening paragraphs, the verb "to be" has an overwhelming presence, but only in its copulative aspect "how fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning . . . for a girl of eighteen as she then was," "his letters were awfully dull," "how strange it was" (Woolf 3). To sum it up, Woolf goes from copulative in the beginning to the predicative in the end. From definition to existence. This simple, common verb, "to be," encapsulates the complexity of human thinking and feeling, as it is rendered in the play and in the novel. Hamlet's first words form a question, not by accident blending identity issues (Bernardo addresses the question to an appearance, soon identified as Francisco) with perception issues. Regarding the latter, it is useful to read the entire dialogue, in which Shakespeare is playing with the characters' identity, as Bernardo acknowledges his partner of dialogue's identity only after revealing his own, suggesting that the process of knowing such things can only take place in reciprocity:

BERNARDO. Who's there?

FRANCISCO. Nay, answer me: stand and unfold yourself.

BERNARDO. Long live the king!

FRANCISCO. Bernardo?

BERNARDO. He.

FRANCISCO. You come most carefully upon your hour.

BERNARDO. 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.
(1.1.1-7)

The ending of *Mrs. Dalloway* also blends identities. Clarissa exists in Peter's thoughts and the phrase "for there she was" has a predicative connotation but also an implied linking value for the verb "to be." She is his former lover, the woman who broke his heart, the one who continues to be a mystery to him after

decades, the sweet perfume of youth, the good friend with whom he once wanted to change the world, the reason to go to a party he is not keen to attend. In short, she is his Clarissa.

In powerful connection with the verb “to be” there is the negative indefinite pronoun “nothing.” In *Hamlet*, it signals, by means of repetition, the subtextual question “to be or not to be,” haunting both the prince’s and the reader’s mind. In this regard, Amy Cook traces some contexts, thus shedding light on what is apparent and what lies beneath the surface:

In *Hamlet*, few things are as powerful as nothing. Nothing is seen by the watchman Barnardo at the start of the play. Nothing lies between Ophelia’s legs. Nothing makes the player king weep for Hecuba. Nothing is the thing that makes up the king. Nothing comes up thirty times in *Hamlet*. The presence of nothing in the text calls attention to the absence that nothing is supposed to stand for. (55)

“Nothing” plays a significant role in identifying things. Although by its linguistic nature it signals an absence, it challenges the reader’s mind to go beyond this level of meaning and to build definition, to transform the negative into the affirmative. Nothing is, by turns, the king’s ghost, then, Hecuba, afterwards, the sexual identity of Ophelia played by a male actor in Shakespeare’s time, later, again the dead king, visible to Hamlet, but not to Gertrude. At some point, nothing becomes everything in one of Hamlet’s lines addressed to Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, in which he delivers a sample of wisdom that summarizes his struggle: “for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (2.2.268-270).

Woolf uses “nothing” 84 times in her novel, making out of it quite the core of the book, in the sense that all is “dust” except the human inner world that floats freely like the smell of the flowers, above all things (one must remember that the beginning of the novel introduces Clarissa who sets out to buy flowers for her party, and the end of it is set in the middle of that party where the presence of the flowers is implied). Peter Walsh’s thoughts support this idea: “Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind” (Woolf

41). More than that, the pronoun is present in every character's consciousness, as it is rendered in free indirect style, thus becoming an important element of the connection between all of them. One time, it is used modified, as a noun, while Peter Walsh is walking through Regent's Park, and then falls asleep on a bench, dreaming: "So, he thinks, may I never go back to the lamplight; to the sitting room; never finish my book; never knock out my pipe; never ring for Mrs. Turner to clear away; rather let me walk straight on to this great figure, who will, with a toss of her head, mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest" (Woolf 41). The quote above describes man as a "solitary traveller" and his wish to blend with a spirit force that frees him from daily connections. The next paragraph, also set in the frame of the dream, describes the traveller exiting the woods into the village, meeting ordinary men and women, the latter knitting (a symbol of creating human connections), in a state of peace, "as if some august fate, known to them, awaited without fear, were about to sweep them into complete annihilation" (Woolf 42). Solitary or connected? This seems to be the question Peter is asking himself and is posing to the reader, the very question that haunts Hamlet, Septimus and Clarissa. Nothingness stands here for death, but the fact that the word is accompanied by the construction "with the rest" questions the implied meaning of a void. In nothingness the traveler is "with" something else, something as ambiguous as Hamlet's revelation of the final act, before dying: "Had I but time--as this fell sergeant, Death, / Is strict in his arrest--O, I could tell you-- / But let it be. Horatio, I am dead" (5.2. 368-370).

The use of "nothing" may be placed in relation to what Woolf stated about another novel of hers – "I meant nothing by *The Lighthouse*" (qtd. in Boland xiii). Nothing, as absence, seen as the gap between memories and present, is the very material used to create and recreate reality, but also, as Maud Ellmann stated, "the lack, the dearth, the destitution that art is founded on" (xxii). To sustain that division and absence are principles of creativity, a closer analysis of Woolf's vocabulary of negation is useful. Thus, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, one encounters a high frequency of words that

fall into this category: “no one” (17 times), “none” (6 times), “nobody” (20 times), “not” (452 times), “never” (108 times), “no more” (12 times), “neither” (7 times), “nor” (12 times). All these terms have the power to engage the reader in identifying what the characters destroy by negation but also what they build on it.

2. Young – Old

In tight connection with the predicative “to be” which suggests life, there is the dichotomy young – old. In the preface of the volume of criticism about *Hamlet* which he edited, Bloom discusses the difference between the way the main character appears in the first four acts of the play and the way he acts and speaks in the last one: “It is a critical commonplace to assert that the Hamlet of Act V is a changed man: mature rather than youthful, certainly quieter, if not quietistic, and somehow more attuned to divinity. Perhaps the truth is that he is at last himself, no longer afflicted by mourning and melancholia, by murderous jealousy and incessant rage” (Introduction 1). Regarding this pattern of evolution, Woolf has a different approach, as she introduces the theme of the double and thus gives the reader a young Septimus, having trouble adapting to changeable things, less resilient after the war, feeling continuously pressured to take action about something, and a mature Clarissa, who is described as feeling young and old at the same time, a state very similar to the one Hamlet reaches towards the end of the play. Comparing the frequency of the words “young” and “younger” (used 67 times) to that of the adjective “old” and its comparative “older” (used 161 times), one may conclude that “old” prevails in Woolf’s vocabulary, empowering Clarissa once more, in addition to the fact that she is the key figure in the scene of her party, as well as in the final scene of the fictional world and the scene of Peter’s thoughts. It is Peter who asserts that maturity comes with the benefit of reconciling knowledge and feeling, a very similar view to the one Clarissa has at the beginning of the novel when she mentions feeling young and old simultaneously: “When one was young, said Peter, one was too much excited to know people. Now

that one was old, fifty-two to be precise (Sally was fifty-five, in body, she said, but her heart was like a girl's of twenty); now that one was mature then, said Peter, one could watch, one could understand, and one did not lose the power of feeling, he said" (Woolf 138). The restless Hamlet of the first four acts corresponds to Septimus in the novel, while Clarissa is quite similar to the Hamlet of act V, an idea that I will examine below in a comparative manner by discussing other features of the two texts.

3. Connection – Alienation

Tackling the subject of connection versus alienation, one must understand this dichotomy in the larger frame of belonging, of what makes the characters function, be a part of something, have a meaningful life. In this subsection, I will discuss love, understood as the most obvious type of connection. In this respect, Bloom has an interesting approach regarding Hamlet's evolution, from loving "the image of authority, the dead father, and the object of the dead father's love," Gertrude, to not loving at all in act V, when he "returns fully to himself" (Introduction 6). Although Bloom sees the prince in agony throughout the whole final act, the fact that Hamlet acknowledges his love for Ophelia and that he connects to divinity makes him more centered and less lost than he was in the first four acts. Hamlet's unstable view of love is highly influenced by loss: he was only seven when the beloved court jester died (the grave digger says he has had the job since the day the prince was born, thirty years previously, and Yorick's skull has been under ground for twenty-three years); his father is also dead, and his mother does not seem trustworthy. To Ophelia, he declares love in act III, and then, a few lines later, he denies it, and, on the day of her funeral, he measures his love for her as being 40 thousand times more intense than her brother's. Shortly after this statement, Hamlet confesses to Laertes that he has always loved him. Thus, love bursts out of his being at the end of the first scene of act V. The prince begins the next, which is also the last one, with openness to divinity, with serenity, connected to a wisdom that frees him from torment

more than killing Claudius does. Unlike Hamlet, Septimus cannot find his way to feeling or acknowledging love, and thus despair flourishes, leading to a complete shutdown from everything, including himself. He, like Hamlet, has lost dear ones in the past, but not being open to other forms of love makes him unable to evolve and to survive.

Mrs. Dalloway puts behind her the feelings of love that have colored her youth (for Peter and Sally) and accepts sharing life experiences with Richard whom she does not love in a romantic sense, but she has no regrets about this choice. Clarissa learns to give love in different forms without expecting anything in return, “for the sake of offering,” as she herself states (Woolf 87). She loves Elisabeth, but the girl is alienated from her (a common condition among teenagers); she loves her parties but expects not much from them, simply enjoying the creative process, symbolically rendered by the image of her sewing the dress.

Clarissa is mature, she is like the Hamlet of act V, whereas Septimus never gets the chance to become that, being stuck in a state that resembles Hamlet’s state throughout the first four acts. Bloom introduced a term to describe the Danish prince’s attitude in the final act: “disinterestedness” (Introduction 2). Hamlet dies a peaceful man because he reaches some kind of mysterious and beautiful state, a state of “universal love,” “not nihilism,” a state beyond judgement, a state epitomized by “let be” (Bloom, Introduction 2, 3, 8). By contrast, Septimus dies unhappy (in his thirties, like Hamlet), committing suicide in an act of despair, after feeling like a target of all human evil.

Clarissa also joins Hamlet in his pursuit of an answer to the question “to be or not to be” and grabs the meaning of “let be” which is voiced in act V, scene II, whereas Septimus feels the urge to choose an answer and goes for “not to be.” Mrs. Dalloway acknowledges the fact that you can be AND not be at the same time, in the sense of interacting with others and be something to them, for periods or instances of life, but also in the sense of valuing solitude seen as another type of interaction, that is, an interaction with oneself.

This makes room for alienation, which may mean disconnection from the others but also from oneself. Hamlet feels, beyond the grief of personal loss, a general disappointment with all humans, except Horatio: “Not only a Melancholic, he is a Malcontent, a figure radically alienated from the world he inhabits” (Grady 162). Septimus is also alienated from those around him, but, unlike Hamlet, who finds peace with himself and some kind of self-knowledge towards the end of the play, he becomes deadly overwhelmed by external factors and disconnected from his own inner world.

4. Past – Present

One cannot discuss the past and the present as separate entities, for the simple reason that there is a cause–effect relationship between the two, this being the reason for which my analysis will examine them as interwoven entities. Memory plays an essential role in *Hamlet*, being the trigger of the main character’s dilemma. In Woolf’s novel, Clarissa is described as currently reading a memoir in fact, she cannot read anything else, although in her youth she used to have a broad area of interest in literature. Mature Clarissa is like a full glass, a fact seen not as arrogance, but rather in the sense that her inner world is a continuous process of bricolage, operating with memories, recreating them, as a result of changing connections with the present. Is this not exactly what Hamlet is doing?

The motif of the ghost receives multiple meanings in *Hamlet*, where it stands not only for the past and lost dear times, but also for the present, seen as a ‘refreshed past,’ of a subjective reality that shapes the feeling of each day, as Hugh Grady points out: “The return of his father as a Ghost – with all the ‘questionable’ resonances of the mysterious aura created in the ambiguous metaphysics of afterlife assumed in the fiction of the play’s aesthetic space – in turn creates a powerful ‘hauntology,’ as Derrida calls it, an effect of presence and non-presence” (161). Hamlet mourns not only his father but also the world as he used to know it, because the ghost modifies the prince’s past with its

revealing affirmations: the uncle is not only disrespectful to his brother by hastily marrying Gertrude but also a murderer, and his mother is not only incestuous but also adulterous. Thus, the king's ghost, coming into the present, recreates the past but also modifies the mourning and assigns duties, in short, modifies the present. Septimus is also haunted by Evan's presence throughout the novel until his death. But equally haunted by her memories is Clarissa, and her ghosts are maybe much scarier as they also appear in the flesh: Peter Walsh, Sally Seton. The difference is that she is able to read their appearances as self-knowledge, whereas Septimus receives external messages (such as the trees are alive, love is universal, the dead are alive, talk to the Prime Minister about it), too great a mission which ends up in alienation.

The idea of the ghost goes even further, the main male character – Hamlet, but also Septimus – becoming ghosts themselves. In the Shakespearean tragedy, as Grady points out, the Prince explicitly assigns Horatio to tell his story, as accurately as possible, thus ensuring his presence in the collective memory: "Through a series of contingent improvisations he changes the world but cannot restore what has been lost, and he leaves us mourning his own new absence from the world, initiating a new phase of 'hauntology' in the quite different figure of the dead Prince Hamlet whose story must be told, has been told, will be told" (163). On the other hand, Septimus haunts Clarissa, although she has never met him, in a narrative form, as the account of his suicide was given by Lady Bradshaw. But Clarissa's imagination and her physical response to the event shape the haunting process. Septimus also penetrates the collective memory, but Woolf turns the lens on a particular section of it – Clarissa's consciousness. She thus may be seen as a new type of Horatio, able to understand things without actually witnessing them. Septimus is also 'ghosting' through Sir William, who shares the news of his suicide with Richard Dalloway, as we are told in free indirect speech. Woolf does not elaborate on this section; the story-telling between the two men remains unknown and uncertain, as if the thread of communication at that level had been less powerful than what we

have witnessed between Clarissa and the doctor's wife. Regarding connection, the novelist seems to empower her female characters once more, signaling that they are the key in creating a continuity that overcomes even death.

While the ghost stands for the past being present, one may acknowledge consciousness as the present being an updated past. In this respect, both *Hamlet* and *Mrs. Dalloway* offer rich material to explore. The mere form of a play, through the unfolding of events and replies under the very eyes and ears of the audience, not to mention the use of the present tense in stage directions, sustains the illusion of the "now." Moreover, Hamlet's consciousness appears as changing itself as interactions and events occur, with contradictory inner voices and torment which lead to what Richard Levin calls a layered consciousness:

Some of this layering can in fact be seen in the excerpt from his first soliloquy . . . , since at several points in it he interrupts himself ("Heaven and earth, / Must I remember" [I.ii.142–143], "Let me not think on't" [I.ii.146], and "O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourn'd longer" [I.ii.150–151]), as if powerful emotional pressures are breaking through his conscious train of thought against his conscious will and so reveal an internal struggle between different parts or aspects of his mind. This, of course, is one of the devices employed to create the illusion that Hamlet is a real person, to whom we attribute different levels of consciousness, and it marks one of Shakespeare's major improvements over the soliloquies in the plays of his predecessors and in his own earlier plays. (184)

The same topic is relevantly rendered in the closet scene where Hamlet gives a speech to Gertrude displaying "two contradictory views of her sexuality" (Levin 184). On the one hand, he finds a single possible explanation for her choosing Claudius over his father (the ghost implies that the choice was made even before the king's death, through adultery): lust. On the other hand, Hamlet considers her to be too old for such carnal impulses. The prince

feels a constant pressure to find answers following a neither-nor and either-or paradigm in the first four acts of the play.

Woolf's novel is set on a June day, from morning till evening, which gives the reader a strong impression of a present, an impression sustained by rendering various characters' thoughts in free indirect style, blending consciousnesses. The past, however, infuses everything, and, to support that, strong evidence is given by the way the verb "to be" is used, 256 times in the present simple form, affirmative and negative, and 1550 times in the past simple form, affirmative and negative. The overall high frequency of this verb, in the context of a dominant past, suggests that not events, but states of mind and feelings that emerged from different events, are those which shape memory. The verb "to be" is sometimes used with predicative value but mostly as a linking verb, which reveals Woolf's concern with not only defining things but with identifying them through the eyes of her characters. Thus, reality is a mere act of perception, echoing Hamlet's "there's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (2.2.268-270), to which she seems to add a subtextual "feeling makes it so." The past, "always in motion," and the present, "absolutely new," are facets of the creational process of life itself, and, therefore, the action in the novel consists, as Floris Delattre noticed in 1931, of "an incessant flux of emotional moments" (300).

Woolf builds a layered consciousness in Septimus, a character who finds himself questioning his old beliefs, a relevant example being the way he perceives Shakespeare before and after the war: once a beautiful expression of human connection and romantic love, the writer is later seen as having been deeply disappointed with humans. Multiple layers are described in Peter's and Clarissa's consciousness as well. The meeting between the two of them makes him question his view of the upcoming divorce and the new marriage to a much younger Indian woman, and his feelings for Clarissa. Mrs. Dalloway has also a slight impulse to run away with Peter, from all her present life, ending an episode that seems to her like the acts of a play, as if real life awaited just around the corner.

The dichotomy past – present shapes a process of self-discovery which is central both to *Hamlet* and to *Mrs. Dalloway*. While in Septimus's case the process becomes incompatible with life itself, in Hamlet's and Clarissa's cases one may discuss it as the evolutionary thread of the characters and of the entire fictional world. As Grady points out, Hamlet changes identity, fakes madness, loves and unloves Ophelia on the same page, in a pursuit to distract others' attention from his plans, but there is a procrastinating trait attached to this behavior, a trait that, in fact, delays self-knowledge: "Hamlet himself is continually filling up the empty theatrical space with his many roles, none of which can be said to embody that goal of Polonius's pseudo-wisdom, a true self. Rather, we have to say, Hamlet's decentered self is radically unfixed, existing only within the process of deferred identification that is his condition throughout the play" (191). Only in the final act does Hamlet come to terms with himself, a state that frees him more than the death of Claudius does. On the other hand, the female protagonist of Woolf's novel evolves from being Mrs. Dalloway in the first line of the book to being Clarissa in the last. The point of view is essential here, because she sees herself sometimes depersonalized as Richard's wife, and at other times as the young woman full of life she was at Burton. As the novel progresses, we trace the many roles that Clarissa is playing, in Peter's consciousness, in society, in the Dalloway family. The character Clarissa Dalloway exists in the form that she does due to the way various other characters perceive her, including the old woman across the street who gets a glimpse of her only once.

5. Mother Figure – Father Figure

As for the mother figure – father figure dichotomy, one may find similitudes between Hamlet's and Septimus's backgrounds. Both of them are briefly but significantly shown to us as boys deprived of their mothers' warmth, trust, and probably understanding. Hamlet looks at Yorick's skull remembering the countless times he has been kissed on the lips and carried by the court jester, his only

childhood memories rendered in the play, which do not include a mother, probably a traumatic absence; Septimus sets out to London after multiple disappointments with his mother's behavior towards him: "had left home, a mere boy, because of his mother; she lied; because he came down to tea for the fiftieth time with his hands unwashed" (Woolf 60). Thus, we see a pattern of early trauma, a fertile frame for later traumatic experiences. The impact of fighting in a war is devastating for Septimus, especially because it overlaps with the death of his friend, Evans, and changes irreversibly the way he perceives the world and himself. Drawing on Sigmund Freud, Reina van der Wiel discusses the reason for which only 20 percent of war-fighters experience posttraumatic stress: "Although still under debate, resilience appears to be closely related to preparation for anticipated stress, successful fight or flight response, developmental history, belief system, prior experience, internal resources, and family and social support" (8). Septimus has poor resilience as he has no social support; he does not feel he belongs to a family because he has lost the original one, and he married Rezia without having a true connection with her. He also lacks a belief system, and he belongs to nothing and to no one, a feeling amplified by the absence of the wedding ring on Rezia's finger.

Regarding the father figure, Hamlet feels duty-bound to avenge the dead king, which creates a discrepancy between what he perceives himself to be and what he thinks he should be. One may notice that besides the initial distrust of the ghost's revealing statements, Hamlet has no conflict with his father, no trauma to carry, no legacy to deal with. Septimus's father is never mentioned, while Mrs. Dalloway's, Justin Perry, is highly present in the memories from Burton, both in Peter's thoughts and in Clarissa's. Her mother, on the other hand, appears without a name, being mentioned only once, by Miss Hilbery, who finds the protagonist very much like her mother when she used to walk in the garden wearing a grey hat. This vague presence catches Clarissa's attention for a short moment, inducing emotion: "And really Clarissa's eyes filled with tears. Her mother, walking in a garden! But alas, she must go" (Woolf 125). The pattern that one may identify in the two

texts is that a main character is always put in a stronger relationship with the parent of the opposite sex. Placing the male – female interaction in the outer but also in the characters' inner world becomes part of the self-discovery and identification process that governs this particular play and this particular novel.

6. Mind – Body

The relationship between mind and body is subtly rendered in the two texts. They are not separate entities; on the contrary, the equilibrium between the two, or the lack of it, within a certain character, determines the survival of that character. In 1994, Elizabeth Grosz borrowed the model of the Möbius strip from Jacques Lacan and discusses it in relation to the body – mind dichotomy:

Bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives. The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. This model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other. (qtd. in van der Wiel 27)

Hamlet's famous soliloquy in act II, scene 2, shows the reader his admiration for human qualities – "What a piece of work is man!" – but regarding the body, he has an ambivalent attitude. On one hand, the prince treasures human physical capacities – "in form and moving how express and admirable!" and, on the other, he is disappointed with the transience of the flesh – "and yet, to me, what is that quintessence of dust?" (2.2.327-332). Throughout the first four acts, Hamlet constantly sees the human body as a burden for spiritual thriving (Gertrude chooses the less valuable man following her lust, while Ophelia is told to go to a nunnery to avoid

becoming a “breeder of sinners” (3.1.132)), but, towards the end, by accepting the transience of physical human form, he is able to see death and the dissolution of the body not as an end but as transformation: “To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till he find it stopping a bung-hole?” (5.1.209-211). The words have a sarcastic connotation, but one must acknowledge the evolution of the perspective, from “dust” to “use,” from solitude to connection. This is precisely the difference Woolf draws between Septimus and Clarissa, regarding the viability of their outlook on living. One dies in despair; the other one creates connections and makes room for otherness in life.

Clarissa is very aware of her body, mostly unsatisfied with its appearance, but generally this does not stand in the way of her expanding the interior world. Only once does her body make her think, with disappointment, about the identity she had developed for herself over the years: “But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown . . . this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (Woolf 8). The words “with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all” resemble what Hamlet stated in act II, scene 2. There is a shift from this perception of her depersonalized self at the beginning of the novel and the way she appears in the end, simply as Clarissa, in Peter’s mind. Thus, salvation comes with connection. The body itself becomes, for Clarissa, a means of communication between people unknown to each other, between life and death: “He had killed himself – but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt” (Woolf 131). By contrast, Septimus feels his body only connected to nature and not to human beings, which is not enough to make him survive his own torment and others’ pressure upon him: “leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibers with his own body” (Woolf 16).

The body becomes the materialized expression of a mind in search for connection, when Miss Kilman experiences a powerful pain, both mentally and physically, once her beloved Elizabeth decides to part ways with the tutor: “The waitress came. One had to pay at the desk, Elizabeth said, and went off, drawing out, so Miss Kilman felt, the very entrails in her body, stretching them as she crossed the room, and then, with a final twist, bowing her head very politely, she went” (Woolf 95).

7. Written – Spoken Language

As the two texts are available to the reader in written form, it is useful to underline the metalanguage that they use in defining the dichotomy written – spoken words. The characters’ lines, in the play, the stream of consciousness technique and the dialogues, in the novel, plead for oral communication but there are subtle demonstrations, both in the play and in the novel, of the value given to written material. Thus, Hamlet saves his life by rewriting the letter to the king of England and replacing his name with the names of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In act I, scene 5, after the ghost asks to be remembered and avenged, Hamlet soliloquizes about a table of memories, an erasable surface to write on, and a few sentences later about his brain as being “book and volume,” a more stable medium for written language. But, as Grady points out, the symbolic power of the two written surfaces resides in the degree to which they influence memory:

The difference is deeply expressive of different possibilities in the future: whether Hamlet’s memory will prove a transitory table or a more permanent book, whether the Ghost’s commands (and his/its version of reality) will remain an external, alienated task, or be assimilated, taken within Hamlet’s (protean) sense of self – these issues . . . are posed for the audience and readers in this brief and fragmentary allegory amidst the ‘wild and whirling words’ (1.5.137) of Hamlet’s agitated reactions to the Ghost’s revelations. (164)

The power of language to create reality and to influence action is to be determined by the reader once the play reaches its end. Hamlet calls attention to the realm of words being at the same time its victim and its creator.

Ophelia too is reading a book in act III, scene 1, and Polonius encourages her to keep doing that, while he will spy on her conversation with Hamlet, who is about to come. Reading the book is, in Polonius' eyes, besides "an exercise" that "colours [her] loneliness," a proof of truthfulness in the prince's eyes, winning his trust (3.1.51-52). This statement occurs after Polonius saw Hamlet reading in act II, scene 2, but what the courtier had missed then was the way words can be played with and manipulated in order to change meaning.

Woolf's novel puts Septimus and Clarissa in a very different relationship with language. The war survivor is unable to feel but reads with no difficulty what he used to read, Dante's *Inferno*, for instance. He also cannot comprehend new language, symbolized by the letters in the sky whose meaning he fails to grasp. Being stuck in the past and in numbness makes Septimus unable to survive. For Clarissa, on the other hand, the act of reading encapsulates life itself: she reads the lines from *Cymbeline* in the library window; she reads messages on the telephone pad; she "reads on Lady Bruton's face" the signature of time; she reads Baron Marbot's *Memoires* at night; she fails to read Peter's letter announcing his arrival in London, but she later writes him one saying it was heavenly to see him. One can imagine her reading the letter, as it is universally acknowledged that the author of any written piece becomes the first reader of that piece. There is a significant difference between Clarissa and Septimus in this regard, since the latter is unable to write and dictates things to his wife. The reader is told that younger Septimus wrote poetry and Isabel Pole made written corrections to his poems, lent him books, wrote him letters. That period of emotional thriving and fulfilment was also a period of deep connection with the language, making one question which caused which. Later on in the novel, the war survivor is

alienated from language, and this leads him to become incompatible with life.

As for the spoken language, *Hamlet's* action has as a main motor the ghost's account of an adultery and a murder. The end of the play presents the audience with a dying Hamlet urging Horatio to survive him and tell his story. The whole play is set between two stories, one of the recent past and one that is in the making but also on the verge to become a future one. Ever since *The Arabian Nights*, the power of storytelling to sustain life became a point of intersection for literary works. Thus, survival is not only individual but community-linked, as the collective memory is enriched with every narrative thread.

In Woolf's novel, every character's consciousness reveals "book and volume," as Hamlet was saying about his own brain. Clarissa, Peter, Septimus, and Rezia, each have their own internal book of memories, subject to continuous making and remaking. While *Hamlet* presents a metatheatrical instance with the play-within-the play, *Mrs. Dalloway* introduces a metanarrative sequence, Lady Bradshaw's account of Septimus's suicide, told only to Clarissa, resembling the personal touch of the act of reading. A few moments later, Clarissa withdraws to a separate room (also suggesting the solitude of reading) and imagines Septimus's death, living it with all her being, asking herself questions about it, just the way literature is meant to interact with a reader.

Blending time frame (past-present) and language (exchange of words between characters), Franco Moretti translates Hamlet into vertices and edges, linking each character to all the others whom they spoke to during the play, and making thus a map that brings together, at the same time, the whole population of the three acts. Moreover, when he tries to understand the importance of a character by the consequences of his/her disappearance to the play's dynamics, Moretti finds out that while taking out Hamlet and Claudius the play may still survive, losing Hamlet and Horatio presupposes such a fragmentation that the play disintegrates. Somehow, it is a counterintuitive conclusion, since Claudius is a more central character than Horatio. Horatio's indispensability in

the play lies in the way he mediates the connection of the peripheral characters to the central ones, of the geographical ramifications (England, Norway, France, the realm of the dead) to central Elsinore (Moretti 227-228). Thus, Horatio becomes to Moretti “a fantastic half-intuition on Shakespeare's part,” with “something enigmatically undeveloped about him” (229).

Three centuries later, Clarissa Dalloway interacts in speech acts with a variety of characters, from the maid to the Prime Minister, from peripheral characters (Lucy, Miss Pym) to central ones (Peter, Richard), uniting social strata and bringing together even age extremes (teen Elizabeth, old lady from across the street). The only ones whom she does not intersect with are Septimus and Rezia, but the link is established somehow when Lady Bradshaw tells the story of the WWI survivor's suicide to Clarissa. Moreover, the impact on the female protagonist is so powerful that it makes her withdraw to a quiet room and establish, in a very physical manner, a contact with the realm of the dead. The flames that Septimus feels at the beginning of the novel – “the world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames” (Woolf 11) are symbolically transferred to Clarissa at the end – “her dress flamed, her body burnt.” Here is a new Horatio, bringing together the geographical ramifications (India, rural England, the realm of the dead) and central London, the peripheral characters and the central ones. Shakespeare gained with Horatio a strange balance of his play, as Moretti points out: “Kent is near Lear out of loyalty; Macduff, near Malcolm to avenge his family. Horatio? Horatio has a function in the play, but not a motivation” (229). In her novel, Woolf seems to have found in Clarissa's lack of motivation her very function in the dynamics of the novel. Doing things for the sake of doing, Clarissa combines Horatio's networking skills with Hamlet's late disinterestedness, pulling a doomed Septimus from oblivion and unifying all that can be unified in the world of this novel.

I started out in this comparative analysis with a feeling that Clarissa and Septimus are facets of Hamlet, and I end my quest with a slight correction – Clarissa and Septimus are facets of *Hamlet* – because as I progressed with my research, Woolf's

heroine seemed more and more the heir of Horatio's legacy and Septimus – an atrophied, but no less pain driven Hamlet. Both characters of the novel display their traits in a modern arena, but in fact not so different from the Elizabethan stage, in literary frames that have the same tragic core. Concluding upon the survivors in these literary works, one may trace the matrix of their survival: the Shakespearean Horatio lives on and mediates the changing of sovereignty (and thus a new era), gets to tell Hamlet's story and by that to make a dent into the collective mind. He thrives. Clarissa seems happy and unhappy at the same time (having something from Hamlet's duality of thinking), lonely and extremely connected, present and always with a foot in the past. Not only to Peter, but to the reader as well, Clarissa is so volatile and yet so palpable. She thrives.

Once immersed in the worlds of this novel and of this play, the reader's mind faces new questions, questions that emerge only in the dialogistic association of the two. The horizon of expectation modifies with every reading of *Hamlet* after *Mrs. Dalloway*, of *Mrs. Dalloway* after *Hamlet*, and also with every rereading of each. Being aware of the fact that Woolf was a reader of the Shakespearean work and a creator in the Shakespearean tradition (in the way Eliot stated about the inescapable double-way thread between past and present in literature), one may formulate the biggest gain of any reader – “a capacity for otherness, a capacity that comes to life when author and reader participate in a circuit of interanimation, retaining their own subjective particularity even while they are united in their contact with a commonly shared and uncircumscribed spirit (divine or human) that is the basis for their relation” (Hale 13).

Works Cited

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*.
Oxford UP, 1997.

- . Introduction. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's Hamlet – New Edition*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 1-10.
- Cook, Amy. "Staging Nothing: *Hamlet* and Cognitive Science." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's Hamlet – New Edition*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 55-72.
- Delattre, Floris. "Floris Delattre on Virginia Woolf and Bergson." *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin, Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2003, pp. 299-300.
- Ellmann, Maud. Introduction. *To the Lighthouse*. Vintage Classics, 2019, pp. xvi-xxii.
- Grady, Hugh. *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*. Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Hale, Dorothy. "The Art of English Fiction in the Twentieth Century." *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth Century English Novel*, edited by Robert L. Caserio, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 10-22.
- Jauss, Hans Robert. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Translated by Timothy Bahti, U of Minnesota P, 2005.
- Levin, Richard. "Gertrude's Elusive Libido and Shakespeare's Unreliable Narrators." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's Hamlet – New Edition*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 173-192.
- Moretti, Franco. *Distant Reading*. Verso, 2013.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Folger Shakespeare Library, shakespeare.folger.edu/downloads/pdf/hamlet_PDF_FolgerShakespeare.pdf. Accessed 30 Apr. 2022.
- van der Wiel, Reina. *Literary Aesthetics of Trauma, Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. Feedbooks, pdf, gutenberg.net.au/plusfifty-n-z.html#woolf. Accessed 15 May 2021.