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“THE WORLD BROKE IN TWO”: THE GENDERED EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA  
AND FRACTURED CIVILIAN IDENTITY IN POST-WORLD WAR I LITERATURE

by

Erin Cheatham

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“THE WORLD BROKE IN TWO”: THE GENDERED EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA  
AND FRACTURED CIVILIAN IDENTITY IN POST-WORLD WAR I LITERATURE

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University of Nebraska, 2016

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This thesis examines the complexities of civilian identity and the crisis of gender in twentieth century fiction produced after World War I. Of central concern are four novels written by prominent women authors, novels that deal with themes of trauma, violence, and shifting gender roles in a post-war society: Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*, Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Jacob’s Room*. Although these novels do not directly portray the battlefield experiences of war, I argue that, at their core, they are “war novels” in the fullest sense, concerned with the aftereffects of a war that shattered civilian identity and broke worlds in two. I situate my argument around Cather’s famous assertion that “The world broke in two in 1922, or thereabouts,” included in the preface to her 1922 collection of short stories, *Not Under Forty*. Cather’s assertion echoes a similar statement by Virginia Woolf, imploring that “on or about December 1910, human character changed,” made in the same year. These two statements encompass the attitudes of a generation of writers uniquely attuned to the changing social and political climate in which they were producing some of the most important literature of their time. The four novels I explore here represent unique examples of the capabilities of modernist narrative techniques and language. These narratives set up a dichotomy between genders, exploring how the war caused a rift in traditional gender roles that eventually lead to a “crisis of gender.”

Ultimately, these novels question the illusion of wholeness that soldiers were expected to portray after returning from a war that split their world in two, and forever fractured the idea of civilian and domestic life.

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Living in the Midwest and furthering my education in the lovely state of Nebraska is an experience that I'll never forget.

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## Introduction

Willa Cather, in the preface to her collection of short stories *Not Under Forty*, makes the bold claim that “The world broke in two in 1922, or thereabouts.” The year 1922 is significant in the history of twentieth century literature, as the world saw the creation of some of the most significant modernist texts: James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*, and T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land.” Michael’s North’s *Reading 1922* offers an interesting view of this influential year in literature, setting up the central conflict of 1922 as the widening of the generational gap that produced these works. North notes that “This dramatic advent of a new literature was at least part of what Willa Cather had in mind when she complained, ‘The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts’” (North 3). The authors, frustrated by a world that could not adapt to modern sensibilities and modes of thought, fought for a new type of literature, one that was better suited to expose the fragmented inner realities of a generation ravaged by war and conflict.

World War I had a significant impact on art and literature, robbing the world of some of the most influential thinkers and creators. This impact extended far beyond just those who experienced the battlefield firsthand, and seeped into every aspect of civilian life, forever altering the notion of what it meant to live in the modern world. Modernist writers attempted to navigate this changing landscape by exposing the inadequacies of the traditional modes of literature produced by the previous generation of Victorian writers. They believed that literature needed to better capture both the external and internal realities of human nature, and should be expressed in a manner that is more indicative of the complexities of the human mind. Literary Modernism called for an immediate overhaul of narrative techniques and styles, attempting to establish a new “form” that was

better equipped to portray the realities of modern life. These new “forms” and techniques included stream-of-consciousness narratives, the use of free indirect discourse and shifting focalizations, and a fragmented portrayal of time and space.

As the modernists began to break from narrative tradition, they rejected traditional linear temporality in favor of a more complex representation of the intricacies of time and space. In addition to frequent temporal shifts, modernist literature is distinguished by its discontinuity of narrative perspective and reestablishment of characterization. In her essay *Modern Fiction*, Virginia Woolf dismisses the narrative techniques of “the materialists” of previous literary movements and instead emphasizes that the point of interest for the moderns lies in the depths of individual psychology, and thus the representation of character must be less didactic: “Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight of incident scores upon the consciousness” (*Modern Fiction* 155).

In fiction written after the Great War, trauma narratives focused on what F. Scott Fitzgerald, in his 1933 novel *Tender is the Night*, deemed, “Non-combatants shell shock:” the experience of trauma through civilian eyes. These narratives set up a dichotomy between those who experienced war first-hand, men stationed on the front lines, and those who felt the domestic effects of war, usually women who eagerly awaited the return of a soldier. In this sense, the war caused a rift in traditional gender roles; women during the war took over the roles traditionally assigned to men, compensating for their loss by filling two worlds. When the men returned home from war, the social atmosphere was displaced again, as men attempted to re-integrate into a society that had



grown accustomed to working without them. This was further exaggerated by society's attempt to pick back up where it had left off, to concede to a sense of "normalcy" that would never again exist.

The novels explored here show how the war catalyzed a "crisis of gender," and redefined notions of masculinity, of what it truly meant to be a man. This can be seen more dramatically in the fictional portrayals of the "returned soldier" that Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf offer, representations of those afflicted with the "war neuroses" that was too common amongst men after the war. Higonet importantly writes that

By the end of the war, therefore, trauma had joined brotherhood and disillusionment as hallmarks of the war experience and of the war narrative. In spite of underlying ambiguities, the gendering of war entailed a gendering of trauma, and trauma became a privileged, masculine form of testimony about the complex meaning of war, a status it retains among historians and critics today.

(Higonnet 94)

Since it was considered "manly" not to complain, "shell shock was the body language of masculine complaint, a disguised male protest, not only against the war, but against the concept of 'manliness' itself" (Showalter 172). Ultimately, these novels question the illusion of wholeness that men were expected to portray after returning from the war.

This thesis explores four modernist novels in particular, Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Jacob's Room*, through the lens of the gendering of trauma and the shifting idea of post-war civilian life. Chapter one discusses *The Return of the Soldier*, focusing on Chris Baldry's problematic return to civilian life after being "wounded" in the war.

Chris's "invisible illness," his amnesia precipitated by war neuroses and shell shock, transports him fifteen years in the past, to a time before war, marriage, and the trivialities of domestic life. Focalized through the perspective of Chris's loving cousin Jenny, *The Return of the Soldier* highlights the complex relationship between men and women after the war, and the ways in which the invisible illnesses of shell-shocked soldiers threatened traditional gender roles and ideals of masculinity. Ultimately, Kitty, Chris's wife, and Jenny both agree that the only way to "cure" Chris is to destroy the complex illusion he has built up in his head, and send him back to the war that caused his trauma. I explore the dichotomies between the experience of war through the differing perspectives of Chris, Kitty, and Jenny, ultimately assessing the differences in how this trauma manifests in both men and women.

Chapter two explores Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* as a non-traditional "war novel," using Godfrey St. Peter's attitudes towards war and violence, and the embedded narratives he uncovers, to navigate the transitional period after the war, in which the ghosts of the dead still haunted civilian life. In the novel, St. Peter, a history professor, neglects his scholarly endeavors in order to edit the personal diary of his friend and former student, Tom Outland. The relationship between these two men is central to the novel, as Tom's embedded narrative encompasses nearly half of the novel itself, and St. Peter uses this narrative to re-create a more digestible personal history for himself, editing his past in order to create meaning for his present. In this chapter, I also explore St. Peter's relationships with the various women in his life in order to uncover the gender binaries in the novel, dichotomies that contribute to what Marianne DeKoven calls a "crisis of gender." Cather uses this crisis to expose the various ways the war altered

certain ideals of masculinity and femininity, and the ways in which modernist writers utilized narrative techniques and styles to explore the crises that plagued them.

Chapter three explores the differences in the experience of trauma through the exploration of two of Virginia Woolf's most experimental narratives, *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. These two modernist novels explore the intricacies of internalized trauma and the subsequent externalizations that persisted in the wake of World War I. In these novels, Woolf utilizes a prototypical modernist narrative structure, incorporating modernist techniques that attempt to emulate and represent the complex interiority of the characters. David Trotter writes that "the literature of crisis seeks out concentrations (it is often an urban literature, because cities compress both time and space by multiplying encounters)" (Trotter 78). This is most readily apparent in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where these multiple encounters are usually filtered through an urban landscape and described from differing perspectives, creating a narrative sense of wholeness while presented through fractured perspective. Both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Jacob's Room* differ somewhat significantly from Cather's *The Professor's House* and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* in that they include a more complex connection between narrative style and overall content. In this final chapter, I also focus on the dichotomies between the gendered experiences of trauma; the effect of industrialized warfare on civilian life is contrasted with the war combatant's direct experience of this violence, and the tensions this produces.

The violence in the novels is gendered in interesting ways. Women are more often associated with physical violence and bodily harm, while men must endure damaging psychological and internal violence. Modernism itself reflected the gendered aspects of

society, and sometimes produced a body of work inherently unforgiving towards women, especially women writers and female portrayals in modernist works. Joseph writes that “although the era between the wars did produce an opportunity for gender liberation, it also produced conditions that abetted a traumatization of gender” (Joseph 64).

In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris Bundy’s amnesia takes him fifteen years into the past, to a time before the war and before the domestic life he always knew was threatened by modernity. In this sense, the agency of time is significant in trauma narratives, as temporality is usually upset or momentarily disturbed. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith suffers delusions and flashbacks that force him to re-live the trauma faced during the war; In *The Professor’s House*, Tom Outland is stuck in a past that is tirelessly “edited” by St. Peter; In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris Bundy must escape to the comfort of life before war and marriage in order to “process” his trauma. Time, in this sense, becomes a distorted image of experience.

By focusing specifically on women writing about war and trauma, I am able to explore the ways in which civilian identity changed during and after World War I, when modernized warfare destabilized traditional notions of and attitudes towards the capabilities of war. Traditionally, twentieth century representations of war were “thought to be war writing by men about men,” yet more recently, this genre “has been expanded to include representations of war by female authors,” as scholars “agitate for recovery of female war writers and new ways of thinking about women, war, and literature” (Goodspeed-Chadwick 3). These female authors had a unique perspective, they were witness to the shifting social atmosphere of society in the wake of a war that left over eleven million men dead, a society that was forced to deal with this absence in many

ways. Through the chapters presented here, I begin to unravel the ways in which modernist authors like Woolf, West, and Cather interpret this new world around them, and the shifting notions of gender and identity precipitated by the trauma and casualties of World War I.

**Chapter One: An Invisible Wound: Silent Trauma and Civilian War Neuroses in  
Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier***

With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from battlefield grown silent—not richer but poorer in communicable experience?

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller"

*The Return of the Soldier* was first published in 1918, the same year that the Great War came to a close. Rebecca West's depiction of a wounded soldier returning home from the front lines portrayed the shared experiences of millions of young men in Britain, returning home from a war that forever altered their sense of identity and stability. These men, some battling the invisible wounds of shell shock and war neuroses, fought to regain a sense of normalcy after the war, attempting to re-integrate into a social and political landscape that shifted in their absence. In *The Return of the Soldier*, West explores the complex tension between the genders after the war, in which women tried to make room for the "changed" men in their lives, while dealing with their own personal sense of loss and trauma. The novel exposes the shortcomings of a society plagued with a need to understand the invisible trauma of its young soldiers, a society that emphasized the legitimacy of curing physical wounds over the necessity of addressing the internal ones. Non-combatants experienced the war through the filtered eyes of media and the news. They heard indirectly of the mass casualties and the bloody battles, but knowing few real details they relied on imagination to conjure images of what was happening on the battlefield. In effect, they were susceptible to what Trudi Tate refers to as "civilian war neuroses" (20).

*The Return of the Soldier* explores the ways in which we understand the “domestic trauma” inflicted during times of war, and how civilian post-war experience centered on a “need to maintain a stable environment to which combatants might return” (Frayn 48). After hearing of her husband’s release and impending return, Kitty Baldry busies herself with fixing the house to welcome her husband back. The need for this “stable environment” was a manifestation of the anxieties that plagued women at the time, the realization that domestic ideals and civilian identities were shifting in a new, modern direction. Kitty’s expectation that life can return to “normal” is quickly upset by Chris’s amnesia, his un-willful refusal to “re-integrate” into a life and identity that no longer had room for him. Bonikowski notes that Chris’s return is “the occasion of a domestic trauma, a shattering of the domestic space comparable to the shattering of a soldier’s mind” (108). This “domestic sphere,” though easily shattered by Chris’s return, was also meticulously crafted. Baldry Court, the home of Chris and Kitty, is described in colorful terms that emphasize the deep natural beauty of the estate. We come to learn of the “miles of emerald pastureland” and “sleek hills blue with distance and distant woods,” the “suave decorum of the lawn and the Lebanon cedar” that make up “the beauty of that view” (*The Return of the Soldier* 4) from Jenny’s window. Yet, she notes that all of this “beauty was an affront to [her],” as she “was wishing for the return of a soldier” (*The Return of the Soldier* 5). West’s ambition in portraying the “domestic haven” of the English countryside is to immediately juxtapose the stark contrast between civilian and combatant experience during the war.

On a deeper level, this contrast can be made between the external and internal realities of the characters. The anxieties that Jenny and Kitty feel, about the war, about

Chris and his safety, are met with the beauty of the world that surrounds them, meant to appease these anxieties and reassure them. Kitty's emphasis on keeping everything in the house in order embodies her ambition to create a "domestic haven" for her husband to return to. Meanwhile, Jenny reveals that she wants "to snatch my cousin Christopher from the wars and seal him in this green pleasantness his wife and I now looked upon," and tries to "build around me such a little globe of ease" (*The Return of the Soldier* 5). Yet, it is immediately clear that Jenny's knowledge of the war and its impact is limited, as we learn that all she knows about the war comes from the "war-films" (*The Return of the Soldier* 5) she's seen. Bonikowski notes that "by restricting the focus of her novel to women living on a country estate, West intensifies the shock that the impact of the soldier's return makes on their lives" (106-7). The "shock" that is delivered when Chris returns an "injured" soldier not only affects the women who have been waiting on him, but the setting itself seems to transform into something darker. Shortly after Chris's return, Jenny notices that the house seems to become "terribly aware," that a "strangeness had come into the house and everything was appalled by it, even time" (*The Return of the Soldier* 25). Chris's return precipitates a sense of absence that slowly pervades the novel, shifting the emphasis from the "green pleasantness" of the physical space they inhabit to the "strangeness" that appalls time itself.

In portraying her archetypal soldier as a shell-shocked amnesiac, Bonikowski notes that West draws "attention to this strange new illness— an invisible wound—that...contained a meaning not only about the soldier's experience of war but also about the experience of women at home who had to receive him and to try to understand his place in their lives" (95). Upon enduring the reality of her cousin's amnesia, Jenny



reveals that “I was past speech then, who had felt his agony all the evening like a wound in my own body” (*The Return of the Soldier* 31). Her willingness to take on Chris’s “wound,” to bear his “agony” with him, only further divides the two. Even after his return, she continues to transpose the trauma she imagines onto Chris, as she attempts to translate his own “illness” into a physical trauma. In Jenny’s mind, Chris is physically wounded, and needs support; as he runs into the arms of his former lover, Jenny imagines him “running across No Man’s Land,” with Margaret’s arms bracing him “with a gesture that was not passionate, but rather the movement of one carrying a wounded man from under fire” (*The Return of the Soldier* 59). Jenny’s need to invent the physicality of Chris’s trauma is evidence of the cultural attitude towards post-war mental illness. Andrew Frayn notes that “the three women’s attempts to comprehend Chris’s shell shock show the difficulty of treating an unseen wound as diagnoses and analyses developed” (56). When Margaret first approaches Kitty and Jenny about Chris, she hesitantly divulges the specifics of his injury; “How is he wounded?” Kitty asks, to which Margaret responds, “I don’t know how to put it; he’s not exactly wounded” (*The Return of the Soldier* 12). The lack of physicality of Chris’s illness, that you cannot “see” his trauma, makes the situation hard to digest for Kitty and Jenny. The women must envision for themselves the scenes of war that caused Chris’s amnesia, in order to piece together for themselves a sense of understanding.

Chris Baldry’s amnesia represents “a symptom most suited to emphasizing the soldier’s disturbingly present absence when he returns home” (Bonikowski 100). This “absence” is felt in many ways: Chris’s lack of memory, his lack of physical wounds to showcase his trauma, his lack of love towards Kitty. In a sense, Chris’s return evokes

more absence than presence, something that is felt the strongest by Kitty, who must learn to cope with the sudden loss of her husband's love and memory.

While West gives agency to the women of the novel, she releases Chris from his agency, in effect "silencing" him through the narrative. We only "hear" Chris through the perspective of his cousin Jenny, and, even then, we first hear his voice through Margaret's recollection, and the letter that he send her shortly after leaving the front lines. The "silent" man is given a voice through the women around him. Margaret reads the letter he has written her after suffering his amnesia, Jenny begins to bear his pain "like a wound in [her] own body" (*The Return of the Soldier* 31), and Kitty ultimately decides that Chris must remember who he is in order to be a "real" man.

Our construction of Chris is almost solely based on Jenny's heavily curated presentation of the man she knows as her cousin, the man he was before the war. Her inability to comprehend his invisible illness comes at the cost of her unwillingness to concede that the war has changed him. In this sense, perhaps Jenny's "war neuroses" manifests as her inability to comprehend the reality of Chris's trauma, her need to reconcile the man she knew with the soldier who returned from war. Ultimately, the women in Chris's life agree that this child-like figure that returns from war, the absence of a man, must be "returned" in order to salvage his masculinity. In this sense, the narrative structure itself reinforces this notion of "return." Loeffelholz notes that "the novel - spare as it is - suggests the heavy price men pay for masculinity" (82). Jenny and Kitty attempt to create a domestic haven for Chris to return home to, somewhere "good enough for his amazing goodness" (*The Return of the Soldier* 6). Yet, on his return, "Chris rejects this implicit bargain between men and women, as he rejects his wife and

the improvements made in the house in his absence” (Loeffelholz 82). When Chris returns from the war, he “returns to a time when he was neither soldier, nor dutiful husband, nor provider” (Loeffelholz 82). While still suspended in this blissful amnesia, Jenny and Margaret both agree that Chris’s masculinity is at stake, as he cannot return to those roles that define him as a man in society’s eye. He is rendered almost childlike, gleeful and unencumbered, described in boyish terms. Yet, both women agree that if this idyll does not end, “He who was as a flag flying from our tower would become a queer-shaped patch of eccentricity on the countryside, the stately music of his being would become a witless piping in the bushes. He would not be quite a man” (*The Return of the Soldier* 88). Chris’s masculinity is dependent on his identities as soldier, husband, and provider. The post-war amnesia that afflicts him acts to suppress these identities, silencing him yet again.

West utilizes a non-traditional narrative structure, not through the use of experimental technique, but in the novel’s narrative voice. Chris Baldry’s account of post-war trauma is focalized not through his own perspective, but through the lens of the women who fill his life. Here, West poses an interesting question about the gendered experience of war: if masculine trauma is the product of the first-hand witnessing of death and destruction, what, then, is female trauma? *The Return of the Soldier* suggests that women bear the marks of war differently, if not more intrusively, than men. By focalizing the narrative through the eyes of a woman, West gives agency and purpose to the women who “served” on the home front. Trauma narratives typically give precedence to the men who experience the trauma, wholly ignoring the women that help put the men “back together.” West herself writes that she “had been obliged to tell the story in the

first person, in the character of Chris's cousin Jenny, in order that I could the more vividly compare and contrast the effect Margaret produced on Chris's household with the effect she produced on Chris" (West 9).

However, the novel's ending does not quite follow through on its critique of traditional gender roles, as these "gender roles are reaffirmed through the role of women in Chris's recovery" (Fraysn 55). Chris "would not be quite a man" if he cannot be identified as a soldier, and he is eventually cured against his will. Even Margaret finally agrees that Chris must ultimately be made aware of his memory loss if he is to fully "return" to life. The woman as "caretaker" is exemplified here, and throughout the novel, in the many attempts to physically comfort and care for Chris. Jenny remarks that "his soldierly knowledge was as deeply buried as this memory of that awful August. While [Margaret's] spell endured they could not send him back into the hell of war. This wonderful, kind woman held his body as safely as she held his soul" (*The Return of the Soldier* 71). This realization is interesting in that it implies that Margaret's "spell" is the true cause of Chris's amnesia, another way in which Jenny refused to acknowledge the true depth of Chris's "invisible trauma." Similarly, while watching Margaret and Chris interact, Jenny notices the intimate way in which Margaret cares for Chris, that she has "gathered...[his soul] into her soul and is keeping it warm in love and peace so that his body can rest quiet for a little time. That is a great thing for a woman to do" (*The Return of the Soldier* 70). Again, we see the ways in which Chris's "injured" body must be healed by the care of the women around him. In this sense, woman fulfills her wartime role of "caretaker," acting as a nurse to tend to the wounds of the injured.

In many ways, Chris's "return" doesn't come until the end of the novel, when his memory, and masculinity, have been restored. In this sense, *The Return of the Soldier* symbolizes not Chris's physical return home from the front lines, but his mental return to the soldier that suffered the trauma of war. The title resonates again at the end of the novel, as we come to understand that the "return of the soldier" for Chris also means his return to masculinity, the things that make him a man in the eyes of the women who surround him. However, what also translates by the end of the novel is West's attempt to offer a "cure" for the silent trauma that plagues Chris. His return to war, thus a return to "the status quo of wartime patriarchal authority" (Bonikowski 102), inevitably reinstates the masculinity he has seemingly lost through his amnesia: his mind, as well as his "crisis of gender," is cured.

Bonikowski writes about the importance of understanding the title's double meaning and its significance to West's overall message about the post-war experience, noting that

The irony in West's doubling of the meaning of "return"—the soldier returns home only to be "cured" and returned to war— is effective precisely because we understand what Jenny understands when she envisions Chris "go[ing] back to that flooded trench in Flanders under that sky more full of flying death than clouds, to that No Man's Land where bullets fall like rain on the rotting faces of the dead. ..." (90). The certainty of death is conveyed by the stoic tone of Jenny's narrative, and reinforced by the irony of Chris's wife Kitty's satisfied whisper, which concludes the novel: "He's cured!" (110)

It is important to question whether or not the formative ending disrupts the narrative's structure in its assertion that Chris will be "returned" to war to face certain death. Though the women somewhat settle on a feeling of resolve, the ending itself is somewhat unexpected. We assume that Chris will regain his memory and live his life with Kitty, however, his return to war to face his death is an unexpected approach. Here, West explores just what is "cured" when these men are relieved of their "silent illness," and concludes that perhaps the most harm is done when we perpetuate the denial of the legitimacy of mental instability and its perceived effect on masculinity and male identity. For what does Chris truly regain in being "cured" at the end of the novel, only to be returned to the very thing that incited his trauma in the first place?

**Chapter Two: “The Thing Not Named”: The Ghosts of the Great War and the  
Crisis of Gender in Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House***

Although Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* is not traditionally categorized as the same type of “war novel” as her 1922 novel *One of Ours*, if we read the novel “with the assumption that the silence surrounding the Great War points to its very significance, the text suddenly reveals surprising new levels of meanings” (Trout 161). These new meanings manifest in various different and significant ways: through St. Peter’s relationship with Tom Outland and the various women in his life; through his scholarly endeavors to edit Outland’s personal diary, thus creating a new personal history for himself; and through the complex internal landscape of the post-war mind.

In the novel, “Cather has prepared interpretive obstacles” (Trout 161) that foreground silence and absence. The war is rarely directly mentioned, and the people of the novel seem more like ghosts that haunt the narrative than characters that fill it. In this sense, Cather’s novel is as much about absence as it is about presence. It explores the remnants of the lives heavily affected by modernized warfare and a changing social climate, and gives a voice to those who were left behind. The novel is associated with “studies of Armageddon that likewise focus not on battlefield horrors but on the shattered inner lives left in the war’s wake.” Ultimately, Cather showcases the ways in which the Great War created a “modern wasteland,” and the novel acts as “her portrait of a broken age left reeling by the industrialized depravity of 1914-1918” (Trout 150).

In *The Professor’s House*, Cather utilizes various embedded narratives to explore how we deal with narratives of the past. St. Peter’s scholarly ambitions are temporarily derailed by his desire to edit Tom Outland’s history, revisiting a narrative of the past in

order to make sense of his present. The novel itself, though focalized through St. Peter's present life, contains traces of history and narratives of the past which are crucial to the novel itself. The narrative structure of the novel emphasizes these stories in that "textually, the sheer force of Outland's 'Story' tends to suppress 'The Family' and 'The Professor' sections, and the potency of its idealistic imaginativeness encourages a forgetfulness of the conditions which prompted its shape in the first place" (Bell 15). Although embedded in the middle of the novel, the power and scope of Outland's story acts as its own history, through which we can better understand St. Peter and his experiences.

These narratives, placed in the middle of the novel, demonstrate a disruption of narrative technique, destabilizing the narrative in an attempt to unearth posthumous voices. We know that St. Peter is giving us his own account of Outland's story, and we are aware of his aim "to annotate the diary that Tom had kept on the mesa" (Cather 238). These narratives tell the stories of characters who are not alive in the main narrative, and are centered on the idea of "memorializing" the dead. Mother Eve and Tom Outland both "haunt" the novel in interesting ways. Instead of establishing a first person voice for "the dead," these narratives provide a framework to help us better understand the living. St. Peter offers Outland's story as "nothing very incriminating, nothing very remarkable; a story of youthful defeat, the sort of thing a boy is sensitive about – until he grows older" (Cather 155).

Steven Trout insists that *The Professor's House* is "Cather's book of the dead, and at its heart stand two interrelated studies of vanished human beings" (Trout 152). The unearthed "Mother Eve" is one of these "vanished human beings," extracted from the



earth by Outland during his time on the mesa. Her story is filtered first through Outland's diary, and second through St. Peter's recollection of Outland's story. Tom Outland doesn't survive the war, but is able to be "preserved" through St. Peter's attempts to edit and remember his life. His narrative, a sizable portion of the novel, is offered as a remembrance of his life. Just as the men who "returned from battlefield grown silent," Outland, too, has been "silenced" by the war. His narrative survives only through St. Peter's preservation and the tireless editing of his journal.

While his wife and daughters are away in France, St. Peter decides to "give part of this summer to Tom Outland's diary - to edit and annotate it for publication" (Cather 150). He sits down to write the introduction, an act that involves intently probing his own memories of his relationship with Tom, at a time when he is most secluded in his house, away from the feminine presence of his wife and daughters. In this sense, Cather positions Tom's narrative in stark contrast to its preceding chapters about the domestic affairs of St. Peter's life and the women who inhabit it. His wife and daughters, the feminine presence in his life, must physically remove themselves from his space in order to make room for Tom's narrative, and St. Peter's exploration and rumination upon this relationship. Tom's diary represents his only physical connection to his friend, and his narrative in the middle of the novel can be seen as St. Peter's way of realizing the importance of his character

Tom's narrative, a history of his time on the mesa, unlocks for the reader a first-hand account of the only missing voice from the novel, Tom Outland. Though a central character, Tom's story (and his fame) are posthumous, as the novel begins after his death. However, through the lens of St. Peter's recollections of Tom's story, we are allowed

access to Tom's narrative. Yet, the reliability of this narrative is somewhat uncertain, as it is framed around St. Peter's narrative. This embedded narrative, a story with an ambiguous history and the only section narrated in first person, adds to the overall complexity of Cather's narrative techniques.

Tom entombs his own voice within the mesa, making himself an artifact as he buries his diary in the ground, in the same way that St. Peter entombs the voice and narrative of his old friend within the novel. He shares Outland's story, and reflects on his own life and how Tom was affected by it. However, by unearthing Tom's diary and editing it for publication, St. Peter begins to "unravel things step by step" (Cather 227); recovering the book that Tom "sealed...up with cement" and purposefully "left in concealment on the mesa" (Cather 200) shows St. Peter's misunderstanding of Tom's words. His narrative should have acted as a warning to St. Peter, a story to learn by, but instead St. Peter goes through the process of editing Tom's words, collecting and dismembering his own voice and story, thus casting doubt on the reliability of his narrative.

St. Peter uses Tom's story as a lens through which to define his own work and accomplishments, even going so far as to perhaps skew the end of his narrative in his favor. Tom's story ends with his emphasis on "just a year after I quarreled with Roddy, I landed here and walked into your garden, and the rest you know" (Cather 229). Though the narrative begins with Outland's voice, it ends with an emphasis on St. Peter and his own role in Outland's story, thus emphasizing the unreliability of the only first person account (the seemingly most reliable type of narration) in the novel. Tom's narrative becomes an artifact itself, cemented within the middle of the novel and entombed in St. Peter's focalized perspective; the two are seemingly intertwined. Mother Eve's narrative

is heavily filtered through the focalization of these two men. We are aware of her story only through St. Peter's retelling of Tom Outland's story. Her trauma, the unearthing of her body and the subsequent discovery of her bodily harm, is seen through the "male gaze," through Tom's eyes and filtered through St. Peter's words.

Cather's exploration of the "crises of gender" is precipitated by the cultural climate of post-World War I civilian life. In the novel, Women are "transformed...by modernist form," they become "awesome, frightening, magnificent, powerful figures" (DeKoven 182). The "vigilant repression and exclusion of the feminine "origin" of life results in the starkness of the familiar normative gendered self/other dualisms of Western culture" (DeKoven 179).

Godfrey St. Peter is surrounded by women. In the opening lines of the novel, St. Peter gripes over the "needless inconveniences" of the "dismantled house where he had lived ever since his marriage...and brought up his two daughters" (Cather 3), invoking a tension between a "shared space" of both masculine and feminine presence. The professor seems to imply that "since his marriage" he has lived in a space of "needless inconvenience" (seemingly both a physical and mental space), trifling with the domestic affairs of a house full of ladies, and trying to mediate the argument that "the bath should be the most attractive room in the house" (Cather 4). He comes to find solace in his workroom, where he "must plunge in like a man" to avoid the "unpleasant effects of change" (Cather 7).

Yet, this "escape" becomes a shared space as well, one in which both a masculine and a feminine presence complicate the Professor's quest for solace from the "unpleasant effects of change." Through this space, we begin to understand more fully St. Peter's

complicated relationship with women throughout the novel, and what these relationships say about Cather's attitude towards the "crisis of gender" explored in the works of modernist writers at the time. By situating *The Professor's House*, and St. Peter's relationships with various women, around Marianne DeKoven's interesting discussion of the complexity of the relationship between gender and Modernism we can begin to explore the powerful gender dynamics at play in the novel.

DeKoven writes that "a closer look at Modernism through its complex deployments of gender reveals not only the centrality of femininity, but also, again, an irresolvable ambivalence toward radical cultural change" (175) in both male and female writers. These "complex deployments of gender" are critical in understanding the gender relations and anxieties of modernist writers. In a similar way that "the male Modernists feared the destructive power of the radical cultural change they desired" (DeKoven 174), St. Peter too fears the social changes occurring in his life: his daughter's marriages, and their subsequent reliance on other men, and the relocation to his new house. DeKoven also explores the "fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine" and the subsequent "irresolvable ambivalence toward powerful femininity" (DeKoven 174) that plagued both male and female modernist writers.

Ironically, the room that St. Peter feels the most attachment too is a "feminized" space. It is filled with artificial representations of women, "the forms" he refers to as "my ladies" (Cather 82) and women's belonging, the remnants of leftover fabric and unfinished dresses. St. Peter's attachment to this space is also associated with his attachment to Outland, as he refuses to have his friendship with Tom "translated into the vulgar tongue" (Cather 50). He also wonders about Euripides and his retreat to a cave by

the sea, wondering if the reason that “houses had become insupportable to him...was because he had observed women so closely all his life” (Cather 136).

The embodiment of St. Peter’s “escape” is not just the physical space of the room itself, but the objects that inhabit the space. His desk acts not only as the agent with which he creates his own mythology, but also the means by which he escapes into the past; “There were some advantages about being a writer of histories. The desk was a shelter one could hide behind, it was a hole one could creep into” (Cather 141). The forms Augusta leaves, draped in old fabrics, allow him to escape to the memory of “pretty little girls in fresh dresses” and the faint sounds of the “domestic drama that went on beneath him” (Cather 84-5).

After Tom’s “voice” has been heard, through the agency of St. Peter’s recollection of Tom, the masculine/feminine tension comes to a head in the final scene of St. Peter’s near death experience. After nearly asphyxiating in the closed space of his study, the professor realizes that Augusta has “pulled [him] out, literally” (Cather 253). He is pulled by the “strong arm” of the “empowered maternal feminine,” as Augusta literally saves him from the closed off, hyper-masculine space of his workplace, seemingly “birthing” him into the realization that “he would rather have Augusta with him just now than anyone he could think of” (Cather 256). He can now see her as “seasoned and sound and on the solid earth” and admits that he feels “a sense of obligation toward her” while he doesn’t “feel any obligations toward his family” (Cather 256-7). He gives credence to her role as his “savior” and “empowered maternal feminine” by finding solace in “a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound” (Cather 257).

Women also haunt the novel, always passing through the “male gaze” of St. Peter and positioned in the narrative as “objects” to be seen and analyzed. Though choosing to focalize the majority of the narrative through the eyes of a male protagonist, by the end of the novel we really only truly know St. Peter through his relationship with other women, and the feminine influence they have on his life. Even Outland, his closest male friend, dies before the start of the novel, and is only given a voice through St. Peter’s recollections and tireless editing of his journal. St. Peter’s ever-present “male gaze” divides the narrative into internal and external reflections, of St. Peter himself, and the women that surround him. The narrative focus on St. Peter’s relationship to his family at the beginning of the novel insinuates his own lack of definition as a character with a voice. Though the novel is focalized through his perspective, we don’t get a glimpse of interiority until the final few chapters, the ones specifically designated as “The Professor.” Instead, we learn more about family dynamics and St. Peter’s relationship to the women in his life.

St. Peter's opinion of his wife seems reliant upon her interaction with and attention towards other men, most notably her two sons-in-law. He never pauses to admire her "in a particular gown or attitude" unless her attention is held "by the appreciative gaze of another man" (Cather 63). He reflects that "with her sons-in-law she had begun the game of being a woman all over again" (Cather 64), implying that her time before her daughters' marriages was a retreat from her "womanhood." After gaining two sons-in-law, she "dressed for them, planned for them, schemed in their interests" (Cather 64), all things St. Peter assumes his wife does not do for him. To her husband, this attention she pays to the young men in her life makes her "less intelligent and more

sensible than he had thought her," and he seems amused by the idea that "she wasn't going to have to face a stretch of boredom between being a young woman and being a young grandmother" (Cather 65). While his attitude toward Mrs. St. Peter's interests and activities insinuates a deep disdain for her concern for other men, it also acknowledges his willingness to define the women in his life by their attitude toward and relationship with other men.

St. Peter spends a large amount of his time considering his daughters from a distance, gazing upon them much in the same way he considers "the forms" in his work space. He is slightly intimidated by his oldest daughter, he finds "the curl of her lips...handsome, but terrifying." The one "masculine" attribute of his otherwise "truly beautiful daughter" haunts him every time he looks at her, always first noticing her regrettable "slightly stooping shoulders" (Cather 67). He disagrees "with the general opinion" that his oldest daughter is "brilliantly beautiful" (Cather 26), and instead finds that she has "exactly the wide femur and flat shoulder-blade of his old slab-sided Kanuck grandfather," attributing to her the masculinity of the male patriarch of the family. Kathleen's "I can-go-it-alone" attitude gives him "a sudden pang." So much so that he makes "her take his arm and be docile" (Cather 52). Ironically, Kathleen "had done several really good likenesses of her father" (Cather 52). She is only able to aptly draw her father, for with the other people, most notably the women, in her life, she "had no luck" (Cather 52).

Contrastingly, St. Peter describes his youngest daughter as inherently feminine, yet "her figure in profile...looked just like an interrogation point" (Cather 27). In his assessment of her figure, his daughter literally becomes a "question" to be deciphered.

When considering her dress, he finds that the "lurking purple and lavender" in her sleeves makes her "colour prettier than ever," and later insinuates that "it's only lately you've begun to wear them. Louie's taste, I suppose?" (Cather 67). He goes so far as to displace the compliment itself, not directly calling his daughter "beautiful," but instead giving Louie "compliments on his choice" and noting that "he knows what's right" (Cather 68) for his wife.

Though he loves his daughters, St. Peter has "no enthusiasm for being a father-in-law" (Cather 37-38), and leaves the business of dealing with his daughters' lives to his wife, asking her to "keep the ball rolling" (Cather 38). He finds his oldest the most interesting female in his life, undoubtedly the daughter with the more masculine attributes, but is disappointed in her choice of partner, saying that "a more interesting man would make her happier" (Cather 53). St. Peter regards his time away from his wife and their new home as his "only extravagance" (Cather 81). He recedes in the quiet comfort of his study even though, as his wife points out, "the miserable little stove" might cause him to accidentally be "half poisoned by gas" (Cather 80), an ironic moment of foreshadowing. St. Peter is willing to literally and figuratively forgo the potential perils of his "masculine space" in order to escape the feminine presence of his wife and their life together. Mrs. St. Peter notes "how irritable and unreasonable he is becoming" (Cather 81) after reflecting on this ignorance.

Yet, we are told Augusta's presence in the old house "brightened it up for him," and the Professor "had grown to like the reminders of herself that she left in his work-room" (Cather 84). Augusta's presence in his study, the little reminders she leaves behind of a feminine presence, make "those terrible women entirely possible" (Cather 84).



Augusta's "feminine intervention" in St. Peter's seemingly male-dominated space allows him to see his "idea" of a woman as "entirely possible." With Augusta's touch, the forms that haunt his work-space become real-life projections of his articulately fostered, yet still distorted, sense of what it means to be a woman, and how it relates to his own identity. Through the primary sense of touch and connection to the physical world around him, St. Peter's narrative is focused on objects and people, exploring his connection to things and places as they define him, most notably the women that surround him.

The narrative structure filters everything through the "male gaze"; St. Peter's perspective is readily apparent throughout the text. He continually observes his daughters from a distance, noticing subtle details about them that either displease or satisfy him. We are only offered one perspective through which to view these women, setting up a dichotomy between the sexes that Cather uses as a platform for exploring the "crisis of gender" through the novel. The war itself catalyzed a shift in traditional roles each sex played in domestic and social life. For most women, "the war facilitated not just a liberation from the constricting trivia of parlors and petticoats but an unprecedented transcendence of the profounder constraints imposed by traditional sex roles" (Gilbert 440). Once the men "returned" from war, they were confronted with a social landscape that had shifted in their absence, forcing them to not only deal with the invisible wounds of war, but the deconstruction of traditional gender norms as well.

St. Peter "clings to his old study more for the sake of daydreaming than scholarly productivity" (Trout 154), and is stuck ruminating on his travels with Tom Outland, incapable of writing the same scholarly material he once produced. For St. Peter, with the Great War and Outland's death in 1915, "history in the academic sense has...lost its

attractiveness -- and perhaps its meaning” (Trout 155). His world has broken in two, split between a reverie of the past with Tom Outland, and his current ambition to edit his personal history. In this sense, it is significant that St. Peter is a professor of history, a field of study tasked with explaining the traumatic events of World War I through a historical lens. Part of St. Peter’s hesitation to return to his scholarly practices stems from his inability to truly comprehend and interpret the reality of the war, and the post-war life into which he has been thrown. Instead, he uses the past, and his connection to the deceased Outland, to attempt to create a new and quantifiable personal history.

The novel itself emphasizes a certain type of “empowerment of the living by the wartime dead” (Gilbert 446), as the characters of the novel memorialize these victims of violence in order to empower themselves. St. Peter edits Outland’s journal as a way to cope with his post-war trauma; he is physically moving to a new space, a new house, though he still clings to certain remnants of the past. Outland’s depiction of “Mother Eve,” and the violence she endured, is used to justify his own actions and foreshadows his untimely death.

Steven Trout notes that World War I is the “thing not named” in the novel, something heard and felt, but never spoken directly of: “One searches in vain in *The Professor’s House* for the kind of extended analysis of wartime loss that dominates the final chapter of *One of Ours*” (Trout 160). However, in an elusive passage near the end of the novel, St. Peter regrets that he never got to travel with Outland, that he was never able to “revisit certain spots with him” (Cather 236). St. Peter remarks that “chance, in one great catastrophe, swept away all youth and all palms, and almost Time itself” (Cather 236). This “great catastrophe” not only robs St. Peter of a future father-son relationship with

Outland, but also disrupts “time itself” by sweeping away the youth that make up future generations, and produces a generation of survivors that feel frozen in time, stuck with an internationalized trauma that splits their world in two. The Great War also disrupted the notion of what it means to serve for your country, and “left the notion of military glory as riddled as the bodies in no-man’s-land” (Trout 170). Instead of praising the war as victorious, it can be argued that *The Professor’s House* subtly conceives of a new kind of post-war life, one in which patriotism and military glory must be re-conceptualized in the face of a shifting civilian identity, and traditional gender roles must be re-envisioned to make room for a more complex and modern social climate.

St. Peter, thinking about Outland’s future after the war, suggests that he does not “think it occurred to [Outland] that [his] will would ever be probated” and that “he expected to come back from the war” (Cather 118). Towards the beginning of the novel, St. Peter describes Outland as “a brilliant young American scientist and inventor, who was killed in Flanders, fighting with the Foreign Legion, the second year of the war, when he was barely thirty years of age” (Cather 30). Cather uses St. Peter’s preoccupation with Outland’s youth, and his untimely death, as a platform for vocalizing society’s reaction to the loss of youth after the war. Yet, though St. Peter regrets that Outland’s life was cut short by the war, he also acknowledges the direction Tom’s life could have taken had he survived. He recognizes that by dying young, Outland “had escaped all that,” a life of managing money, dealing with fellow scientists, and being “the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting” (Cather 237). Outland’s narrative, his diary and life story, seem to appease St. Peter’s sense of longing for his friend. By recognizing that Outland’s life would have been drastically different had he

survived the war, St. Peter is able to memorialize his friend and his great accomplishments, solidifying his life as one not marred by a long life of familial duties and old age. He's mummified, like Mother Eve "with a great wound in her side" (Cather 192), frozen in time as the man St. Peter knew him to be.

**Chapter 3: “The World Seen by the Sane & the Insane Side by Side”: The Chasm between Civilian and Combatant Experience of Trauma in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs.***

***Dalloway and Jacob’s Room***

"I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant "novel." The new -by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?"

Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 3: 1925-30*

In a 1930 letter to Ethel Smyth, Woolf writes that: “As an experience, madness is terrific I can assure you, and not to be sniffed at; and in its lava I still find most of the things I write about. It shoots out of one everything shaped, final, not in mere driblets, as sanity does. And the six months – not three – that I lay in bed taught me a good deal about what is called oneself” (*Letters* 4:180). Woolf’s insistence on madness as an “experience” encapsulates her ability to translate the aspects of her own experience of madness into that of her characters. Instead of shying away from the darker aspects of traumatic experience, Woolf dives deeper to investigate the true nature and validity of the “insane” mind. In her 1919 essay “Modern Fiction,” she writes that “so much of the enormous labor of proving the solidity, the likeness of life, of the story is not merely labor thrown away but labor misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception” (*Modern Fiction* 153). For the modernists, the meticulously planned details of a novel obscure the “truth” by exemplifying a too real “reality.” In the same essay, Woolf later questions “Is life like this? Must novels be like this?” (154). Characterization that is overtly “realistic” does not take into consideration the skewed nature of personal experience and “insanity,” as no single “truth” is universal to individual character. Through the lens of *Mrs. Dalloway*, we are constantly reminded of the questionable nature of “truthful” characterization through various narrative shifts. In

the scene of Peter's interruption of Clarissa as she contemplatively mends her dress, we slide between the minds of both characters. "She's grown older, [Peter] thought," "Exactly the same, thought Clarissa" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 34); the perception of each moment is skewed in different directions, depending on the perceiver, each of whom has a particular individual experience that affects his or her outward and inward perception. Peter is seemingly bitter about Clarissa's insistence on her happy life, while Clarissa is stuck in the past, insisting that nothing has changed. Through this intermingling stream of consciousness, it is possible for the reader to experience a closer semblance of reality than that which "a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged" (*Modern Fiction* 154) can afford.

On January 26, 1920, Woolf wrote in her diary: "For I figure the approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist. Then I'll find room for so much - a gaiety - an inconsequence - a light spirited stepping at my sweet will" (*Diary* 2:14). Though the "new form for a new novel" she references would eventually become *Jacob's Room*, later published in 1922, Woolf's new approach translates to her conception and creation of *Mrs. Dalloway* as well. We can infer that "scarcely a brick to be seen" refers to Woolf's use of experimental narrative techniques, utilizing an omniscient narrator who offers a glimpse into the complex interiority of the characters of the novel.

As Jane Lilienfeld argues, through the complexity of Woolf's experimental narrative, "the troubled issue of subjectivity for the trauma survivor offers an important vantage point from which to interrogate the conflicted discourse of

modernist/postmodernist constructions of the subject position.” Woolf also denies a complete “erasure of interiority even while depicting fragmented positionalities of self” (153) through a complex utilization and manipulation of free indirect discourse to explore the interiority of characters who have survived trauma. In both *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf “voices the intertwined nature of personal and political representations of trauma” (Lilienfeld 154). Her depictions of the “traumatic mind” represent her attempt to foster meaning behind the consequences of traumatic experience, as characters from each novel must deal with the ramifications of war on both mind and body. While Septimus’s “madness” is predominantly a consequence of a society that stigmatizes mental illness and instability, Jacob’s “madness” comes both during his time in the war (which takes place off-screen) and after his death, as those around him must struggle to understand the insurmountable loss of his absence. Published a few years before *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Jacob’s Room* embodies Woolf’s attempt to create “a new form for a new novel” (*Diary* 2:186). Her insistence on her need to create something “new” was perhaps precipitated by her new-found confidence in her “own voice”: “There’s no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice; & that interests me so that I feel I can go ahead without praise” (*Diary* 2:186). In her discussions of Woolf’s use of an experimental narrative form, Lilienfeld writes that

Woolf’s descriptions of the so-called “ordinary mind” as it is ceaselessly assaulted by sensual and visual onslaughts voice what it feels like, not just to re-experience unsought trauma memory, but to perceive the daily details of life from the vantage point of having survived trauma. (Lilienfeld 154)

In this sense, the narrative form accentuates the “buried discomfort” of those suffering from the psychological consequences of a traumatic event, showing its own agency in its ability to both emulate and shape the narrative. In a diary entry from October 1922, Woolf ruminates on her process and motivation behind *Mrs. Dalloway*:

Mrs. Dalloway has branched into a book, & I adumbrate here a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane & the insane side by side – something like that. Septimus Smith – is that a good name? - & to be more close to the fact than Jacob: but I think Jacob was a necessary step, for me, in working free. (Diary 2: 207-208)

Caramagno explains that “the temptation to deny the reality of mental illness is strong” (212), as Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw agree that “we all have our moments of depression” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 83). The urge to resist Septimus’s illness, to boil his madness down to a “moment of depression” is to deny the connection between the mad and un-mad mind. “Blatant, gibbering madness is a convenient, culturally acceptable stereotype” (Caramagno 212), but acknowledging the merit and legitimacy of Septimus’ madness exposes it as just one shade of normal mentation. It is easier for his doctors and wife to assume that he “has nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 18), instead focusing on ways in which he can “ease” his mind, stop thinking about his “troubles” instead of facing the trauma he has endured. Septimus further complicates this matter by teetering on the edge of self-awareness and discovery of his own ailment, as he is both aware and unaware of his deteriorating mental state.

The disillusionment of personal trauma affects individual experience, much in the same way that the aftermath of World War I produced the disillusioned modernists who



sought to represent the fragmentary world in which they now lived. Though this renewed sense of characterization attempts to expound the fragmentary 'self' for what it is, personal experience still leaves characters susceptible to the circumstances of their particular situation, sometimes "freezing" them within moments of unrest or interruption. Peter Walsh becomes 'unhinged' early in life, and never seems to fully recover. "At Bourton that summer, early in the 'nineties" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 50), Clarissa disrupts his idealistic romantic notion of the future when she falls in love with Dalloway, and this "final scene, the terrible scene which he believed had mattered more than anything in the whole of his life" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 54) leaves him frozen. In his mind "she seemed contracted, petrified. She did not move" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 55). While he does not see her again for forty years, she never leaves his mind, always a statue in the backdrop of his life. His perception is distorted by his restless need for fulfillment, a void left by Clarissa and interrupted by Dalloway as "the destroyer" of Peter's investment in a life and future with Clarissa. The woman singing in the park represents the eternally "frozen"; Peter hears "the voice of an ancient spring sprouting from the earth...which issued from a tall quivering shape, like a rusty pump." He sees the "battered woman" who "through all ages...stood singing of love." This woman, whom he believes "would still be there in ten million years" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 69), is statue-like in his mind, frozen as a result of the heartbreak over her dead lover. Yet again, Peter has seen, through the eyes of individual experience, a world standing still. He "couldn't help giving the poor creature a coin" emphasizing the pathetic nature of the woman's situation, as she "smiled, pocketing her shilling." In an interesting moment of intersection, Rezia, catching the women's song "like smoke from a cottage chimney," also remarks "poor old woman" (*Mrs. Dalloway*

70), yet instead of emphasizing the ancient way about the woman, she worries about the woman's wellbeing, "suppose one's father...happened to pass, and saw one standing in the gutter? And where did she sleep at night?" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 70) The maternal instinct that propels Rezia influences her perception of this woman, and she derives an odd hope from the woman, suddenly "quite sure that everything was going to be okay" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 71).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf gives agency to a narrator that "presents a picture of a postwar world whose reality is implicitly ironic and portrays the tension that exists between veterans and civilians and, more especially, between life and death, memory and denial" (Levenback 48). Septimus's "experience" of his trauma and the subsequent memories that follow him back into civilian life constitute his disintegrating mental state. Septimus's attempts to reintegrate into civilian life after the war are marred by the subtle, everyday reminders of his combatant experience. Everyday stimuli have the innate ability to remind him of the trauma he experienced, and the landscape of London becomes his own internal war. His experience of post-traumatic stress and the "memories" it entails are "distorted both by associated experiences and by [his] emotional state at the time of recall" (Van der Kolk 281). The heightened emotional state that he experienced at the time of his trauma, his years in the war, distorts the memory itself. Not only does Septimus lose his grip on reality, but through this he experiences the trauma that causes the detachment over and over, distorting both his memory and his sense of definite reality. While Chris Baldry's illness manifests as an escape *to* the past in *The Return of the Soldier*, Septimus Smith's illness manifests as an attempt to escape *from* the past. His trauma creates an unstable mentality that forces him to confront the violence he

experienced during the war, most notably in his hallucinations of his deceased friend Evans. These hallucinations, and Septimus's increasing inability to process them as imaginary, transport him back to the battlefield, displacing his sense of linearity and furthering his illness.

His "frenzied" states are precipitated by things that remind him of his trauma. The constant barrage of these everyday stimuli cause his trauma to re-occur in a way that he is unable to control. Herman writes that "it also appears that traumatized people cannot "tune out" repetitive stimuli that other people would find merely annoying; rather, they respond to each repetition as though it were a new, and dangerous, surprise" (Herman 36). The trauma itself can be experienced on a nonverbal level, as aspects of the traumatic experience manifest in non-verbal ways. In certain cases, "memories of the trauma tend, at least initially, to be experienced as fragments of the sensory components of the event: as visual images; olfactory, auditory, or kinesthetic sensations; or intense waves of feelings that patients usually claim to be representations of elements of the original traumatic event" (Van der Kolk 287). In this sense, Septimus's post-trauma experience is not reliant upon purely verbal stimuli; the experience of "the traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep" (Herman 37).

Van der Kolk notes that while memories of ordinary events diminish in clarity over time, certain aspects of traumatic events "become fixed in the mind, unaltered by the passage of time or by the intervention of subsequent experience" (282). Septimus's inability to connect his "subsequent experience," his post-war reality, with his experience

of trauma during the war, leads to his distorted perception of everyday life. His “fixation” on the traumatic events of the war cloud his memory in a way that makes the formation of memories not tainted by trauma nearly impossible. As a consequence, “the imprints of traumatic experiences seem to be qualitatively different from memories of ordinary events” (Van der Kolk 282). Perhaps Septimus’s perceived “madness” is spurred by his need to construct a narrative for himself that makes sense. His experience of the war and the trauma he suffers does not easily integrate into his everyday life as a “normal memory;” consequently, he feels compelled to “construct a narrative that ‘explains’ what happened” (Van der Kolk 289) to him.

His “madness” is his inability to recognize that these traumatic events manifest in non-verbal ways, not allowing him to properly express the extent of his feelings towards the events themselves. Even in his momentary lucidity, Septimus cannot extricate himself from his experiences during the war. Rezia ruminates on Septimus’s condition, noticing the way he was always “starting, laughing, sitting hour after hour silent, or clutching her and telling her to write” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 119). She observes the way he “would lie listening until suddenly he would cry that he was falling down, down into flames! Actually she would look for flames, it was so vivid” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 119). Even Rezia’s experience of Septimus’s madness becomes a startlingly vivid reality, one that draws her into his trauma as much as it excludes her. However, as the edges of Septimus’s reality blur, the memories of his combatant experience bleed into his current, civilian reality in a way that Rezia will never be able to truly understand, much in the same way that Jacob’s friends and family can never truly “know” him, only the space he occupied:

Then there were the visions. He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on a cliff with the gulls screaming over him. He would look over the edge of the sofa down into the sea. Or he was hearing music. Really it was only a barrel organ or some man crying in the street. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 119)

These moments of madness and confusion are important to understanding Septimus's altered mental state, one in which his everyday experience of reality is impeded by traumatic images and hypersensitive memories. To Rezia, it is "the most dreadful thing of all, to see a man like Septimus, who had fought, who was brave, crying" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 119). Presumably, Rezia's emphasis on Septimus's bravery comes from the fact that he survived the same war that claimed the lives of many of the young men who fought alongside him. It is "dreadful" for a "man like Septimus" to outwardly express an inner sentiment, and more so to be witness to his outpouring of emotion. Rezia indirectly equates the sacrifices of marriage with the sacrifices of war, saying that "everyone has friends who were killed in the War. Everyone gives up something when they marry" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 56). In this, she assumes the role of "victim" as well, postulating that no one can really escape the atrocities of war, civilian or combatant.

Rezia also tries to rationalize Septimus's deteriorating mental state as a "choice," thinking that he "let himself think about horrible things, as she could too, if she tried" as she notes that he has "grown stranger and stranger" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 56). Rezia feels as though she does not recognize her husband in his moments of "strangeness," but reveals that she believes "he could be happy when he chose" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 56). Her inability to recognize Septimus's lack of agency in his mental state parallels with the unproductive

treatment of Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes, one which ultimately fosters his sense of hopelessness and isolation.

Interestingly, Rezia's depictions of Septimus's increasingly fuddled mental state offer insight into the depths of his "madness," with particular attention to Woolf's narrative technique:

He lay on the sofa and made her hold his hand to prevent him from falling down, down, he cried, into the flames! and saw faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names, from the walls and hands pointing round the screen.

Yet they were quite alone. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 57)

The narrative here bends free indirect discourse to flow in and out of both Rezia's and Septimus's interiority. Though focalized through Rezia, these detailed depictions of Septimus's experience could only have come from Septimus himself. The complexity of the narrative at this point increases, as we experience both Rezia's and Septimus's internal and externalizations simultaneously.

The concept of the "haunted man" is explored in different ways in both *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*: "As Jacob haunts his room after death, so Septimus is haunted by his former comrade Evans" (Frayn 145). Septimus barely escapes the war; as the last shell misses him, he watches them "explode with indifference" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 73), only to have the trauma of war follow him home. Septimus cannot "look upon the dead," he lives his life "behind a pane of glass" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 74). He believes that "it must be the fault of the world then – that he could not feel" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 75). He initially prides himself on his inability to feel at the time of his experienced trauma, that "when Evans was killed...Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was

the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 73).

Although Clarissa and Septimus never physically meet in the novel, both are inextricably linked through the narrative, inadvertently crossing paths and witnessing the same events. “Smith and Dalloway both see the skywriting, as they both hear the mysterious car and the ringing of Big Ben, and they both see Sir William Bradshaw, whose overbearing advice helps to precipitate Smith’s suicide” (North 85). Septimus haunts Clarissa’s narrative, the same way Evans haunts him. By the end of the novel, Septimus’s suicide has a profound affect on Clarissa, both physically and mentally. After hearing of the news at her party, she thinks that “Always her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt.” She learns that “he had thrown himself from a window” and envisions him lying “with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 156). Ultimately, the news of Septimus’s death leads Clarissa to the conclusion that “Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 156). Clarissa’s view of death as defiance and communication echoes the way the dead attempt to communicate in *The Professor’s House*. After processing the news, Clarissa comes to realize that “there was an embrace in death” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 156), offering a few morbidly comforting words that echo throughout the novel.

Woolf’s exploration of the experience of trauma in a non-narrative, non-linear form is bolstered by her usage of specific modernist narrative techniques. The experimental use of language was precipitated by the “machine age” and the

mechanization of society during and after the war, as “writers were forced to reconsider their use of language and form, and technological developments were stimulated by the war” (Frayn 119). Woolf explores the “relationship between the war and industrial modernity” (Frayn 119), focusing more specifically on the consequences of war on everyday life, for both civilians and those fighting directly.

While *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place over the course of one day, Woolf’s use of free indirect discourse and the discussion of specific memories allows the reader to experience more than the twenty-four hours that encompass the passing narrative. *Jacob’s Room*, however, has an indefinite and untethered sense of time. The narrative constantly shifts perspectives and years, seamlessly teetering between memory and reality, experience and imagination. In this sense, the two novels share a complexly structured sense of time, one that complicates a surface level examination of time as a linear experience. Though we have the subtle reminder of the tick of Big Ben in the background, Woolf’s narrative in *Mrs. Dalloway* predominantly fosters a sense of off-kilter time. The clocks are “shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 87) the time, creating a sense of time and space that is “so far diminished” it is perhaps unrecognizable.

In her examination of the differences in narrative voice of each novel, Levenback describes the narrator of *Jacob’s Room* as “a self-conscious, postwar, civilian narrator, who is geographically fixed (leaving Jacob to go to the front unobserved)” (Levenback 46), while writing that the narrator of *Mrs. Dalloway* has an “omniscient and seemingly disinterested narrative voice ... with the flexibility to report and to enter the consciousness of the characters without reliance on starkly calculated, obvious, and sometimes comic, ironic discourse” (46).



In both *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf treats “the war as a combatant experience, the reality of which was beyond the power of her pen to describe and the power of civilians (particularly in the village) to understand” (Levenback 107). In *Jacob's Room*, Mrs. Flanders associates cleanliness and order with safety and comfort, she conducts the “sterilizing duties of householding” (Caramagno 188) in order to externally and internally create a manageable order. Her domestic duties serve as an internal tidying, creating a barrier between inside and outside, order and chaos. However, because of this she becomes both detached from and absorbed in the immediate reality of war. The reality of her domestic, civilian life at home becomes intertwined with the physically far-off (though still overwhelmingly close) reality of young men fighting in a bloody war. Betty's civilian experience and the combatant experience of her sons in the war bleed together, culminating in a passage at the end of the novel that aptly encapsulates the immediate reality of all those affected by the traumas of war:

Again, far away, she heard the dull sound, as if nocturnal women were beating great carpets. There was Morty lost, and Seabrook dead; her sons fighting for their country. But were the chickens safe? Was that someone moving downstairs? Rebecca with the toothache? No. The nocturnal women were beating great carpets. Her hens shifted slightly on their perches. (*Jacob's Room* 143)

Betty cannot extricate the thought of “her sons fighting for their country” from her worry over “her hens” and Rebecca's toothache. She conflates “the guns” with “the sea,” as the “dull sound” heard “far away” intermingles with the immediate reality of her life by the sea (*Jacob's Room* 142-3). Yet, as Andrew Frayn notes, “in Woolf's work combatants rarely return” from the war, and when they do, the “post-war world is overpowering.”

Instead of depicting the atrocities of war directly, something she wouldn't have experienced first-hand as a woman, Woolf "considers how to memorialise the war dead, and consistently attempts to enclose absence in *Jacob's Room*" (140).

Levenback argues that "the distance between civilian and combatant experience" (Levenback 47) is thrown into sharp relief by their post-war proximity in *Mrs. Dalloway*, writing that "Woolf transformed the physical distance during the war into a physical proximity during the day in the postwar London the novel involves" (Levenback 47). She also notes that Septimus Warren Smith is a "less privileged Jacob Flanders who had, nonetheless, survived the war" (Levenback 47). The by-products of war that shape both civilian and combatant life not only include the deaths of millions of young men, but also the struggle for survival that occurs during the reintegration into civilian life. The various portrayals of Septimus's madness, even as he "fling[s] himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 127) perhaps indicates "that not death, but the problem of survival is the more troubling by-product of the war" (Levenback 90).

Dr. Holmes tells Rezia that she should think of Septimus as dead, that even though he survived the war and is physically present, he is "horribly mangled" and "would not recover consciousness" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 127). Perhaps Dr. Holmes's conclusion that Septimus is "horribly mangled" and "would not recover consciousness" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 127) rings true both before and after his death. He is "mangled" because his memory and consciousness have been fatally altered by his traumatic experience in the same way that his body is physically mangled after he jumps to his death. After witnessing Septimus's suicide, Rezia equates the sight of Mrs. Filmer's waving apron

with that of “a flag slowly rippling out from a mast” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 127), spurning the thought that “men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus has been through the War” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 127). For Rezia, Septimus’s death is a direct result of the war; he is “saluted” at the scene of his demise. Though he doesn’t die as a combatant during the war, his experience as a combatant in a civilian world directly results in his death.

Published in 1922, the same year that saw the production of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, *Jacob’s Room* is emblematic of the beginning of Woolf’s “break with conventional narrative technique,” that the novel’s “narrative techniques are so innovative that they call attention to themselves” (Zwerdling 894). The rain in Chapter One of *Jacob’s Room* acts as “the imagery of the unbidden traumatic memories,” suggesting “a shower of unsought visualizations, a fitting metaphor for the first world war in which civilians feared attack as did entrenched soldiers” (Lilienfeld 154). *Jacob’s Room* isn’t about the act of war; rather, it is about the consequences and loss that are felt during and after war. In her seminal work on Virginia Woolf, Winifred Holtby explores the essence of Woolf’s themes of loss and trauma, writing: “When such a young man was killed, she seems to ask, what was lost then? What lost by him? What was lost by his friends? What exactly was it that had disappeared?” (Holtby 116).

The complexity of the novel’s narrative emphasizes the untrustworthy and wholly unattainable nature of perception, that Jacob is unreachable by both writer and reader. In a passage towards the beginning of the novel, the narrator reveals the self-conscious awareness of her position as outsider:

The bareness of Mrs. Pearce's front room was fully displayed at ten o'clock at night when a powerful oil lamp stood on the middle of the table. The harsh light

fell on the garden; cut straight across the lawn; lit up a child's bucket and a purple aster and reached the hedge. Mrs. Flanders had left her sewing on the table. There were her large reels of white cotton and her steel spectacles; her needle-case; her brown wool wound round an old postcard. There were the bulrushes and the Strand magazines; and the linoleum sandy from the boys' boots. (*Jacob's Room* 7)

As if looking through the front window of an empty house, the narrator exhibits an intimate familiarity in her description of the Flanders's living room, yet without seeming to inhabit the space itself. The "bareness" of the front room is "fully-displayed" for anyone to see, illuminated in a "harsh light" by the "powerful oil lamp." The narrator's frequent examinations of empty rooms, and subsequent listing of each room's content, allows the reader to recognize that in these moments the narrator is on the outside, looking in, only able to make surface-level observations of character and place. The narrative thus continues in a way that complicates this assumption, adding to Woolf's overall exploration of the "knowingness" of character. Caramagno writes that "the Jacob we seek exists somewhere between the text and the reader" (208), that his incongruity exists in a space between objectivity and subjectivity, never fully realizing either space. In this sense, neither Jacob nor the reader achieves a "moment of being," but instead exists on the fringe of understanding in order to fully realize the "unknowingness" of character and self. The narrator's use of foreshadowing also calls into question the stability of the narrative we are offered, as the repeated imagery of the sheep's skull functions as the catalyst of Betty Flanders's "buried discomfort" (*Jacob's Room* 6), the veiled reminder of death and its reach. Though at the beginning of the novel we are

unaware of Jacob's fate in the war, through the subtle use of imagery and foreshadowing, we are able to insinuate that finite nature of Jacob's experience.

*Jacob's Room*, however, is "unlike the classic Bildungsroman" in that it "lacks a teleology" (Zwerdling 898). A typical Bildungsroman has a sense of progressive change or chartable progress. However, this is impossible for Jacob because of the unknowability of his character, his untimely death and our foreknown knowledge of it, prevents any noticeable progression of his character. Zwerdling writes that: "A novel is expected to give us characters who have an identity or whose progressive change we can follow sequentially-as in the Bildungsroman. In *Jacob's Room*, however, Woolf was faced with the problem that this fictional convention does not hold good for all human beings at all stages of life." (Zwerdling 899).

In the final scene of *Jacob's Room*, Bonamy and Mrs. Flanders examine the listless space of Jacob's empty room, picking through his things after his death. As Bonamy marvels at Jacob's untouched things, he notices "all his letters strewn about for anyone to read," asking, "What did he expect? Did he think he would come back" (*Jacob's Room* 143). Bonamy questions Jacob's assumption that he will return from the war, instead implying that Jacob was perhaps fated all along to die in the war, that he knew Jacob would not be returning. Bonamy is thrown into "chaotic emotionalism" (Caramagno 194) after Jacob's death. He forgoes his attention to order and detail, and succumbs to the paralyzing weight of the unpredictable and senseless. He postulates these feelings against the landscape and the disorder of the world around him: "War is a mental object as well as a physical one, and Bonamy's former objectivism is as much a violation, an act of war, as Jacob's death" (Caramagno 195). Though Jacob dies during combat,

Bonamy must accept that the emptiness of Jacob's character, his physical and emotional absence, is as much a psychological component of the tragedy of his death as the actual act of death itself. Frayn writes that "Jacob's absence demands that the blanks be filled, but also provokes questions about those who narrate his life. His evanescence and then absence in death – a death which is itself absent – leaves open a narrative space into which others might step" (141).

In one instance of narrative intervention, we come upon Jacob as he "lay asleep, fast asleep, profoundly unconscious" (*Jacob's Room* 8). The insistence upon the profundity of his unconsciousness immediately calls our attention to his lack of immediate space in the novel. Just as the constant plea of "Ja-cob, Ja-cob!" (*Jacob's Room* 3) is shouted throughout by various characters, we too are called to questioningly shout Jacob's name, hoping to find some semblance of character or humanity in the spaces that he once filled.

Jacob could be "almost any young man" (Bennet 96); the appeal of this universalism is that the representation of his fragmented sense of identity can be extended to "any young man," or any person. The realist approach of creating a unique identity and characterization within the space of a "fiction" is replaced with a "universal" identity of unknowingness. Woolf's narrative techniques can be seen as a means to an end, a device through which she illuminates not only a fiction, but the purpose of that fiction and the truths it carries with it. The innovative nature of *Jacob's Room* and the technical choices that comprise it "ought to be looked at not as attempts to 'revolutionize modern fiction' but as individual solutions to the problem at hand" (Zwerdling 896). Though the

characterization of Jacob could be just “any young man,” he is purposefully both intentionally himself and ambiguously not.

In one of Woolf’s least laudatory passages on war, she writes of the “nonchalance” of men in the “prime of life” who fall “into the depths of the sea,” writing about the senselessness with which young men are sacrificed at times of war:

With equal nonchalance a dozen young men in the prime of life descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together. Like blocks of tin soldiers the army covers the cornfield, moves up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, and falls flat, save that, through field-glasses, it can be seen that one or two pieces still agitate up and down like fragments of broken match-stick. (*Jacob’s Room* 125)

These men “suffocate uncomplainingly together,” victims of a “perfect mastery of machinery” that tells them they must die for their country. This seminal passage in *Jacob’s Room* captures the core of Woolf’s attitude towards the traumatic experience of war, and its impact on both civilian and combatant experience. The “tin soldiers” cover the fields, sprawled about like the “fragments of broken match-stick” while the loved ones they left behind are fated to await their return amid the everyday life of civilian experience.

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