



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



---

**ISSN 2278-9529**

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **Configurations of the Subjects as Reflected in *Mrs. Dalloway*: “The Perfect Hostess” and a Shell-Shocked Veteran**

**Mevlûde Zengin**

Assistant Professor

Department of English Language and Literature

Faculty of Letters, Cumhuriyet University

58140 Sivas, Turkey

**Article History:** Submitted-12/01/2018, Revised-21/01/2018, Accepted-29/01/2018, Published-28/02/2018.

### **Abstract:**

Being a crowded novel *Mrs. Dalloway* provides rich material for building a discussion upon the configurations of the subjects and formations of the selves. The objective of this study is to explore, through the lens of New Historicism, the cultural dynamics in identity formation as reflected in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Due to an abundance of characters, the study, confining itself to the analyses of two characters in the novel, Mrs. Dalloway and her double Septimus Warren Smith, will search for to what extent these two characters may be considered to be social, cultural and historical constructs and what the function of power and authority is in the constitution of them. The paper argues that *Mrs. Dalloway* presents an account of how Clarissa has become Mrs. Dalloway and how she has become of who she is. Septimus may be regarded as a subject constructed firstly by the social structures of the world and then by the medical discourse. In Septimus's case how the illness is constituted, how it is treated and thus how Septimus becomes the object of the medical discourse are the significant issues on which the study will focus. The paper concludes with the idea that whilst Mrs. Dalloway accepting the social roles attributed to her is living in harmony with the society, Septimus not accepting the subject position determined by the medical discourse is not so lucky. He becomes a victim since he cannot tolerate the self imposed on him.

**Keywords:** *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf, New Historicism, Configuration of the Subject, Power Relations.

*How does a person get to be this way?*

Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*

### **Introduction:**

Being a fairly crowded novel with its both major and minor characters, Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* provides rich material for building a discussion upon the configurations of the subjects and formations of the selves. The aim of this study is to scrutinize, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, from the new historicist perspective, the configurations of the identities and selves through the workings of the cultural dynamics. To this end, firstly the information about the assumptions on the constitutions of subjects regarding them as social, historical and cultural fabrications will be given briefly. The study will be confined to the analysis of two characters in the novel due to an abundance of characters in it. The characters

in question are Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, both of whose stories somewhat intertwine through the pattern and structure of the novel, and both of whom are exposed to the dynamics of social, historical and cultural phenomena functioning as the power and authority in their formations. One of the arguments of this paper is that *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel presenting an account of how Clarissa has become Mrs. Dalloway, i.e. how she has become who she is. Related with her social roles, she will be analyzed how she has become “a perfect hostess”, a definition used to characterize Mrs. Dalloway with her social role negatively. Defined by her social role, Mrs. Dalloway seems to be an artifact of the patriarchal society. Likewise, seen in the perspective of New Historicism, Septimus, who appears a shell-shock veteran in the novel, seems to be a product of the social and political contexts of the time. Septimus is regarded in this paper as a representative of the shell-shocked experiencing the post-war trauma. He is also regarded as a subject constructed firstly by the social structures of the world through the First World War and then by the medical discourse. In the analysis of Septimus, the focal points will be how the illness is constituted, how it is treated and thus how Septimus becomes the object of the medical discourse.

### **1. New Historicism and its Way of Recognizing the Subject**

As it is known, since the 1980s New Historicism has opened, in literary criticism, new ways of interpretation of literary texts and of analysis of the characters in them with its focus from essentialism to contextualism, from humanism to historicity. Both literature like any other cultural phenomenon and human beings, for the new historicist critics, are shaped by social, cultural, political and historical forces, hence it is not possible to claim that there is a universal unchanging human nature to transcend history. In New Historicism the social and historical conditions are believed to give rise to individuals rather than an intrinsic human nature. The new historicist approach to human beings accepting them as cultural artifacts has an anthropological base by means of the theories of the American cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz. In his essay, “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man”, Geertz reflects the idea that man is a cultural product, which has been one of the distinguishing traits of New Historicism:

Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products – products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless (Geertz, 1973, p. 51).

Geertz (1973) also claims that culture is a major ingredient in forming subjects and “by submitting himself to governance”, man creates himself (p. 48). Geertz’s famous declaration that “there is no such a thing as a human nature independent of culture [...] without men, no culture, certainly; but equally, and more significantly, without culture, no men”, (Geertz, 1973. P. 49) contributed much to the new historicist perception of man. Hence new historicists have found a new way whereby they examine how a particular period of culture fashions and manufactures itself. Stephen Greenblatt (cited in Ryan, 1996) put this idea in his essay, “Resonance and Wonder”: “Interest lies not in the abstract universal but in particular, contingent cases, the selves fashioned and acting according to the generative rules and

conflicts of a given culture (p. 55). So it is apparent that new historicists' interest in human beings is in the strand of the acceptance of man as a constitution of the social, cultural and historical values in which he lives and out of which he is formed. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that New Historicism has such a postmodernist aspect that acknowledges that the self is a concept which can never be fixed and is the product of more time-based phenomena that are not constant.

New Historicism acknowledges not only the formation of the subject as a social, cultural and historical artifact but also the function of power and of authority in the constitution of the subject. New historicist critics assume that in the formation/construction of the subject, i.e. in the identity acquisition the dominant culture and its values are of prime importance. The social and cultural dynamics always circulate in society to construct the subjects. Identity formation culminates in either an agreement between the self or those values imposed on him or a negotiation with them. In the first case the imposition on the self is inevitable and in the second case a reaction against the dominant culture, power, authority or hegemony is unavoidable.

Louis Pierre Althusser is the philosopher who contributed to New Historicism with his ideas on the constitution of individuals. According to Althusser, a person's desires, choices, intentions, judgments and insights are all the products of the social practices circulating in the society in which the individual lives. In this case what occurs in fact is not the individual's preferring freely rather the society's making its individuals in its own image. What determines the preferences of the subjects is not the free will of the individual rather the established social practices shaping the subjects. Even if the individual seems to be behaving according to his/her free will, the free will itself is a so-called one because it is the society and culture that shape an individual's characteristics, and affect his/her perceptions, decisions, insights and choices. It is the individual's roles imposed on him/her that shape his/her self. Hence the construction of the self, in Althusser's view, is an ideological practice. In his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)", Althusser takes our attention to the fact that ideological practices are the sum of ideological state apparatuses, as he himself abbreviated as ISAs. These include an assortment of institutions whether governmental or social or religious such as the education system, the family, the media, religion or religious institutions, social institutions or organizations of all kinds (whose methods are not apparently repressive) as well as the prevailing ideas which they propagate. Althusser (1971) advances his theory as in the following:

What are the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)? [...]

I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. I propose an empirical list of these which will obviously have to be examined in detail, tested, corrected and re-organized [...] we can for the moment regard the following institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses [...]

– the religious ISA (the system of the different Churches),

- the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private ‘Schools’),
- the family ISA,
- the legal ISA,
- the political ISA (the political system, including the different Parties),
- the trade-union ISA,
- the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.),
- the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.) (pp. 142-143).

The ISAs function by ideology so they are the institutional forms of ideology. And this means that ISAs are not repressive. The process of being shaped by ISAs is a lifelong one and most of the time unconscious. It is such a process during which we all take the roles we are exposed to; for example, the role of a daughter, a wife, a mother, a husband, a male, a female, a student, a white, a black and so on and on. During this process we acquire our selves and identities; we learn what it is to be all of them and we learn to define ourselves and others.

## 2. Woolf’s Reflecting her Characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*

*Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel having a much more social content than it sounds. It is embedded with the social, cultural and historical phenomena ranging from social life and politics, patriarchy, eugenics, lesbianism to medicine. Dealing with the social dimension of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Alex Zwerdling (1977) points out Woolf’s engagement with the relation between the individual and the social environment, between the individual and the historical forces in her novels. Some of Woolf’s novels such as *Night and Day*, *Jacob’s Room*, *The Years* along with *Mrs. Dalloway*, as he notes

are rooted in a realistically rendered social setting and in most cases in a precise historical time. Woolf’s attention was focused as sharply on society as on individual consciousness; what she saw there fascinated her and became a significant element in her work (p. 69).

Woolf’s often quoted diary entry about her purposes of writing *Mrs. Dalloway* attests frequently neglected vein of the novel: the social critical quality of the novel. “In this book I have almost too many ideas”, she writes; “I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense” (Woolf, 1982, p. 44).

*Mrs. Dalloway* is also a novel clearly exploring how the world is perceived by both the sane and the insane. Woolf in a letter that she wrote on Saturday, October 14<sup>th</sup> points out this quality of the novel: “*Mrs. Dalloway* has branched into a book; and I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side – something like that. Septimus Smith? Is that a good name?” (p. 41) This suggests that Woolf made connections between sanity/insanity and the social system, between life/death and the society. Woolf’s novel raises such questions as what is reality? What shape our perception of truth? And related with them, what form us? What shape what we are? *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel raising these questions by means of many different devices such as “memory, point of view,

gender, the sublime experience, the respective sanities and insanities of the characters – the sliding of the sane/insane minds” (Norris, 2010, p. 33).

From the social dimension of the novel, it can be argued that the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* are all constituted by the social, historical and cultural matrices; in other words, the formations of subjects occur on the social, historical and cultural levels. Woolf reflects her characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* as social and cultural constructs, cultural manifestations of their time. They are characterized by their social roles and worlds. Due to the close connection between the self and the society, the social and cultural dynamics are observed to be at work in the identity formations of Woolf’s characters. Hence, *Mrs. Dalloway* proves a new historicist notion that individuals are constructed and they move through various roles either socially, culturally or sexually. In what follows, I will try to analyze two characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith to put forth how they are constituted by social and cultural dynamics of the society and how far they are the social, cultural and historical constructions, i.e. how they have become what they are along with a touch with the consequences of their identity formation with regard to especially Septimus.

### **3. The Constitution of Identity and Self in Mrs. Dalloway**

One of the arguments of this paper is that *Mrs. Dalloway* presents an account of how Clarissa has become Mrs. Dalloway, how she has become of who she is. Being a woman over fifty and an upper-class politician’s wife Mrs. Dalloway has been constituted by the Victorian values and the patriarchy. It has been observed throughout the novel that she is always defined by her social roles as required and forced by the society. The prime role that has been imposed on her and that she enacts is “the perfect hostess”, which defines her identity as well. “The perfect hostess” (pp. 9, 56) is originally an epithet by which Peter Walsh sneeringly called Clarissa in the days at Bourton when he understood that Clarissa would marry Richard Dalloway due to some important features of him (such as wealth, social status, and a prestigious profession) that Peter did not have. However, this epithet has been adopted by Clarissa, and her self and identity have been shaped by this conception and have gradually comprised the role of a “perfect hostess”. Hence Mrs. Dalloway is an example of the kind of the individual that is constructed by the patriarchal western society; and she can be explored as a subject configured by the patriarchy rather than a subject constituted by on her own merits or of her own free will.

When looked from the Althusserian viewpoint, Clarissa is observed to be subject to the effects of the “ideological state apparatuses”, by which an individual is exploited and formed being unaware of his/her state of the exploitation because ideology itself masks man’s object position and shows him/her to himself/herself and to the society as subject. As mentioned previously, Althusser, in his influential essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)”, analyzed how a dominant social system enforces its control on its individuals in a subtle way to shape them through its ideology. If we apply these ideas to Clarissa’s case, it can be seen how patriarchy exerts its power on her and how she is exploited by the social and cultural dynamics of the late Victorian society. She is in thrall to the society in which she lives and to the societal norms; yet she has an illusion of herself as

being free and an autonomous individual. The social system seems to have given her two alternatives in regard to marriage; one is Richard Dalloway and the other Peter Walsh; and Clarissa thought when she was young and still thinks that she made a right decision freely to accept Richard’s marriage proposal and reject that of Peter. But as an individual affected and the worst of all, repressed by the society, the idea of marriage was inculcated in Clarissa though she assumes that she was free in her choice. The effective element in her choice was her wish of leading a wealthy and a prestigious life. Hence it is the ideology itself whereby Clarissa is shaped through its set of ideas or beliefs and Clarissa is a character subverting the common notion of free will and the conception of the autonomous subject. This is what Althusser puts forth in his theory for all individuals made by subjects by the ideology and thus makes him dispense with “the standard humanist notion of free will” (Leitch et al., 2001, p. 1477).

The title of the novel is closely related with Clarissa’s role as “the perfect hostess”. The phrase suggests that Clarissa’s identity comprises a chosen or a given role. In Clarissa an identity as Mrs. Dalloway has been constructed in connection with her marriage and her being “the perfect hostess”. Clarissa’s married name may also be thought, as Henke (1981) suggests, as “a social mask that disguises the former Clarissa Parry”; and it “serves as an outer skin covering the invisible, ineffable core of private identity” (p. 130). The flowing thought in her mind indicates that even Clarissa herself could not see her as Clarissa: “She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (p. 11). It is because of this reason that Clarissa could not develop an identity that is distinctly her own. Clarissa is described as a woman who “knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed” (pp. 9- 10) and who confuses Armenians with Turks (p. 109).

London as a city providing a social and cultural environment for Clarissa is an important constituent in the fabrication of Clarissa. It is the place that has provided Clarissa with an opportunity to have a prestigious position and to carve out an identity. As a cultural being, Clarissa feels that she is a part of London, she feels united with the city and her people: “in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, [...] she being part [...] of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, [...] part of the people she had never met” (p. 10). Shannon Forbes (2005) argues that “Mrs. Dalloway thrives in London because the patriarchal status quo of the city validates her choice to relinquish her independence and to become Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (p. 42). Being gendered as male, Big Ben with its chimes reminds Clarissa that “the city validates and celebrates her decision to perform her chosen role” (Forbes, 2005, p. 42). It is impossible not to agree with Forbes, (2005) who righteously makes a connection between London and Clarissa’s sense of self:

The city takes on a wonderfully complicated representation with regard to Clarissa and performance. London is vital to Clarissa’s sense of having any self at all [...] the city provides Clarissa with the necessary validation to equate her performance with the self [...] the city is agreeably patriarchal to

Clarissa, because only in a patriarchal environment, the city, can Clarissa thrive as Mrs. Richard Dalloway, the perfect hostess (p. 42).

Mrs. Dalloway is a character who is also conditioned by her social surrounding. Class is a determining factor in Clarissa's self as well as her behaviors. All her social relations seem to have been based on and affected by the class she belongs to. It is worth here recalling that in Althusser, class is accepted as an effective 'ideological state apparatus' operating in society to manipulate its ideology. ISAs function by ideology, and thus they "ensure their own cohesion and reproduction" and they propound their 'values' (Althusser, 1972, p. 145). That class is an important element to shape individuals is proven by Woolf in the character of Clarissa. As an instance to Clarissa's formation by the class we can give her being class conscious, through which she makes the classification of people. But what emerges out of this condition is that Clarissa does not know that she behaves and makes judgements according to the norms by which she has become of who she is. Though she thinks that she should avoid judging people saying that they are "this" or "that" ("She would not say any one in the world now that they were this or were that" (p. 99) ), her decision is reversed by the fact that her dislike to Miss Kilman and Ellie Henderson has been formed by Clarissa's being class-conscious. Clarissa's vying with Miss Kilman for the dominance over Elizabeth (p. 111) stems from Clarissa's being an agent of the upper-middle class. A similar case is obvious in Clarissa's dislike to Ellie Henderson, who is actually a distant cousin of Clarissa's. Clarissa, by her constructed ideas, by her snobbery, reflects upon Ellie Henderson's unsuitableness for her elitist parties because Ellie lacks the social grace and money. As Peter and Sally's little dialogue and the reflection of Sally's mind during Clarissa's party help understand Clarissa's contempt for people with lack of money and social status: " 'Oh, that is Ellie Henderson,' said Sally. Clarissa was really very hard on her. She was a cousin, very poor. Clarissa *was* hard on people. She was rather, said Peter" (p. 169). Sally has detected that "Clarissa was at heart a snob" (p. 168). Although Sally invited them for many times, the Dalloways had never visited Sally and her family due to Clarissa, who thought that Sally married "beneath her", "a miner's son" (p. 168). Definitely, Clarissa's bourgeois status quo prevented her visiting them, which indicates that Clarissa has been formed by the social class she belongs to.

As it is known, Peter Walsh is deeply critical of Clarissa's way of giving herself over entirely to Richard Dalloway and to the high society they belong to. Despite being criticized and seen as a snob by Peter, Clarissa is tightly bound to the role of "the perfect hostess". Years later she remembers his criticism and gives response to him in herself. She sees her parties as offering to people to achieve unity; besides, they show how Clarissa has internalized her role: "Well, how was she going to defend herself? [...] What she liked was simply life. 'That's what I do it for,' she said, speaking aloud, to life" (p. 108). Feeling how people's lives are fragmented, how they make superficial judgments, Clarissa

felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste, and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; [...]

An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write,



even play the piano. She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense: and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know.

All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all; how, every instant . . . (p. 109)

It is clear that Clarissa thinks that she gives parties to compensate for the fragmentation and chaos in life. She sees her parties as a means of joining people; however, as she invites only the upper-middle class people to her parties and avoids the lower-classes, her parties are actually far from having such a function of merging people from different classes and thus creating a feeling of integration. Clarissa’s party seen through the end of the novel is “class-demarcated” as Zwerdling (1977) notes. “No Septimus, no Rezia, no Doris Kilman could conceivably set foot in it [...] Even impoverished gentlefolk, like Clarissa’s cousin Ellie Henderson are invited only under pressure and out of habit [...] Clarissa’s integration is horizontal, not vertical” (p. 73). As a matter of fact, her parties function to strengthen her identity of “the perfect hostess”. Obviously, Clarissa has adapted herself to the role of “the perfect hostess” in order to adopt a pose and thus to possess a socially-accepted/confirmed subject position.

Clarissa is not only criticized for her adopting the role of “the perfect hostess” but also her embrace of “the death of the soul”, (p. 55) – which is in effect relevant with her adopting the role of “the perfect hostess”, – by exchanging her freedom of spirit, her romantic feelings for the wealth, security and the social status provided by Mr. Dalloway. Peter recognizes the death of the soul in Clarissa when he visits her on his return from India five years after and he sees that his prediction at Bourton years ago seems to have come true; i.e. he sees in Clarissa “the perfect hostess”. Because he thinks that Clarissa seems to have lost all depth, she is so artificial and soulless, he asks: “Are you happy, Clarissa? Does Richard – ” (p. 44) – a question (suspended by the coming of Elizabeth and) asked desperately and not responded.

Clarissa’s gender role is closely related to her identity as “the perfect hostess”. By means of the reflections of Clarissa’s mind, the reader knows that she had a passion for Sally Seton, who was doing “the most idiotic things” (p. 32) bravely and was a charming and reckless friend of Clarissa’s youth. Clarissa’s sexual passion for Sally involved Clarissa in “an intoxicating process of dreaming, scheming, sharing, and loving which found culmination in a kiss” (p. 70). Clarissa recalls: “Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down” (p. 33)! We know that Clarissa has never felt such a passion for a man, even for her husband Richard Dalloway. She remembers that moment as “the most exquisite moment of her whole life” (p. 33). Despite her passion for Sally, Clarissa and Sally saw no future in such a patriarchal society imposing gender roles on its individuals. Perhaps it is because of this reason that both Clarissa and Sally had to marry. As Woolf writes in the novel, they acknowledged “a presentiment of something that was

bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always a catastrophe)” (p. 32). Ultimately, both of them, as Transue (1986) notes

conceded the inevitable. Sally married a rich factory owner and settled into the role of a conventional wife and devoted mother to a brood of children. In the process, much of Sally’s vitality, independence, courage, and resolution were lost, but there were no obvious alternatives to her choice. Clarissa, too, matter-of-factly put romance behind her and set about choosing the appropriate husband (p. 70).

Although Clarissa has felt “what men felt” (p. 30) with women throughout her life, she has never put her lesbian feelings into practice, has never had sexual consummation with a woman. Her homosexuality was repressed so that she could conform to the stereotypical image of woman formed by the patriarchy. Consequently, we can say that the values of society such as heterosexual love and marriage became a burden on the young Clarissa and thus for the sake of a security and stability in life, she married a man, i.e. she conformed to the stereotypical pattern ascribed to woman sex.

Clarissa may also be analyzed from the viewpoints of both feminism and queer theories, which make a clear distinction between sex and gender and therefore advocate the constitution of the gender. Here it would be suitable to note that there may be found a similarity between these theories and New Historicism in respect of their approach to the individual. What New Historicism assumes for all individuals is similar to what feminist and gender theories propose for the constitution of identity, self and gender in woman. New historicists assume the same thing for all individuals in general. Simone de Beauvoir (1956) was the first feminist theoretician to make a distinction between sex and gender with her statement which is still powerfully resonant: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 273). Judith Butler (2002) categorizes sex and gender in her famous *Gender Trouble*. For both theorists while the first is based on the biological difference, the latter is something culturally constructed. It can therefore be said that gender is performed ideologically by the society. In Butler’s terms, “the performativity of gender” is observed to have become effectual in the formation of Clarissa’s identity (as well as that of Sally’s). According to Butler, performativity undermines the idea that an identity is the source of the manners, behaviours, speech and the like of an individual; rather the construction of identity is the outcome of performative manners, gestures, actions and speeches. Clarissa’s case is no exception. She has been established by the role of “the perfect hostess” that has been imposed on her. In other words, Clarissa is Mrs. Dalloway since she has been exposed to this identity; her sense of identity is based on the role she has been imposed on. Thus she seems to be living in disguise repressing her real self and identity. It is because of this reason that Clarissa is frigid towards her husband. She remembers that “through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again” (pp. 29-30). Due to her frigidity, she is “like a nun withdrawing” (p. 29) sleeping lonely in her attic room. Her inability to commit herself to her husband sexually is also an indication of Clarissa’s alienation from her own body. When viewed from the viewpoint of Butler’s queer theory, it can be claimed that Clarissa’s gender, which otherwise would perhaps be homosexual, is

constituted by the mechanism of suppression of the society and that her body and sexual desire are put in a heterosexist framework.

Clarissa’s inability to get rid of the limitations of the social world (though sometimes it is ambivalent whether she wants it or not) is an evidence of her being socially and culturally constructed. As an instance to this case the scene in which the news of Septimus’s death breaks in upon Clarissa’s gaiety in the middle of her party can be taken. However, she is so indulged in the role of “the perfect hostess” that even though she is disturbed by the news of suicide, she does not let her own feelings subdue the mood of her guests. She meditates on the death of Septimus while watching the old lady through the window for a while, yet not to mar the mood of the party, “she is able to return serenely to her role as hostess, celebrated in the final line of the book” (Sumner, 2000, p. 151) with Peter Walsh’s perspective: “For there she was” (p. 172). As can be seen in the last scene, nothing prevents Mrs. Dalloway from presenting herself in the way that is appropriate to the social and cultural norms and conducting so as to fit the accorded image.

Undoubtedly, Clarissa is a product of the social patriarchal values. Her being excluded from Lady Bruton’s lunch, to which Mr. Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread are invited, is an indication of this. Clarissa’s passivity, her remaining mute about it demonstrates that Clarissa accepts her subordinate position attained to her, which is also her confirmation of her identity as a “perfect hostess”. She is seen as a woman who cannot take part on such important occasions during which they assemble to change something important in the politics of the country. Lady Bruton wishes to start a campaign to persuade the “superfluous youth of [...] ever-increasing population” (p. 98) to emigrate to Canada. She invites Richard because he is a politician and Hugh because he is skilled at writing letters to *the Times* (p. 97). She is herself an aristocratic lady. So there is no room in this luncheon party for Clarissa because as a woman she does not have any quality to be used by the lady. The only public sphere that Clarissa would enter is her own parties. But unfortunately, though according to Clarissa, they are offerings “to combine, to create” (p. 109), somehow, the idea of a party as an offering, as Clarissa herself admits, sounds “horribly vague” (p. 108). Fernald (2006), who deals with Woolf’s feminism in her novels, notes that Woolf feminist perspective

prohibits unqualified admiration for Clarissa Dalloway – a woman who does not know what the equator is and who confuses Turks and Armenians; a woman, in short, unqualified to talk at her own parties – nor does Woolf silently condone the social conditions that create Mrs. Dalloway (p. 103).

It is of course significant that Woolf created such a woman character as Clarissa to make clear the place of woman in society and thus to offer a social criticism, but what is equally important here is Woolf’s showing that Clarissa is shaped by the patriarchal matrix.

Throughout the novel, it is observed that Clarissa sometimes undergoes an inner conflict about her role of “the perfect hostess” and has ambivalence about her self. She seems to have disintegration of the self at times. It can be said that Mrs. Dalloway seems to be longing for having selves and identities other than “the perfect hostess” and to be suffering from the difference between the private self as Clarissa and the public self as Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

Nevertheless, it is a comprehensive issue that cannot be dealt with in the scope of this study, this part of which has aimed to indicate how Clarissa has become of who she is.

#### 4. Septimus Warren Smith as a Social, Historical and Cultural Self

Septimus Warren Smith, who is defined by Woolf as the double of Clarissa, is a socially and culturally constructed character becoming oblivious to social pressure like Mrs. Dalloway in the novel. He appears in the novel as a shell-shocked veteran who fought in the First World War and witnessed his close friend, Evans's being shot dead during the war. He can also be called a deferred shell-shocked because the war ended five years before Septimus's illness has emerged.

Seen in the perspective of New Historicism Septimus may be considered a product of the social and political context of the time, a subject constructed firstly by the cultural values and the social structures of England and then by the medical discourse. He is exposed to the bitter realities of the world such as war, disenchantment with the world, alienation from the society, hopelessness, disillusionment and trauma, all of which drive Septimus to suicide and thus result in death. These are also the outcomes of Septimus's rejection of the identity which the society forces upon him.

The reader knows that before the war, when Septimus was in his twenties, he was "too androgynous to conform to society's masculine stereotype". However, Englishness and its constructive role are noticeable on Septimus. "Shy and stammering, he read Shakespeare's plays, wrote romantic poetry, and fell hopelessly in love with Miss Isabel Pole. Under her tutelage, his soul blossomed" (Henke, 1981, p. 139). His image of England is constituted by English Literature (though it is obvious that he had inefficiency to write and thus saw no future for himself as a poet or author) and his tutor whom he loves. Woolf tells the reader that when the war broke out "Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's play and Miss Isabel Pole [Septimus's tutor] in a green dress walking in a square" (p. 77). Then during the war, he begins to adopt a manly identity. The effects of the war on Septimus are given ironically in the novel. How Septimus had become indifferent with the coldness of war and death is revealed in the following extract taken from the novel:

There in the trenches the change which Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness; he was promoted; [...]

when Evans was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference [...]

For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel (pp. 77-78).

Septimus is a representative of the shell-shocked experienced the post-war trauma. Septimus's case is of significance with regard to its indication of how war abolishes man. Concerned with how individuals are formed, repressed and given identities by the society in which they live, Woolf demonstrates, by means of her character Septimus, how historical forces have impacts on the lives and have the power to shift the courses of their lives.

“Shell-shocked” is defined in *Merriam Webster* as “affected with battle fatigue” and “mentally confused, upset, or exhausted as a result of excessive stress” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shell%E2%80%93shocked>). On the whole shell-shock is a traumatic condition that emerged especially during the First World War and changed one's perception of the effects of war on the individual. The effects of the war should not only be reduced to the bodily injuries/physical wounds but also be recognized as the distortion of the individual's psychology and disruption of his mind. As Wyatt Bonikowski (2013) points out “[s]oldiers' symptoms of amnesia, mutism, anxiety, and various bodily dysfunctions with no apparent organic cause demonstrated that war's effects were not limited to bodily wounds” (p. 1). The shell-shocked is deprived of the capacity of adopting the new situation (both in and after war), of ordering the things in a chaotic world full of violence, and giving sense to his and other soldiers' experiences they have during the war such as shooting and killing the others, and getting wounded and being killed. Sometimes a deep fear of death may lie at the heart of this sort of trauma. All these deprivations of making sense of all such and similar experiences mostly culminate in the alienation of the individual from the world in which he has to live.

The similar traumatic condition is represented in *Mrs. Dalloway* through Septimus. Though the war is over, its disruptive impacts on him are observed by means of his abnormal behaviours, his still suffering from war, his having hallucinations of the commanding officer in the army, Evans, and his reminiscences of the combats during the war. His illness is, in effect, a response to the political oppression. This may also be regarded as Woolf's response to the policy of her own nation, a critique of the violence emerging from war. Septimus's inadequate manners in society and his relations with his wife Lucrezia also give the idea of Septimus's mental illness. Septimus, disoriented by his illness, finds himself isolated from ordinary life. He could not work, could not adapt himself to his environment. He has no sexual relation with his wife. He loses his sociability. Furthermore, there can be seen the dissolution in his personality. In one part of the novel, when Septimus and Rezia are in Regent's Park and about to go to consult Dr. Holmes, Septimus is reflected with his hallucinations:

[Septimus] sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly. Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself –  
'For God's sake don't come!' Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead (p.63).

Similar hallucinations recur in Septimus's vision in the course of the novel. Septimus "feels the extreme alienation", yet he is "unable to communicate any of it, even though he knows that communication is health" (Johnsen, 2003, p. 121). In the following scene of the novel, Septimus is observed to long to communicate: "Communication is health; communication is happiness. Communication, he muttered" (p. 84). Unfortunately, communication occurs not between Septimus and other people; instead it takes form of talking to himself because Septimus lives in a self-enclosed and isolated dream world now. Because Rezia takes off her wedding ring when she becomes very thin, Septimus thinks that their marriage is over (p. 61). When Rezia tells him that she wants children, Septimus thinks that "One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering" (p. 80). Septimus also feels "deserted" (p. 83) when Rezia could not see how hard Dr. Holmes is on Septimus.

As *Mrs. Dalloway* contains a subplot about madness by means of Septimus, it can be argued that the novel takes part in the discourse of madness. Therefore, it is necessary to detect the revelation and function of madness in the novel. What does illness make possible in the novel? What does Woolf indicate to her readers through the reflection of Septimus's illness? To answer these questions how Woolf is reflecting Septimus's illness both from the viewpoint of Septimus himself and from that of the others can be explored. By so doing not only the diversity between the perceptions of madness by the insane and the sane but also the social practices coming into play in relation to madness can be put forward.

It is worth mentioning here Foucault, who contributed to New Historicism with his postmodern views. Foucault rejects the notion of the absolute truth, seeing the formations of these truths in society as a modernist view. Postmodern view, for Foucault, finds itself in the abnormality, that is, in the individuals and thoughts that do not conform with the general truths fabricated by the society by means of its criteria of normality, hence Foucault did researches on madness. The insane like the gay, lesbian and transsexual, are the people who cannot obey the stated standards of the society which requires from every individual to conform to its rules, constructed values and adopted, unquestionable truths and the like. Foucault (1988), in his *Madness and Civilization*, giving a history of madness puts an emphasis on the idea that madness is not an inherently unchanging situation, but the construction of various cultural, social and intellectual structures. So it is the society that determines how madness would be known and experienced and creates the discourse of madness according to its own norms. Another central argument of Foucault in the book is that it is significant to listen to the voice of the insane, which modern medicine and psychiatry fails. Foucault states this idea as in the following:

psychoanalysis has not been able, will not be able, to hear the voices of unreason, nor to decipher in themselves the signs of the madman. Psychoanalysis can unravel some of the forms of madness; it remains a stranger to the sovereign enterprise of unreason. It can neither liberate nor transcribe, nor most certainly explain, what is essential in this enterprise (p. 278).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, how the illness is constituted and how it is treated are important issues in the sense that they indicate the way by which madness is constructed in the modern British society in the post-war period. The illness of the shell-shocked Septimus is diagnosed by the medical authority as madness. The doctors represent the authority. They are also the epitome of sanity, rationality and normality. Septimus, on the other hand, represents the insane, the irrational and the abnormal and thus the marginalized. Septimus as patient is constructed as an object by the medical profession. In the evaluation process of Septimus’s condition and determination on his madness, the physicians and the medical discourse of madness are observed to be normative and therefore Septimus becomes an object in the hands of physicians and of the medical discourse of insanity. As a result of this object position Septimus becomes the mad Other of the sane Self. He becomes the insane other who needs to be treated. He also needs to be turned into the normality – a situation in which all other characters in the novel seem to be. The normality seems to be constructed by the society through the medical discourse against which Septimus has to struggle. Here we can assert that abnormality and insanity are the discursive formations created in the face of normality and sanity.

Such an analysis of the related scenes in the novel allows the reader to see the conflict between the insane (represented by Septimus) and the sane (represented by the doctors). It is clearly understood that the diversity between these two perceptions emerges from the fact that the perception of illness of the doctors have been constituted by the medical profession, which has been constituted by the society and culture. In the novel the inefficiencies of the physicians are reflected so clearly that both Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw are far from healing Septimus. Dr. Holmes tells Rezia that “there was nothing the matter” (p. 22) and tells her to “make him notice real things, go to a music hall, play cricket – that was the very game, [...] a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband” (p. 24). As Rezia remembers Dr. Holmes told them “There was nothing whatever the matter [...] when he felt like that he went to the Music Hall” and did nothing more than to advice him to “try two tabloids of bromide dissolved in a glass of water at bedtime” (p. 81) and to “give him something to make him sleep” (p. 84). Bradshaw not finding Dr. Holmes’s ways of treatment recommends Septimus the rest cure.

As Sumner (2000) notices “the doctors embodiments of ruthless power, are required to protect this society from any trace of disturbance or disruption, yet are themselves a threat to the vulnerable” and it is Dr Holmes who drives Septimus “to his plunge from the window to his death on the spikes of the railings below (p. 151). And as John Mepham argues “the social system works intensely in the novel in any number of ways, most dramatically through the power that doctors exercise over Septimus, driving him to his death” (p. 94). The reader knows that the idea of suicide comes to Septimus’s mind through Dr. Holmes’s trying hard on him:

Human nature, in short, was on him – the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils. Holmes was on him. Dr. Holmes came quite regularly every day. Once you stumble, Septimus wrote on the back of a postcard, human nature is on you. Holmes is on you. Their only chance was to escape, without letting

Holmes know [...] The world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes (pp. 82-83).

Septimus's illness provides the reader with a new perspective other than that of the other people including Dr. Holmes and Dr Bradshaw. Their sane perception is subverted through Septimus's insane perception in the novel because Woolf, though Septimus is insane, lets him have an ability to perceive the truth about the war in order that Septimus could transcend the ability of perception of sane people. In other words, Septimus is represented as sane enough to perceive the reality behind war, to see the devastating results of war. To him it is destructive, devastating; the war itself is death. And those who are unable to fail to understand or do not seem to understand the true reality behind these devastating acts are all guilty. Septimus is also represented as sane enough to recognize Dr. Holmes's brutality as he lacks humanity. Despite his madness, Septimus even understands that Dr. Holmes deprives Septimus of his individuality by repressing him.

We see in Septimus's case how the medical control and surveillance of the medical authority intervene in one's life and become a means of oppression. Septimus's story includes the power relations in which the authorial repression of physicians over the patients is represented and one's identity is confirmed as the patient/the insane and thus the object of the study. The physicians consider that for Septimus thinking about himself is dangerous. Believing that having some hobbies, walking outside and being social will be the right treatment for Septimus's mental illness, Dr Holmes fails to recognize the true nature of the illness. Bradshaw, the pompous high society doctor, whose treatment fee could hardly be afforded by the Smiths, does nothing more than to label Septimus as a patient whose illness is a case of "extreme gravity", "complete breakdown – complete physical and nervous breakdown" (p. 85). He recommends him the rest cure: "It was merely a question of rest, said Sir William; of rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed" (p. 86) in one of his homes (p. 87). Septimus is about to be subject to surveillance. This complies with the truth about the sane's attitude toward insanity that Foucault detected: The treatment of madness is not considered to be an important issue as the surveillance or complete control of illness. Septimus's case is not different. Bradshaw is, like Holmes, far from helping and healing Septimus with his misdiagnosis and ways of treatment. He thinks that Septimus's case is one of "our moments of depression" (p. 87). One of his recommendations for Septimus is to "try to think as little about yourself as possible" (p. 88). This time not only Septimus but also Rezia does not like the doctor. Both of them notice the insincerity and inefficiency of Bradshaw: "Never, never had Rezia felt such agony in her life! She had asked for help and been deserted! He had failed them! Sir William Bradshaw was not a nice man [...] They had been deserted" (p. 88). Septimus has almost the same feeling that he had when he is with Holmes:

Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew are applied. Human nature is remorseless (p. 87).



Though Septimus disagrees with the physicians, his opinion is not valued and is accepted as nothing more than a personal view because he is not the authority. Medical profession which is normally expected to give comfort and relief to patients is shown in the novel to oppress the patient and create violence on the side of the patient. The novel exposes that the mental health system institutionalizes, sanctions and even promotes the surveillance and in some sense captivity of the insane. It is because of this reason that Septimus calls Dr. Holmes “You brute! You brute!” (p. 84). Bradshaw’s reputation for his “infallible accuracy in diagnosis but of sympathy; tact; understanding of the human soul” (p. 85) is undermined in the novel by the narrator’s commentary:

Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William’s goddess[...]Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion [...] But Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged [...] Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace [...] shrouds herself in white and walks penitentially disguised as brotherly love through factories and parliaments; offers help, but desires power; smites out of her way roughly the dissentient, or dissatisfied [...] This lady too [...] had her dwelling in Sir William’s heart (pp. 89-90).

To overcome the control that exercised over him, Septimus commits suicide. His suicide may be recognized as a way of resistance to power. He may be thought to have killed himself to defy the physicians’ treatment and subvert the medical discourse about madness. Thus by the act of suicide, Septimus can be seen as someone not accepting the object position determined by the medical discourse and by the physicians imposing on him patterns of behavior. It is obvious in the scene in which Septimus commits suicide that due to the repression of Holmes that Septimus feels on himself, he flings “himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer’s area railings” (p. 132). We know that before Dr. Holmes comes to the Smiths’ lodging house, Lucrezia and Septimus have a nice usual evening and they are happy. Hearing some voices on the stairs, Rezia leaves Septimus to see who is there. Finding Holmes, she tries to prevent the doctor from seeing her husband. Meanwhile, Septimus hears the doctor proceeding up the stairs and thinks in what way he can kill himself. He also tells to himself: “Holmes would get him. But no; not Holmes; not Bradshaw”. He bolts, goes to the window and he thinks of “throwing himself out” because “it was their idea of tragedy [...] Holmes and Bradshaw like that sort of thing”. He sits on the windowsill “till the very last moment” and when Holmes appears at the door he throws himself crying “I’ll give it to you” (p. 132). Clarissa’s moment of communion with Septimus at the end of the novel also reveals that Septimus’s only defense is death as Clarissa realizes: “Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate” (p. 163). As can be seen Septimus commits suicide in the face of the professional judgment, control and oppression and by his act of suicide he defies them.

New historicism implies that some people, the authority or some views/notions may exercise more power than others on individuals at any given moment in time. In Septimus's case this notion is exemplified in the sense that he is defined and marginalized by the physicians and the discourse of madness. When examined from the Foucauldian viewpoint, Septimus is noticed to be characterized as insane due to the social norms of normality constructed by the society and the medical discourse. As can be seen through Septimus, in her character creation Woolf considered the social and cultural contexts significant; therefore it would not be wrong to say that Woolf has an affinity with the new historicist notion that individuals are always subject to culture and society and they are formed by social and cultural values. By means of Septimus, the reader also sees that as Septimus cannot accept the object position attributed to him by the medical authority and adopt the self imposed on him, he commits suicide. He becomes an outsider and a victim of the society and power relations since he cannot tolerate the self imposed on him.

### **Conclusion**

Consequently, it can be said that *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel in which society, culture and history are observed to shape the subjects, thus representing the new historicist assumption that individuals are conditioned by their social and cultural surroundings and constructed by the power relationships. Throughout the study, it has been attempted to put forth that Clarissa and Septimus in Woolf's novel are the embodiments of fabricated/manufactured individuals, they are both shaped by the time and space in which they live. The power relations have also been regarded as important factors in the formation of these characters. The present paper has also indicated that Woolf seems to have adopted two divergent paths in the configurations of her characters. In Clarissa's formation Woolf's novel contains containment and in the formation of Septimus Warren Smith it has subversion. In order to be integrated with the society and culture in which she lives, Clarissa does not and cannot resist the standardization of woman by the society and thus she becomes "the perfect hostess", which means that she adopts "the perfect hostess" as an identity and self. On the other hand, Septimus, who is also shaped by the society and culture, tries to resist the power on him, so he goes mad. Despite his insanity, he resists the power of the authority represented by the physicians by means of throwing himself to death through the window. This paper concludes with the idea that whilst Mrs. Dalloway accepting the social roles given to her is living in harmony with the society, Septimus not accepting the object position determined by the medical authority and discourse is not so lucky. The alternative to death, for Septimus, is acceptance, to which he cannot yield but through which Clarissa finds reconciliation. Septimus becomes a victim since he cannot tolerate the self imposed on him. What Septimus actually does with his suicide is to negotiate the prescribed modes of self of the medical profession; hence, through Septimus, Woolf not only criticizes the medical authority for their misjudgments and claims but also undermines the power of the authority.

**Works Cited:**

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. (Trans. Ben Brewster). New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Bonikowski, Wyatt. *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination: The Death Drive in Post-World War I British Fiction*. USA: Suffolk University, 2013.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. (Trans. and. Ed. H. M. Parshley). Great Britain: Lowe and Brydone Printers Ltd., 1956.

Fernald, Anne E. *Virginia Woolf: Feminism and the Reader*. USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Forbes, Shannon. “Equating Performance with Identity: The Failure of Clarissa Dalloway’s Victorian “Self” in Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs. Dalloway””. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*. Vol. 38, No. 1, Special Convention Issue: Performance. 2005, pp. 38-50. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30039298>. on 22.03.2016

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. (Trans. Richard Howard). New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretations of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Greenblatt, Stephen. “Resonance and Wonder”. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism: A Reader*. Kiernan Ryan (ed.). London: Arnold, 1996, pp.55-60.

Johnsen, William A. *Violence and Modernism: Ibsen, Joyce and Woolf*. USA: University Press of Florida, 2003.

Henke, A. Suzette. “Mrs. Dalloway: The Communion of Saints”. *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. (ed. Jane Marcus). London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1981, pp. 125-147.

Leitch, V. B., Et al. (Eds.). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001.

Mepham, John. *Virginia Woolf: A Literary Life*. London: Macmillan, 1991.

*Merriam Webster* (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shell%E2%80%93shocked>).

Norris, Nanette. *Modernist Myth: Studies in H.D., D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf*. Canada: Dreamridge Publishing, 2010.

Sumner, Rosemary. *A Route to Modernism: Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf*. Great Britain: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000.

Transue, Pamela J. *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Style*. USA: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Leonard Woolf (ed.). USA: Harcourt, Inc., 1982.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. London: Grafton Books, Collins Publishing Group, 1987.

Zwerdling, Alex. "Mrs. Dalloway and the Social System". *PMLA*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (Jan., 1977), 1977, pp. 69-82. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/461415>. on 22. 03. 2016.