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## Virginia Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway": Interpretation, Knowledge and Power

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VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS. DALLOWAY:  
INTERPRETATION, KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

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A Thesis

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The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

L. Monique Pittman

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APPROVAL SHEET

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway and offers an explanation for Woolf's juxtaposition of the two seemingly unrelated narratives of Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway. This paper suggests that the juxtaposition facilitates Woolf's examination of the social structure, a structure which depends upon the limitation and control of knowledge for its maintenance. Michel Foucault's "The Order of Discourse" provides the theoretical structure necessary to study Woolf's characters as participants in the various language systems which categorize and limit knowledge.

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS. DALLOWAY:  
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Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway tells two distinct stories--those of Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway--which directly intersect only momentarily near the end of the novel. Some critics regard this as a structural flaw, others as a deliberate and effective choice on Woolf's part. Critics who assume the validity of Woolf's organizational choice offer differing explanations for the juxtaposition of the two narratives. Phyllis Rose reads the novel as an autobiographical document portraying the artist's plight; the two narratives elucidate the fine line "between a kind of divine intoxication which is the basis of all creativity and insanity pure and simple" (Rose 126). Jeremy Tambling identifies another unifying theme for the two narratives--male and female homosexuality (149). He suggests that the relationship between Clarissa and Sally Seton parallels that of Septimus and Evans. Thus, the juxtaposition highlights divergent methods for repressing homosexual impulses. Deborah Guth finds a link between Septimus and Clarissa in the motif of "ascent and descent" (18). The opposition of the two emphasizes the inadequacy of Clarissa's life: while Septimus soars (and descends) to a world beyond social confines, Clarissa remains strictly within societal bounds. Explanations such as these often overlook the novel's broader social implications. While Guth does direct her attention to Clarissa's steadfast adherence to social mores, she fails to provide a comprehensive and specific study of

Septimus, Clarissa, and the numerous social pressures operating on and linking the two characters.

Woolf does not stop with the particularity of class systems, the artist's role, the plight of the homosexual, or the role of women, but rather exposes the very structure of power in Western society, a power based on the logical and rational acquisition and possession of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Woolf's characters enforce interpretations on others in an assertion of power typical of Western society. Mrs. Dalloway makes it clear that the powerful members of society maintain the rather tenuous status quo by regulating knowledge and the power accruing its possession. The two narratives of

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<sup>1</sup>Definitions for the following terms derive from Michel Foucault's "The Order of Discourse" and are discussed in greater detail later: knowledge, interpretation, truth, and force. Foucault assumes that knowledge is nothing more than a function of the language used to articulate it. An infinite number of intersecting and diverging "discourses" or language systems produce knowledge. In this sense, knowledge is only knowledge if it adheres to the restrictions of the particular discourse employed. Personal interpretations couched in acceptable terminology may assume the guise of "knowledge" or "truth." In this paper, "interpretation" is used to identify such personal efforts to explain meaning within a power-full discourse. "Knowledge" and "truth" note interpretations which have been successfully articulated within a discourse. In this sense, knowledge is nothing more than interpretation. The paper examines instances in which personages of power utilize personal interpretations presented in the language of a particular discourse in order to maintain the status quo. For example, Doris Kilman interprets Mrs. Dalloway as a shallow, frivolous, and proud woman. This interpretation carries no weight since Ms. Kilman is a disenfranchised individual; however, when expressed in the rhetoric of Christianity, Kilman's view of the "lost and sinful" Clarissa Dalloway gains validity as "truth" or "knowledge" because the discourse of Christianity bears a significance within the culture which Kilman's own views cannot attain.

Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway present two individuals differing in gender, class, education, and experience, and the interpretive agents that constrict and mold them and limit or expand their access to power.

Woolf's literary theories and personal experience provide ample justification for a reading of the novel as a document exposing the use and abuse of knowledge to maintain social status and power. An analogy can be drawn between Woolf's denunciation of Edwardian narrative constraints and her novel's attack on the powers that contain knowledge. Woolf writes in her 1925 essay, "Modern Fiction": "The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall" (The Common Reader 149). Woolf denounces narrative convention as the tyrant which limits artistic endeavors to articulate meaning, much as she exposes figures in Mrs. Dalloway who hinder and/or force compliance with established truths and ways of speaking of truth. Admittedly, Woolf's comments address a very specific area of literary concern; yet, her statement reveals a general distaste for limitations on the creative process, whether it be the production of a novel or the production of knowledge.

Woolf's frustration with the restriction of individual expression is not limited to aesthetics. Through her own experience, Woolf developed a fierce hatred for those who force the psyche or, as she terms it, "force the soul." Woolf sent the proofs of Mrs. Dalloway to her friend Jacques



Raverat. In their notes to The Letters of Virginia Woolf, editors Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann recount that Raverat's wife Gwen wrote back to Woolf and remarked on the novel's mad scenes (Letters, v.3, p. 153). Woolf writes in reply, "It was a subject that I have kept cooling in my mind until I felt I could touch it without bursting into flame all over. You can't think what a raging furnace it is still to me--madness and doctors and being forced" (Letters 180). Woolf specifically refers to the rest cure she experienced as prescribed treatment for depression. While her comment appears to confront an abstract affront to the individuality of the soul, it is a reference to the particular restrictions of diet, exercise, and writing insisted upon by her physicians. Woolf's words suggest at the very least an impatience with efforts to impose socially determined restrictions on the personal, intellectual freedom of an individual. Woolf's use of the word "force" echoes language she employs throughout the novel in relation to individuals who limit and impose knowledge on others.

Alex Zwerdling has set a critical precedent for examining Woolf's commentary on society in Mrs. Dalloway. He offers as evidence this quotation from Woolf's diary: "I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense" (57). While Zwerdling draws attention to an important aspect of Woolf's work, he does limit the scope of his argument to Woolf's treatment of the ruling political class and its relationship to the intellectual

aristocracy of England. I would argue that Woolf's censure of society extends beyond class relations to an examination of the ideological structure supporting society. Mrs. Dalloway exposes various individuals responsible for maintaining power by limiting and controlling the production of knowledge. Her novel indicts those who employ force to impose meaning upon other characters. In this sense the bourgeois Holmes, the nouveau riche Bradshaw, and even the penniless Miss Kilman, regardless of their class, all participate in a larger social system which Woolf criticizes.

French linguist and historian Michel Foucault examines the way in which collective acceptance and regulation of knowledge perpetuate this social system. Like Woolf's novel, Foucault's "The Order of Discourse" questions basic assumptions regarding language, knowledge, and power. He identifies and rejects the assumption that meaning and knowledge exist as "truth" free from the subjective biases of language. He suggests that truth itself is only a function of the language used to articulate it. Foucault refutes the Platonic notion, still prevalent today, that truth or knowledge reign outside and independent of the cultural and social contexts which taint language. On the contrary, Foucault suggests that language itself determines knowledge and truth.

Foucault defines the term "discourse" as the language systems humans use to produce knowledge. While Platonic

models take ideal truth as an a priori given, Foucault assumes the human need to control, limit, and create knowledge within specific parameters. Knowledge does not and cannot exist outside discourse, which structures and limits where, when, what, how, and, most importantly, which people can acquire and utilize knowledge and the power it yields. Knowledge is not something that conforms to discourse so much as it is a product of the way humans talk about things. In Foucault's schema, knowledge yields power precisely because, by definition, it is a limited commodity-one that not everyone can possess.

Foucault's model clearly assumes the necessity of an ordered discourse. Foucault suggests that humans find the very uncertainty of existence highly disconcerting. This general uncertainty may originate in the possibility that meaning is limitless and truth infinite. Humans respond by establishing limitations and institutions which enforce such limits. For example, religions enforce specific guidelines for the nature of truth and provide codes of behavior to ensure spiritual salvation in another world free from uncertainty. Governments offer security on a secular level by dictating correct civic behavior and protecting humans from each other. The unwritten guidelines governing the production of knowledge also purport to maintain the stability of a culture.

Foucault analyzes this web of discourses and identifies what he terms "procedures of exclusion" which restrict the

production of knowledge, meaning, and truth: the prohibition, the opposition of reason and madness, and the opposition of true and false. The first of these means of exclusion, the prohibition, groups under one heading the basic restrictions experienced by humans when speaking. The opposition of reason and madness controls potentially more damaging elements in society by labeling as "mad" those who differ from the norm. The opposition of true and false successfully negates ideas or practices which challenge what humans accept as knowledge by labelling them "false."

The first of these procedures of exclusion, the prohibition, includes restrictions on the topics, the occasions for speech, and on which individuals have the right to speak on certain privileged topics. A reciprocal relationship exists between the privileged speaker and the privileged topic: the speaker gains power because he/she has the right to address certain topics, and at the same time, the topic gains authority because only certain individuals can talk about it. Foucault cites politics and sexuality as two examples of privileged topics, topics which carry with them numerous restrictions on not only who addresses them but also on when and where such discussions may take place. Foucault argues that the treatment of these two topics within discourse indicates the degree to which the production of meaning is, in fact, dominated by the forces of power and desire, not an a priori truth.

While strict prohibitions concerning the circumstances of speech limit discourse considerably, a second principle of exclusion eliminates a more dangerous threat to the ordered discourse. The opposition of reason and madness reinforces the social hierarchy and at the same time labels as "mad" that which does not conform to "normal" limits on behavior, such as those identified by religious, governmental, and other institutional bodies. This opposition emphasizes the prominent role of language in maintaining social structures, for it is the madman's words which constitute his difference from the system: "It was through his words that his madness was recognized: they were the place where the division between reason and madness was exercised" (1155). Foucault notes that as the twentieth century institutionalized the treatment of the mentally ill, it created a new discourse to rationalize the madman's speech and give it meaning. Psychoanalysis strips madness of its threatening aspects and confines it to scientific inquiry. More importantly, psychoanalysis validates itself by its ability to discover "truth" or meaning in the madman's initially indecipherable and therefore potentially subversive speech.

Foucault classifies this "will to truth," the compulsion to discern meaning in all language usage, as the third principle of exclusion, the opposition of true and false. The western will to truth denies the arbitrariness of truth and its historical production (1156). Plato's

rejection of the Sophists' arguments determined that "the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse was or did, but in what it said" (1156). Thus, truth masquerades as an a priori given free from the biases of desire and power which characterize language use. As with the other procedures of exclusion, the will to truth "rests on an institutional support: it is both reinforced and renewed by a whole strata of practices" (1157). The institution dictates that truth must conform to the limitations established by the discourse. Just as institutions and their authorities use the term "mad" to exclude and contain individuals who threaten social stability, so they also employ the term "false" to negate ideas or practices which challenge what humans accept as knowledge.

Foucault makes a distinction between "the truth" and being "within the true" by turning to history for an example. While today's scientific community accepts Gregor Mendel's genetic theories as "truth," his peers rejected those theories because they did not conform to the current "conceptual instruments" or "theoretical foundations." Despite the fact that Mendel's discoveries are "true," he was not "in the true" during his lifetime because his model operated outside the established frame of reference or discourse for biological meaning (1161). Human institutions mistakenly equate things or ideas that are simply "within the true" with the "truth." Foucault notes, "One is 'in the true' only by obeying the rules of a

discursive 'policing'" (1161). Therefore, truth has very little to do with the actual veracity of a statement and much more to do with whether or not the statement corresponds to current patterns of thinking.

A fear of the unlimited proliferation of meaning motivates the urge to restrict discourse:

It is just as if prohibitions, barriers, thresholds, and limits had been set up in order to master, at least partly, the great proliferation of discourse, in order to remove from its richness the most dangerous part, and in order to organize its disorder according to figures which dodge what is most uncontrollable about it. (1164)

Foucault argues that personal, political, and institutional concerns control the discourses which produce knowledge. In Mrs. Dalloway, we can indeed trace this pattern. Woolf's characters each produce readings based on their personal and communal predisposition. While all the characters share this quality, some do not attempt to force their readings onto others. On the other hand, some characters make it their business to do precisely that. These persons confine meaning within the limitations of collective knowledge in order to maintain societal stability and avoid the dangers suggested by the possibility of infinite meaning: namely, that restrictions on behavior become invalid if meaning has no boundaries and if there is no one "truth" on any subject. Foucault writes:

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (1155)

Foucault uses the phrase "ward off," suggesting that the parameters of discourses cannot categorically control or streamline the production of knowledge. Foucault's model is one of numerous layers and intersections, not a monolithic construction dominated by some formal intellectual policing. Nonetheless, discourses do function to produce knowledge and meaning within established norms.

Mrs. Dalloway presents characters involved in moments of interpretive conflict which correspond to the constraining aspects of discourse Foucault identifies. The conflict between Septimus and his doctors illustrates what Foucault identifies as the prohibition against madness and its consequences; that conflict, in turn, illuminates the way Mrs. Dalloway is more subtly constrained by the prohibitions and restrictions of the discourses in which she lives. An examination of the discursive forces affecting Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway explains the juxtaposition of their two stories. Woolf clearly attacks interpretive force by showing stereotypical villains confronting the pathetic victim. However, the complexities of Mrs. Dalloway and her set highlight the difficulties



attending any attempt to escape from the interpretive constraints of the social structure.

Two early scenes in Mrs. Dalloway emphasize the limitations governing interpretation and point to the usefulness of Foucault's essay as a tool for reading Woolf's novel. In the first scene, an unidentified car passes and by-standers speculate about its occupants. The second scene presents the crowd's evolving interpretation of sky-writing. The "readings" in both scenes suggest that interpretation and knowledge appear highly diverse, but are, in fact, produced within culturally determined parameters. Woolf's pointed reference to the professions of the observers in the first scene underlines the remarkable uniformity of interpretation despite the varied backgrounds and professions of the onlookers. Rezia Smith, the young immigrant wife, wonders, "Was it the Queen in there--the Queen going shopping?" and, Edgar J. Watkiss "said audibly, humorously of course: 'The Proime Minister's kyar'" (20-21). Clarissa Dalloway herself concludes, "It is probably the Queen" (23). When the chauffeur shows a card to the policeman, Mrs. Dalloway admits uncertainty by acknowledging that the card could be "inscribed with a name,--the Queen's, the Prince of Wales's, the Prime Minister's?" (24-25). This apparent uncertainty exists within reassuring boundaries, however, as Clarissa lists very specific and limited options for the car's occupants--members of the British ruling elite. Rezia Smith, a milliner, Edgar J. Watkiss, a

laborer, and Clarissa Dalloway, a wealthy housewife, all conclude that the occupant must be some member of the ruling class. In Foucault's terms, they interpret within acceptable guidelines. An object requires interpretation--a luxurious car with shaded windows to which even the policeman gives deference. No one suggests that such a car could contain a charwoman or even a wealthy underworld figure. These possibilities cannot exist "in the true" and are never considered as solutions to the interpretive dilemma the car presents. No, it must carry a personage of wealth, closely affiliated with power and the law as indicated by the policeman's salute. The incident ends without establishing any definitive interpretation. Woolf never indicates who actually occupies the car, suggesting that truth often has very little to do with fact or reality and much more to do with the discourse restrictions on what can and cannot be true.

The sky-writing incident provides another occasion to observe individual interpretations. As with the car, interpretations of the sky-writing develop within predictable limits. The observers immediately assign the writing a generic classification. They know to interpret the sky-writing as an advertisement and begin suggesting trade names, "Glaxo" or "Kreemo." In addition, the assumption underlying these interpretive suggestions is that the words will undoubtedly offer meaning. When the sky-writing begins, Woolf writes, "Everyone looked up" (29).

This simple statement emphasizes the human desire to interpret, categorize, and assign meaning. Such responses confirm Foucault's assessment of the overwhelming human compulsion to establish meaning. Both the car and sky-writing incidents set the tone for Woolf's exploration of the interpretive process throughout the novel. The similarity of interpretation in the two scenes points to the usefulness of Foucault's writings to a study of Mrs. Dalloway.

These early scenes present readings that loosely approximate an interpretive norm. There is little conflict over differing readings because each individual offers interpretations that fit societal expectations. The treatment of Septimus Smith moves Woolf's examination of interpretation to a level where more is at stake than idle speculation about cars and sky-writing. Traumatized by his own loss of feeling during World War I, Septimus appears unable to interpret within the "normal" limits of societal discourse. He unwittingly rejects society's discourse of power and knowledge. In its place, Septimus adopts a discourse of knowledge rooted in the visionary. Septimus's keen sensitivity to the natural world renders him tragically dysfunctional in terms of societal norms. However, the veteran, consumed by his loss of feeling, finds in nature the only connection he can make with a fragmented and violent world. While others around him puzzle over the

problem of interpreting the sky writing, Septimus examines a different text--nature, the trees, the birds:

The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches.

Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. (33)

Septimus's thoughts rather efficiently dispel traditional models of knowing. Generally, interpretive energies concentrate on substance, not emptiness; a passing car, sky-writing, or the music of the birds merit interpretation, not necessarily the silence between the songs. Septimus reverses such tendencies. For him, the pauses between the bird's songs are as meaningful and significant as the music itself. As Foucault indicates, in Western ideology, humans may interpret within a specific discourse as long as they adhere to a number of limitations--language, grammar, reason, material reality. Septimus to some degree disregards these boundaries and attempts to find meaning in other alternatives. Even Septimus, however, utilizes traditional elements of the interpretive process. While he elevates the visionary, he does so by employing tactics of the rational world. He notes that the sparrows are part of a "pattern," just as the observers in the earlier scenes find a pattern--a narrow list of possible car occupants or a genre for the sky-writing. Similarly, the sounds Septimus

hears do not form dissonances, but harmonies which are examples of musical patterns. Thus, although Septimus operates outside the discourse of power and knowledge, he unconsciously continues to utilize elements of the discourse.

Woolf's highly ironic account of Septimus before the war gives the reader a clearer sense of his change after the war. As a young, self-instructed intellectual, he exhibits a tendency toward romantic idealism, even likening himself to Keats (128). Seeking access to the circle of the intellectual elite, Septimus reads Darwin and Shakespeare, acquiring the language and knowledge necessary to belong. Consequently, Woolf writes that when 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 plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (130). Woolf's irony highlights the naiveté characterizing Septimus as well as many other volunteer soldiers. Septimus returns without his idealism, emotionally maimed, and unable to "feel."

Like many shell-shock victims, Septimus, frightened by his own loss of sympathy with other humans, leaves the war disillusioned with the old values. His case provides an example of how a loss of communal values leads to insanity, unhappiness, and isolation. A victim of the horrors of modern war, Septimus has lost his ability to accept the way most people see and understand things.

Despite conflicting impulses, Septimus operates primarily outside the established rules for understanding the world. An ordered discourse limits both the way things are said and what can be said. Septimus disregards both prohibitions. While sitting on a park bench, he muses, "Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down)" (35). While each declaration on its own is logical, it is the lack of transition which renders the progression itself illogical. Septimus does not order his thoughts logically or rationally, and the simple imperative, "Change the world," could clearly threaten social norms if Septimus ever joined his words with actions. Septimus continues to repudiate the socially valuated oppositions upon which Foucault suggests an ordered society is based, love/hate and good/evil:

The supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first that trees are alive; next there is no crime; next love, universal love, he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them for ever.

(102)

Notably, even Septimus cannot resist the desire to make his insights an accepted "truth" by declaring them to the

Cabinet. However, because his words do not conform to the order of discourse dictating what can be "in the true," they cannot possibly be regarded as truth. The principle of "universal love" is belied by the fervor of war and the statement that there is "no crime" would seem equally untenable.

Regardless, Septimus experiences the powerful need to record personal truth through writing. While thinking, Septimus fumbles for a card and pencil. Later, of course, Dr. Bradshaw will have a card at hand to record information about Septimus's symptoms. The repetition of the card encourages the reader to compare Septimus's use of writing with that of Dr. Bradshaw's. While Bradshaw notes symptoms in order to categorize and confine the mental instability of Septimus, Septimus uses language in a less systematic fashion.

Septimus strikes at what Foucault identifies as the heart of the discourse of power--the will to truth (1156). Septimus muses, "It might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (133). Septimus denies that interpretation can have any real purpose since the goal of the interpretive process and the discourse governing its operation is to find meaning. The physicians Holmes and Bradshaw who both classify and explain do assume the existence of meaning. Septimus, on the other hand, questions one of the assumptions underlying the establishment of any social structure. By questioning

meaning, he challenges society's system of ordering, prerogative for power, and reason for being. Indeed, it is through interpretations that characters in the novel frequently justify themselves; thus Septimus's comment undermines both collective meaning and individual significance. When confronted with such talk, the powerful elite have two choices: Holmes's to refuse to take such ravings seriously, or Bradshaw's to label the speaker insane and exclude him from contact with society.

With the introduction of the two doctors, Woolf makes the dangers of interpretive force clear, and at the same time illustrates the necessity of interpretation to existence. Some critics argue that Woolf's characterization of the novel's physicians originates in her own unhappy experience with psychiatric treatment. Sue Thomas notes that critics read "Woolf's treatment of Septimus Smith's mental illness as a reflection of her anger at the rest cures prescribed for her during her own mental breakdowns in 1913 and 1915" (49). As a result, the two characters, Holmes and Bradshaw, suffer from the sharpness of Woolf's ironic pen. In Drs. Holmes and Bradshaw, Woolf creates caricatures of the bumbling general practitioner and the social-climbing, highly trained specialist. However, Woolf's portrayals of the doctors are more than simple ironic sketches. Woolf makes quite clear their partial responsibility for Septimus Smith's death. They are, at the very least, agents for the system which destroys Septimus.



Not born to the ruling elite, Sir William Bradshaw uses knowledge to earn him power and society's approbation. With the approval of society, Dr. Bradshaw controls those elements which threaten social norms. Woolf articulates the origin of Bradshaw's power:

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. (150)

As Foucault notes, the preservation of communal institutions demands the exclusion of the mad, a job Bradshaw performs with the blessing of the ruling class. His labors have, in fact, earned him a title. In her assessment of the politics of Woolf's novel, Pamela Transue elaborates this perspective on Bradshaw: "By labelling all dissenting voices as sick, he consolidates his vision in society" (97). While she articulates well the nature of Bradshaw's work, Transue's appraisal does not hold society accountable in the way Woolf clearly does. Bradshaw epitomizes society's "vision," not simply his own. In addition, Bradshaw himself combines several conflicting discourses to power. While he has won society's approval through his professional service, he yearns for acceptance by the social elite. His social-climbing tactics make him the butt of Woolf's irony and only a marginally welcome guest at Clarissa's party.

Nevertheless, Bradshaw's interaction with the Smiths aligns him with the power of the ruling elite. A well-appointed motor car idles outside his office when Rezia and Septimus Smith first arrive. This detail should remind readers of the earlier scene in which the mysterious motor car with "dove-gray upholstery" prompts numerous interpretations from bystanders (19). The car operates as a symbol tying Bradshaw explicitly to the power of the ruling class. Woolf's repetition of the grey car invites readers to compare the earlier scene with what takes place in Dr. Bradshaw's office. While the bystanders supply interpretations which fit a pattern of "normal" readings, Septimus Smith cannot do this because of his progressive mental breakdown and, more importantly, his failure to share the basic assumptions governing the interpretations of the bystanders. For example, he does not necessarily assume that skywriting must have a meaning. Therefore, Dr. Bradshaw must help Smith conform to social norms.

Bradshaw displays his professional efficiency only two or three minutes into the interview when he determines categorically: "It was a case of complete breakdown-- complete physical and nervous breakdown, with every symptom in an advanced stage, he ascertained . . . (writing answers to questions, murmured discreetly, on a pink card)" (144). Justifying society's trust in him, Bradshaw tags Septimus as "a case of complete breakdown" and takes the first step in returning Septimus to the interpretive norms maintained by

society. Bradshaw's move corresponds to what Foucault identifies as the opposition of reason and madness, one of the mechanisms operating to maintain social order.

Certainly, Bradshaw acts in accordance with the demands of his profession. However, his treatment of Septimus points to the limitations of the medical profession. While the doctor must diagnose the patient in order to suggest a cure, there is a danger in the inaccuracy and misattribution of labels. Woolf highlights a problem inherent in discourse systems like the medical profession--in order to effect cures, medical knowledge must be accepted as "truth," yet, often, this truth is only partial at best.

Bradshaw continues to question Septimus, "You served with great distinction in the War?" (145). Instead of answering the question, Septimus repeats "the word 'war' interrogatively" (145). At this, Bradshaw concludes, "He [Septimus] was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom, to be noted on the card" (145). Although Septimus is perfectly logical in repeating a question, Bradshaw notes this as a "serious symptom." Dr. Bradshaw's assessment leads to several questions: Why is attaching symbolical meanings a symptom of madness? Why does Dr. Bradshaw term this a "serious symptom"? Septimus's interrogative repetition of the word "war" could suggest that meaning may very well be limitless and wholly relative. If this is the case, then Septimus's symbolic meaning

violates what Foucault notes as the unconscious need for established meaning, order, and limitations on truth.

To fulfill society's mandate to regulate such a threat, Bradshaw must classify, interpret, and "read" Septimus. He must force Septimus to accept, either by default or volition, the interpretation society demands for its perpetuation. Sir William tells Rezia, "He [Septimus] had threatened to kill himself. There was no alternative. It was a question of law" (146). By invoking the "law," Bradshaw reveals the mechanism operating beneath the veneer of psychiatric expertise and solicitude for the well-being of his client. In effect, Septimus has violated society's code, broken the law, and must be punished. It is Bradshaw's duty to enforce the "cure" which in Foucault's terms consists of exclusion from society.

Bradshaw's reading, although clothed in the robes of professional prerogative and societal duty, grows out of personal prejudices as surely as does Septimus's symbolical understanding of the word "war." Bradshaw resents Septimus as a threat to society, but more importantly, as an affront to his own system of values:

The fellow made a distasteful impression. For there was in Sir William, whose father had been a tradesman, a natural respect for breeding and clothing, which shabbiness nettled; again, more profoundly, there was in Sir William, who had never had time for reading, a grudge, deeply

buried, against cultivated people who came into his room and intimated that doctors, whose profession is a constant strain upon all the highest faculties, are not educated men. (147)

Bradshaw's personal insecurities fuel his inclination to isolate Septimus and urge him to use the power of his knowledge to show this troubled intellectual who really is in control. Thus, Septimus is forced into a rest cure which may or may not help him. As Dr. Bradshaw concludes, "One of my homes, Mr. Warren Smith . . . will teach you to rest" (147) [emphasis mine]. Bradshaw seeks refuge in communal knowledge and discourse in order to force his own interpretation and vent his own insecurities. His personal interpretations have become, in part, indistinguishable from dominant social ones, thus ensuring his position. Ultimately, Bradshaw is merely an agent of the larger social forces he serves. He bears responsibility as a member of a profession in which the abuse of often limited and incomplete knowledge can be devastating.

Bradshaw's ability to conform to communal interpretive structures characterizes his passion for order. Through a single symbol, Woolf aptly presents Bradshaw as the quintessential orderer of discourse. Throughout the novel, several objects take on symbolic value as signs: Peter Walsh's knife, Richard Dalloway's roses, and Dr. Bradshaw's pink card. Each character's reaction to these signs reflects their epistemology. Bradshaw's pink card becomes a

fitting objective correlative for the move to ward off the danger of the unfathomable by classifying, naming, and confining it. While the card may be a benign pink, it signifies Bradshaw's limited epistemological notions. For Bradshaw, it is inconceivable that individual meaning could be any different from collective meaning--they should be as inseparable as two sides of a piece of paper, of a pink filing card. Bradshaw assumes that what he writes on the card is "truth" based on scientific, rational knowledge. He does not recognize that the words simply gain power as "truth" because they conform to the discourse. Thus, Dr. Bradshaw wielding the power accorded him by society and merited by his professional knowledge, systematically treats by exclusion those who defy traditional norms of interpretation.

Perhaps because he lacks specific psychiatric knowledge, Dr. Holmes is a more damaging interpretive figure than Dr. Bradshaw. Holmes misinterprets by denying the existence of an illness. Lacking a more sophisticated discourse for interpretation, Dr. Holmes places Septimus's disconcerting behavior in a personal context: Septimus is simply "in a funk," a malady that even plagues the doctor himself--easily cured by a round of golf or an outing to the symphony (139). By comparing Septimus's illness to his own needs for a holiday, Holmes ignores the severity of Septimus's illness and imposes his own meaning on the young man. Holmes's interpretation lacks the power of Bradshaw's

psychiatric discourse because it does not draw upon the strength of complex medical terminology. The phrase, "in a funk," cannot compare with "a case of complete breakdown." "In a funk" does not suggest the power of medical authority, whereas "a case of complete breakdown" bears the weight of an institution. Holmes employs questionable, if less imposing, language to control and safely categorize Septimus's malady. He persists in minimizing its significance: "Dr. Holmes came again. Large, fresh coloured, handsome, flicking his boots, looking in the glass, he brushed it all aside--headaches, sleeplessness, fears, dreams--nerve symptoms and nothing more" (138). At this point, Holmes could appear a benign but ignorant fool. However, in his ignorance, Holmes proves a far more forceful and dangerous healer.

Woolf emphasizes this by replicating Holmes's disregard for Septimus's symptoms in the doctor's physical brusqueness: Holmes physically forces or brushes aside Rezia Smith on two different occasions. The first instance in which Holmes's gestures mimic his professional stance occurs during a house call. Rezia informs him that Septimus will not see him. Dr. Holmes, "smiling agreeably," ignores such wishes: "Really he had to give that charming little lady, Mrs. Smith, a friendly push before he could get past her into her husband's bedroom" (138). Holmes invades the Smith's home on a medical prerogative. In place of the specialized knowledge which authorizes Bradshaw, Holmes

invokes another form of knowledge and power--professional experience. As a physician with "forty years' experience," Holmes expects cooperation from the couple who, after all, have gone to him for help. Although unwilling to admit that Septimus is in anything more than a funk, Holmes does at times read Septimus's illness as a serious breach of traditional "English" values. In condescending tones, Holmes stresses the importance of societal norms:

He [Septimus] had actually talked of killing himself to his wife, quite a girl, a foreigner, wasn't she? Didn't that give her a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn't one owe perhaps a duty to one's wife? Wouldn't it be better to do something instead of lying in bed? (139)

Woolf ironizes the bumbling general practitioner. However, this scene is not simply a comic tableau of the doctor's ineptness, for it is one in a series of interviews which ultimately lead to Septimus's suicide. Through questions he clearly deems rhetorical, Holmes urges Septimus to adopt collective meaning and habits. Without the sophistication of a Dr. Bradshaw, Holmes essentially accuses Septimus of violating the rules of discourse by failing to conform to behavioral norms.

By violating behavioral norms, Septimus has apparently relinquished any personal liberties. Dr. Holmes's second physical forcing emphasizes this. Just before Septimus dies, Rezia bars Holmes's way, "No. I will not allow you to



see my husband." Woolf then leads the reader into the doctor's perspective: "He could see her, like a little hen, with her wings spread barring his passage. But Holmes persevered. 'My dear lady, allow me . . .' Holmes said, putting her aside (Holmes was a powerfully built man)" (225). Thus, Holmes acts in a violent, abusive, and threatening way, disregarding the wishes of his patient. He insists upon bullying them into accepting his interpretation of Smith's illness, thus precipitating Septimus's reluctant suicide. Through Holmes, Woolf illustrates that the possession of a little knowledge in conjunction with the authority of position can be more lethal than a great deal of knowledge.

Septimus's opposition to the doctors seems an extreme example of highly restrictive forces combatting a much less systematic participation in the society's discourse of power, knowledge, and interpretation. The themes crystallized in the Septimus Smith narrative become more multi-faceted and complex in Clarissa Dalloway's sphere of influence. The Septimus Smith narrative gains credibility as Woolf presents the themes of his narrative in the life of a middle-class, enfranchised member of society. Rather than the one-sided attack Septimus finds himself a victim of, Clarissa finds herself surrounded by people operating in a web of conflicting orders or structures for establishing meaning--Christianity, social rhetoric, social reform, and intellectualism. Various characters utilize these orders to

compose "readings" of Clarissa and force her into an acceptance of their interpretations.

Doris Kilman, one of Mrs. Dalloway's more antagonistic satellites, employs the order of Christian doctrine to produce interpretations. Although Miss Kilman is clearly less powerful than the Drs. Bradshaw and Holmes, she, too, attempts to constrain interpretations--especially those of Clarissa Dalloway--in the name of "truth." Clarissa's first description of Miss Kilman uses language which echoes the characterizations of Drs. Holmes and Bradshaw. Clarissa calls her "one of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants" (16-17). Admittedly, Clarissa's resentment of Miss Kilman's friendship with her daughter Elizabeth colors her characterization, as does her supercilious class-consciousness exemplified by her repeated formula, "Miss Kilman in her mackintosh" (186). However, these qualifications do not alter the accuracy of Mrs. Dalloway's assessment. In fact, Miss Kilman verifies such a reading on a number of occasions. For example, while taking tea with Elizabeth, she reflects, "If she could grasp her [Elizabeth], if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted" (199-200). Doris Kilman's desire to possess corresponds to the controlling maneuvers of both Drs. Holmes and Bradshaw. While Holmes and Bradshaw act to serve the public good, Doris Kilman's motivation is intensely

personal-- sexual desire disguised as religious or educational motivation. Nonetheless, Kilman's impulse to control replicates the misguided force behind the doctors' attempts to treat Septimus. However, there is a marked difference between the power these two men exercise and that which Kilman aspires to and believes she possesses.

Kilman's power is essentially illusory, simply a construct of words, while the power of the doctors is tangible and sanctioned by society. Herein, according to Foucault, lies the irony of power (1156). Humans covet the promise of power, but do not recognize that it is nothing more than a construct of language, a discourse to which only certain members of society will ever be allowed access. Power only results from the ability to possess and use the discourse. While the doctors' power is also a construct of language, their words are invested with a power that Doris Kilman can never possess. Kilman, as a middle-aged, unmarried woman who sympathized with Germany during the World War, violates traditional social norms. She has, in fact, been excluded by society as a result of her war time sympathies: "It was true that the family was of German origin; spelt the name Kiehlman in the eighteenth century; but her brother had been killed. They turned her out because she would not pretend that the Germans were all villains" (187). Because she refused to accept an interpretation predominant during the war against Germany, Kilman was banished. Ironically, however, Kilman, blinded by the lure of power, employs the

very methods whose force and language marginalized her in the first place.

Because Kilman feels her social insignificance, she attempts to gain leverage by the use of exclusive and excluding knowledge. Several times, Miss Kilman reminds herself that "Her knowledge of modern history was more than respectable" (200). No longer able to use that knowledge as a means to socially sanctioned respectability and authority, Miss Kilman must adopt a new method to gain precedence. She manipulates the doctrines of Christianity to produce a reading of Clarissa which suits her own predisposition to resent the wealthy housewife. Kilman is able to pity Clarissa by assigning her a place in a far more imposing interpretive structure, one whose transcendent claims outshine the superficial hierarchies of the Dalloway world. Christian doctrine embraces all members of society, teaches that it is more difficult for the rich to reach the kingdom of God, and offers as its icon a penniless carpenter. Thus, Christianity is readily accessible and appealing to the disenfranchised Kilman and, through it, she disguises her personal interpretation of Clarissa Dalloway in the communal rhetoric of doctrine.

The precepts of Christianity give Miss Kilman the power to pity the wealthy. She recalls the shift in her interpretive structure: "Then Our Lord had come to her (and here she always bowed her head). She had seen the light two years and three months ago. Now she did not envy women like

Clarissa Dalloway; she pitied them" (187-188). Regardless of its illusory nature, such power satisfies Kilman's penchant for domination: "So now, whenever the hot and painful feelings boiled within her, this hatred of Mrs. Dalloway, this grudge against the world, she thought of God" (188). Ironically, it is precisely this power to pity that might have characterized Clarissa's general reaction to Miss Kilman before she came to detest the woman's influence on Elizabeth. Thus, through religious discourse Miss Kilman attempts a reversal of the power relationship between herself and her employer. If she cannot possess the social stature of a Mrs. Dalloway, she can achieve satisfaction in supposed moral superiority by adopting the language of Christianity. Foucault notes that religious doctrines establish a unit of people defined by their common beliefs (1162). Kilman's adherence to Christian doctrine insures that she is now at the center of a social discourse from which Clarissa is excluded.

Much as Drs. Bradshaw and Holmes manipulate their professional knowledge to suit personal prejudices, so Miss Kilman tempers her desire for domination with the rhetoric of Christianity:

And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her [Clarissa]; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her

mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! But this was God's will, not Miss Kilman's. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered. (189)

Miss Kilman describes here an ecstatic conversion in which she acts as priest to the weeping, penitent Clarissa Dalloway. The fact that this is more than a "religious victory" is quite clear. Like Drs. Holmes and Bradshaw, Miss Kilman actually seeks to force her interpretation; Clarissa must validate the Kilman reading of her wasteful life by crying, "You are right!" Of course, because Kilman has no real power in social currency, she is incapable of the type of damage Holmes and Bradshaw wreck. Elizabeth easily escapes her grasp after their outing to the Shops. Thus, Kilman simply becomes an example of a marginalized figure who adopts the very moves that rendered her powerless in the first place. Kilman illustrates that even the marginalized individual who has been brutalized by the discourse can regard its promise of power as compensation for its accompanying evils.

Doris Kilman bases her illusory sense of power on the transcendent scheme of Christianity; in contrast, Hugh Whitbread grounds his power in the less ideologically centered, but no less forceful, order of social rhetoric. Hugh's rhetorical abilities have earned him a position of influence in the most visible structure of societal

authority, the court. Despite the fact that friends mock him for "his little job at court," Hugh exercises a great deal of power through the manipulation of language (7). In Foucault's terms, Hugh creates "truth" by conforming ideas to the established interpretive guidelines. It is this ability which makes him serviceable to Lady Bruton: "Hugh . . . thus marvellously reduced Lady Bruton's tangles to sense, to grammar such as the editor of the Times, Lady Bruton felt, watching the marvellous transformation, must respect" (166). By transforming Lady Bruton's notions into words which the Times editor "must respect," Hugh produces "truth" which conforms to the limits of the discourse. Lady Bruton feels that if Hugh writes for her, she will be "sure of being somehow right" (166). Although Hugh's efforts seem no more than a sycophantic attempt to satisfy the demands of a social superior, they do exercise a great deal of interpretive force. Hugh converts to reason Lady Bruton's absurd notion that she can sway scores of young people to emigrate to Canada and thus alleviate the population problems resulting from World War I. Lady Bruton and Hugh Whitbread participate in an activity which normalizes the disturbing results of the war and provides simple solutions to the unsettling problems that the dysfunctional Septimus Smith embodies.

Richard Dalloway also attends this luncheon at Lady Bruton's. Unlike Hugh, Richard observes the letter-writing ritual, but does not actively participate. Richard holds a

prominent and recognizable position of political power; yet, he seems much less eager to impose his interpretations on others and respects individual meaning. He readily pronounces Hugh Whitbread's rhetoric "all stuffing and bunkum, but no harm in it" (167). However, such a dismissal highlights Richard's own blindness to the dangers inherent in any effort to influence others.

In fact, Richard represents yet another constraining order, that of social reform. The reformer, like a Dr. Holmes or Bradshaw, operates under the mandate of society to correct trouble-spots--the displaced, the homeless, the jobless. The reformer attempts to provide acceptable solutions to problems which reveal society's inadequacies. While walking through London, Richard notices several such problems: children crossing the street unattended, prostitutes and female vagrants (175). Richard reflects concerning prostitutes in particular: "The fault wasn't in them, nor in young men either, but in our detestable social system and so forth" (175). Richard's comment appears a clear denunciation of the system, not the participants. However, the rather flippant tone of "and so forth" lessens the force of his declaration.

The encounter with the female vagrant highlights Richard's more passive stance. At sight of the woman, Richard wonders "what could be done for female vagrants" (176). Despite his apparent concern, he does not ask the woman for an answer: "Intent he passed her; still there was



time for a spark between them--she laughed at the sight of him, he smiled good-humouredly, considering the problem of the female vagrant; not that they would ever speak" (176). Richard does not engage the woman in conversation. She remains the object of idle inquiry. Ironically, Richard, the social reformer, does not attempt to transgress the social structure which dictates that a man of his class would not speak with a street woman. In terms of his duties as social reformer, Richard primarily functions to maintain appearances within the social structure. Seen in this light, he seems uncomfortably close to the doctors who sweep problems under the rug or out the window. Nonetheless, the gentle humor of this scene marks Richard as a less threatening guardian of the social order. A parity exists between Richard and the vagrant which is absent in the relationship between the doctors and Septimus; the vagrant laughs at the sight of Richard bearing flowers, while he smiles "good-humouredly."

Richard's interpretive moves on the personal level deserve examination. Like the other characters, Richard develops interpretations to accommodate the unknown or threatening which confronts him. During her luncheon, Lady Bruton mentions Peter Walsh's return to England. This reappearance of his rival sparks in Richard a case of male jealousy. Richard counters this uncertainty by reminding himself that Clarissa chose him: "But she had often said to him that she had been right not to marry Peter Walsh; which,

knowing Clarissa, was obviously true; she wanted support. Not that she was weak; but she wanted support" (177 emphasis added). Here Richard finds it necessary to develop a reading of Clarissa that will assuage his own feelings of insecurity. He reasons that Clarissa chose him because he offered a support she needed, a support which Peter Walsh could not provide. Richard justifies his own existence by such a reading of his wife. However, the reader will remember that Clarissa chose Richard not only because she needed support, but also because Peter demanded to share, to know too much. The ironic insertion of "knowing Clarissa" strikes a discordant note with the information which follows it. By stating that Clarissa married him because he could offer support, Richard unwittingly reveals precisely how little he knows about his wife. Despite his mistake, Richard's interpretive self-validation does comparatively little harm. Woolf does not portray Richard forcing such a reading onto Clarissa.

Regardless of Richard's very human, if slightly misguided interpretation, the interpretive gestures of his private life seem less troublesome than those of other figures in the novel. Clarissa notes the importance of individual privacy in her marriage:

And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him [Richard] open the door; for one would not part with it

oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect--something, after all, priceless.

(181)

Despite the fact that Richard has been planning to return home after his luncheon in order to say "I love you" to Clarissa, he does not do so. He recognizes the invasion a declaration of love would be and simply gives Clarissa the flowers: "But he could not bring himself to say he loved her; not in so many words" (179). Such a declaration gives the speaker leverage in the relationship as it forces the partner into a reciprocal gesture, obliquely pushing them into a statement which dovetails with the phrase, "I love you." Although Richard does not speak, he communicates with Clarissa, "But how lovely, she said, taking his flowers. She understood; she understood without his speaking; his Clarissa" (179). Richard, perhaps rendered understandably insecure by the reappearance of his rival Peter Walsh, needs the affirmation of hearing, "I love you," yet he does not yield to such an impulse. In this, Richard contrasts sharply with Peter who makes his passionate feelings for Clarissa oppressively plain. Richard hesitates once more before leaving, "He must be off, he said, getting up. But he stood for a moment as if he were about to say something; and she wondered what? Why? There were the roses" (181). Clarissa emphasizes the superfluity of words at such a moment; the roses have been sufficiently eloquent. The

beauty of this moment is that neither individual has to vocalize their interpretation, but silently they share a very similar reading of the incident--a moment of interpretive mutuality.

Much as the pink card embodies Bradshaw's closed epistemology, so the roses resonate as a sign of Richard's methods for interpreting and establishing knowledge. Woolf describes Richard "grasping his red and white roses together (a vast bunch in tissue paper)" (174). Richard's roses are an unruly lot, certainly not ordered as are Bradshaw's cards. In fact, Richard must grasp them in a lighthearted gesture to prevent losing them. If the roses become a sign of knowledge or interpretation, then we see that Richard only confines out of necessity and does not do so in a very systematic fashion. In fact, only a thin layer of tissue confines them, not the hard card of Bradshaw. Richard's roses also underline his contrast to Peter Walsh. As he walks past the female vagrant, Richard bears "his flowers like a weapon" (176). This simile should remind readers of Peter Walsh who carries a weapon throughout the novel, his knife. The comparison presents Richard as an even friendlier interpretive agent, one whose weapon is nothing more than a bouquet of flowers meant to say "I love you," flowers which could easily have another meaning.

This more positive reading of Richard, however, is undercut slightly by an incident which shows him capable of imposing an interpretation on Clarissa. Clarissa reflects

that both Richard and Peter "criticised her very unfairly, laughed at her very unjustly, for her parties" (183). Typically, Richard's interpretation stems from his humanitarian agenda: "Richard merely thought it foolish of her to like excitement when she knew it was bad for her heart" (183). Clarissa easily defends herself against such criticism: "And both were quite wrong. What she liked was simply life" (183). Again, Richard's reading does not harm his wife; however, the significance of this incident lies in the comparison of Richard and Peter. Clarissa pairs the two figures, suggesting some similarity between Richard and Peter who, as is shown below, is a more threatening interpreter.

Woolf's opposition of Peter and Richard highlights their differing interpretive strategies. Clarissa notes that her relationship with Peter was one of words. They argued frequently and Peter often pointed out "the defects of her own soul" (9). Clarissa muses, "How he scolded her! How they argued" (9). When Peter returns to London, he abuses the privilege of friendship by making his distaste for Clarissa's life very apparent. Like Doris Kilman, Peter finds himself an outsider and turns for support to a type of intellectual superiority vaguely based on youthful socialist leanings. Peter attempts to reverse the power relationship--placing the wealthier and more influential Clarissa in a lower position--by appealing to intellectual superiority. Woolf tempers her portrayal of Peter, however, with the

somewhat comic phallic symbol of the knife. Peter manifests a need for personal authority by fidgeting with his rather pathetic recourse to power, his knife: "And he took out his knife quite openly--his old horn-handled knife" (65).

Peter's apparently impotent knife allows for a contrast between himself and the more efficiently violent Dr. Holmes. Both Holmes and Peter make notable entries into two different homes. Holmes forces his way up the stairs into the Smith's home, and Peter rushes past the maid and up the stairs to Clarissa. Peter arrives at Mrs. Dalloway's home: "'Mrs. Dalloway will see me . . . . Oh yes, she will see me,' he repeated, putting Lucy aside very benevolently, and running upstairs ever so quickly" (59). The contrast in responses to the two entries reveals a significant difference between Peter and Dr. Holmes. Holmes's violence results in Septimus's suicide, while Peter causes only a minor shuffle as he violates Clarissa's privacy. Clarissa's actions emphasize that Peter does make an invasion of sorts: "She made to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy" (59). When compared to Dr. Holmes, Peter seems a failed attempt to approximate masculine authority. Woolf pokes fun at Peter who through his knife and intrusive nature makes a show of employing tactics which truly do not serve him.

In addition to his failed attempts to employ more forceful tactics, Peter relies on a sense of intellectual superiority. Like the other characters, Peter is pushed

into an interpretation by personal insecurities. While Peter visits with Clarissa, his surroundings make him feel his own failure: "Oh yes, he had no doubt about that; he was a failure, compared with all this--the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks, the chair-covers and the old valuable English tinted prints" (64). However, this sense of failure changes to disdain, much as Miss Kilman's sense of powerlessness transforms into pity. Peter thinks, "I detest the smugness of the whole affair" (65). Peter, a socialist in his youth, calls upon his intellectual disdain to shore up his distaste for the upper classes whose security he envies. Like Kilman, Peter is the outsider. He intends to ask Richard Dalloway to help him find a new post and requires an alternative system of interpretation to reverse his own position of relative powerlessness. However, unlike Kilman, Peter has enduring ties to Clarissa and avoids the forceful insistence necessary to impose his interpretation of Clarissa on his old friend. Thus, he does not utilize his sense of intellectual superiority to denounce Clarissa entirely. Nonetheless, the insecure Peter uses language very similar to Doris Kilman's: "I know what I'm up against, he thought, running his finger along the blade of his knife, Clarissa and Dalloway and all the rest of them; but I'll show Clarissa" (69). He wants to "show Clarissa," much as Kilman wants "to overcome her; to unmask her" (189). Kilman wishes to make Clarissa cry; however, in this scene Peter is the

one who cries, ironically linking Peter more closely to traditionally female traits rather than the masculine knife he clings to. Although he yearns to force his meaning and validate himself in the eyes of the Dalloway set, he is incapable of such a move.

Although Peter's social status is outside the ruling class, his personal epistemology reflects, to a certain extent, the eighteenth-century rationalism supporting such Western power structures. In fact, Clarissa acknowledges that for Peter knowing was simply a matter of studying and reading. Clarissa muses:

Take Peter Walsh now. There was a man, charming, clever, with ideas about everything. If you wanted to know about Pope, say, or Addison, or just to talk nonsense, what people were like, what things meant, Peter knew better than any one. It was Peter who had helped her; Peter who had lent her books. (192)

Thus, although Peter has landed outside the realm of the powerful elite, he, like Kilman, embraces the underpinnings of the system which banished him, perhaps seeing in logic and reason a structure whose methods inspire belief by their systematized nature. Ironically, Peter frequently knows very little about "what people were like," or "what things meant." In fact, as is seen below, he even misapprehends his old and intimate friend Clarissa. Peter's intellectual superiority seems something of a fraud; he is able to fool



Clarissa by his "learning," yet he lacks a genuine understanding of people.

The limitations of Peter's rationalism and intellectualism are revealed in his persistent misunderstanding of human beings, specifically Clarissa. For example, after noting the elegant surroundings of Clarissa's drawing-room, Peter asserts, "Richard's doing, not Clarissa's; save that she married him" (65). While the objects themselves and the money that supplied them are Richard's "doing," the decor of the room is a direct result of Clarissa's own preparations for the party. In fact, Clarissa reflects, "But Richard had no notion of the look of a room" (181). Peter seems unwilling to acknowledge a part of Clarissa (her social savvy) which might not correspond to his own interpretation of her. Regarding Peter, Clarissa notes "his lack of the ghost of a notion what any one else was feeling" (69). However, in the very next line, we read: "I know all that, Peter thought; I know what I'm up against, he thought, running his finger along the blade of his knife" (69). The repetition of the verb "know" highlights Peter's own lack of self-knowledge, the fact that he knows very little about human relationships and finds validation for his misapprehension in his knife.

Significantly, Peter misunderstands Clarissa herself. Peter believes she gives her parties because she enjoys imposing herself; but Clarissa disagrees, declaring Peter wrong and adding, "What she liked was simply life" (183).

Clarissa continues, "But could any man understand what she meant either? about life? She could not imagine Peter or Richard taking the trouble to give a party for no reason whatever" (184). She indicates her parties are an attempt to help people connect, to bring them together: "And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift" (185). Peter's dismissal of the parties as a symptom of social snobbery does not account for Clarissa's true motivation and emphasizes his limited understanding of her.

While Clarissa rather successfully deflects Richard Dalloway's moment of interpretive imposition, she finds it more difficult to dispel the force of Peter's readings. Clarissa shows a marked disregard for Richard's efforts at social reform, paying little heed to whether his committee meets to discuss the Albanians or the Armenians (182). Perhaps because she finds Peter's intellectualism more imposing, Clarissa feels his reading of her more profoundly. Clarissa has difficulty laughing off Peter's analysis of her parties and comments on how insignificant and trivial she feels in Peter's presence. Clearly, his interpretation meets its mark.

Like Dr. Bradshaw's pink card and Richard Dalloway's roses, Peter's knife functions as a sign of his epistemology. In its potential for violence, the knife marks Peter as an aggressive and threatening interpreter,

one willing to use force and yet incapable of doing so. Phyllis Rose notes that the obvious phallic implications of the knife make Peter a "vaguely menacing, aggressive" figure (142). Clarissa herself acknowledges the knife as a means of imposing interpretations: "What an extraordinary habit that was, Clarissa thought; always playing with a knife. Always making one feel, too, frivolous; empty-minded; a mere silly chatterbox, as he used" (65). While Peter partially redeems himself by failing to achieve the out-moded masculine authority of Dr. Holmes, he must be held accountable for the fact that he attempts to approximate the force of such a position. Peter's self-deceit and lack of intuition characterizes a generation of men who embrace rationalism yet remain ignorant to the mystery of existence which so fascinates Clarissa, Septimus, and Woolf herself.

Woolf emphasizes the limitations of Peter's intellectualism by contrasting his understanding with that of the less educated, yet more insightful, Clarissa. Clarissa notes, "But Peter--however beautiful the day might be, and the trees and the grass, and the little girl in pink--Peter never saw a thing of all that. He would put on his spectacles, if she told him to; he would look" (9). Clarissa must point to things of significance, and while she indicates that Peter would put on his glasses and look, she does not affirm that he actually sees or attaches meaning to the natural world. The mystery of the natural world motivates the epistemologies of both Clarissa and Septimus

and forms an alternative to the various orders and discourses vying for their allegiance. This awareness of the mystery of existence links Clarissa and Septimus and predominates Woolf's depiction of Clarissa herself.

Within the first ten pages of the novel, Woolf establishes Mrs. Dalloway as a woman who readily accepts the limited nature of knowledge and the mystery of existence. In fact, Clarissa scoffs at any attempts to confine the essence of existence in the formulas of science, logic, and language. Her relationship with Richard upholds the barriers between individuals and guards against interpretive bullying: "For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him" (10). Clarissa preserves the integrity of individual privacy: "(Where was he [Richard] this morning for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.)" (10). Clarissa refrains from asking for information as simple as which committee Richard is attending, setting her apart from the transparently villainous doctors and the more subtly disturbing Peter Walsh. Several questions focus this examination of Clarissa: 1) As do other characters, does Clarissa develop interpretations to justify herself? 2) How does she function when confronted by the various orders surrounding her? 3) And, more importantly, what part does she play in the imposition of interpretation?

Initially, Clarissa seems to resist the need to impose interpretations on others in that she refuses to categorize individuals. She determines: "She would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (11). Her refusal to classify by using the demonstrative pronoun suggests her acceptance of limited meaning and the infinite possibilities of experience. Herbert Marder notes that this passage reveals Clarissa's "impulse to ignore rational categories, to celebrate the integrity of every living person, without regard for creeds or doctrines" (57). Clarissa's stance opposes the orders of Dr. Bradshaw's psychiatry, Doris Kilman's Christianity, Richard's humanitarianism, and Peter Walsh's rationalism. She rejects each order's basic compulsion to classify and control what Foucault terms the proliferation of meaning (1164).

Despite this renunciation of categorization, Clarissa proceeds to use demonstrative pronouns profusely, not only in relation to herself, but also in her assessment of other individuals. In fact, only a few pages after this renunciation, Clarissa laments that she cannot be like Richard who does things for himself, but that she does things "to make people think this or that" (14). The appositive, "perfect idiocy she knew," qualifies the force of such a manipulative admission. The fact remains that Clarissa admits she acts in order to force people into thinking "this or that," a move to convince others of her interpretations. However, such a move to invite certain

interpretations of herself remains worlds apart from the force the doctors use in treating Septimus. In addition, one could argue that in her "instinctive" knowledge of people--"Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct"-- Clarissa labels and diagnoses in much the same way that the physicians Holmes and Bradshaw do (11). Admittedly, Clarissa's "instinct" cannot command the power Holmes and Bradshaw wield. Instinct, as a personal form of knowledge, is also a devalued form of meaning in Woolf's society. Clarissa's instincts can only govern the small sphere of her home and her party, and that, too, is limited. While Clarissa instinctively dislikes Dr. Bradshaw, his position in society dictates that he be invited.

In entertaining Bradshaw, Clarissa finds herself virtually a slave to the dictates of the social system; however, in her treatment and classification of the lower class and dependent Kilman, Clarissa herself exercises that same class-conscious authority. Perhaps most striking, as Marder notes, is Clarissa's savage denunciation and classification of Miss Kilman as "One of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants" (16-17). Marder comments ironically, "So much for Clarissa's refusal to pin a label on 'anyone in the world.'" (59). Marder rightfully points out the inconsistency in Clarissa; yet he ignores information that partially justifies her categorization. Marder does not account for the fact that the language Clarissa uses to

describe Miss Kilman echoes that used by Woolf to discuss the tyrants Holmes and Bradshaw.

To some extent, Clarissa's treatment of Miss Kilman actually highlights her personal restraint. Like the other characters, Clarissa develops interpretations which justify her own existence in moments of psychological insecurity. Wounded by Elizabeth's departure to the stores with Miss Kilman, Clarissa unleashes an interpretive tirade:

Love and religion! . . . How detestable, how detestable they are! . . . The cruelest things in the world . . . seeing them clumsy, hot, domineering, hypocritical, eavesdropping, jealous, infinitely cruel and unscrupulous, dressed in a mackintosh coat, on the landing; love and religion. Had she ever tried to convert any one herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? (191)

This passage seems consistent with Clarissa's earlier determination to refuse the use of the demonstrative pronouns in defining individuals and interpreting character. However, only a page prior to this assertion that she has never tried to "convert" anyone, she thinks, "Miss Kilman, in a mackintosh, whom Heaven knows Clarissa would have liked to help" (190). Clarissa's help would be in its own way a form of conversion, transforming the malevolent, bitter woman by removing her mackintosh and creating a more socially acceptable, less threatening member of the

household. Miss Kilman would be coopted by the structure and thus rendered powerless, no longer a threat. Such a move seems remarkably close to methods which Drs. Holmes and Bradshaw employ to subdue Septimus Smith. However, the fact remains that Clarissa does not perform any such act throughout the novel. She does not reform Miss Kilman, and although she dislikes "poor Ellie Henderson," she does not attempt to change her and grudgingly invites her to the party.

It would seem that to a certain degree Clarissa avoids the compulsion to gain power through knowledge. During her morning walk through London, Mrs. Dalloway proudly itemizes her scant collection of traditional knowledge: "How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fraulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed" (11). Here Clarissa misapprehends herself because she has accepted others' views of her. She does, in fact, have a profound understanding of the world, a knowledge that exceeds the learning of Richard or Peter. Clarissa has had little formal or traditional education and finds existence itself an infinite source of meaning and wonder: "And yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing" (11). For Clarissa, existence defies explication by any rational system. Clarissa voices her skepticism:



Why creeds and prayers and mackintoshes? when, thought Clarissa, that's the miracle, that's the mystery; that old lady, she meant, whom she could see going from chest of drawers to dressing-table . . . . And the supreme mystery which Kilman might say she had solved, or Peter might say he had solved, but Clarissa didn't believe either of them had the ghost of an idea of solving, was simply this: here was one room; there another. (193)

Here Clarissa voices her strongest denunciation of what Foucault terms the will to truth. Herein lies her closest kinship with Septimus Smith. Just as Septimus conjectures that there may be no meaning at all, so Clarissa, in a less daring move, suggests that the order of reason does not possess the power to comprehend the mystery of existence. This similarity also contains the essence of the difference between the two characters. Septimus denies the very possibility of meaning while Clarissa simply asserts reason's inability to articulate absolute meaning.

Unlike Septimus, Clarissa will never be a great threat to the social structure. Clarissa has married into the ruling class of male authority from which she gains her own social status. She is surrounded by individuals perpetuating various discursive orders. Thus, her more revolutionary leanings are controlled. Perhaps then, it is the safety of the ruling class which saves her from Septimus's fate. Woolf suggests, however, that Clarissa

survives not simply because she is a socially advantaged individual. Rather, perhaps, Clarissa persists where Septimus dies because she allows the possibility of meaning, but at the same time opens the door for an alternative to the socially established system of rationality. In opposition to a system whose goal is the acquisition of power, Clarissa offers meaning through connection with other humans. Clarissa acknowledges her experience of such a connection:

Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter--even trees, or barns. It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that. (232)

Clarissa hopes that somehow the human spirit survives the grappling and gritty life of the conscious world because of these unseen connections. Significantly, the quotation ends with her use of the demonstrative pronouns, pronouns used earlier as means to classify and limit individuals, meaning and interpretation. She no longer uses these words to classify, but merely to indicate the limitless possibilities

for human connection. Through the use of the stream-of-conscious style, Woolf links the minds of her characters as they reflect upon objects suggesting that language does not have to be used exclusively as a means for manipulating knowledge, interpretations, people, or power; it can provide for connection, no matter how minimal, between human beings.

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