

**“It is at the ghosts within us that we shudder”:  
Voicing the Anxieties of  
Liminality in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway***

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**Abstract**

The trauma of war is a theme that begins to recur in early twentieth-century literature; Virginia Woolf’s canonical text *Mrs Dalloway* offers a configuration of the haunting memories of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> This is depicted in her male character Septimus Warren Smith, a war veteran who returns to live in constant terror and guilt, as the disturbing memory of the past becomes a form of a ghostly revenant that inhabits his psyche. Septimus is thereby constantly visited by past memories which constitute an ‘abject’ that confuses the boundaries of the self and which consequently lead him to commit suicide. His haunted self becomes apparent through the ghostly conversation with his dead friend Evans whom he lost during the war. Combatants live in a state between life and death at the front line; this state becomes symbolic of the psychological struggle they experience upon their return, when attempting to readjust and fit in to post-war society. This article focuses on the way Septimus returns to live as a ghost of his former self occupying a space of ambiguity and terror. In addition, I will draw attention, through the female character of Rezia Warren Smith, to the way the changed state of masculinity affects the women around them. Rezia’s character shows that women share a similar experience to that of their men, as they are also haunted by the past and come to inhabit the same liminal space, between life and death. That is to say, the psychological impact of male trauma upon women draws out their vulnerability, which, as modern women, they tried to keep buried. Such vulnerability comes in the shape of the ‘Angel in the House’ with her politics of domesticity and entrapment. To support this argument, I will be using Julia Kristeva’s theory of ‘Abjection’, for it helps our understanding of the complex position of women in post-war Britain.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This work (London: Penguin Classics, 2000) will be cited throughout the article as ‘*Dalloway*’. Other works by Woolf will be cited in the usual way.

<sup>2</sup> This article is based on a paper presented by the author at *Time to Remember: Anniversaries, Celebration and Commemoration*, Skepsi’s tenth annual conference held at the University of Kent, 26th May 2017.

**Keywords:** First World War trauma, haunting memories, the return of the past, liminal spaces, women's trauma, Abjection, Angel in the House.



Modernism was marked by a series of cultural shocks; the greatest of all was the First World War that left indelible marks in the memories of veterans and their families. Psychotic fragmentation, disillusionment and uncertainty became the defining tenets of Modernism. Soldiers' experiences at the Front usually rendered them psychologically disturbed. The horrors of the war unravelled a different reality, that of fear, distress, and vulnerability, which obscured their vision of the future. Peter Childs points out that in literary Modernism:

[T]here wasn't a unitary normative self to which each of us might conform, and many Modernists were sufficiently influenced by advances of psychology to change the way they represented human character. For Lawrence, Woolf, Joyce and others the self was not a stable but evolving, fluid, discontinuous and fragmented (Childs 2008: 59).

Seen as such, Modernism is a literary mode that becomes centralised on depicting the inner concerns of the individual or as Woolf calls it, 'the dark places of psychology' (Woolf 1984: 162). In other words, fragmented subjectivity, which continually questions the self, is at the heart of Modernist narrative. The instability of the self, in this regard, demands new forms of expression that only a Gothic language can make visible. While it is true that Gothic literature has undergone a series of transformations since it first emerged, one feature that remains a constant of the genre is its concern with revelations of unknown anxieties within the individual, and this is how it helps articulate the incommunicable realities of the First World War.<sup>3</sup> As such, Gothic imagery of the ghostly and hauntings give form to the trauma of the War and the nightmares associated with it. Added to this, the theme of ghostly revenants as extracted from the Gothic genre, has become central to documenting the trauma of war.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this article

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<sup>3</sup> The origins of Gothic fiction are attributed to Horace Walpole with his publication of the first Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. Its elements have gone through a series of transformations in the hands of his followers such as Ann Radcliffe who feminised the Gothic genre by depicting the female experience of the eighteenth century under the tyranny of patriarchy, through the devices of the haunted castle and the recurrence of ghosts. At the end of the nineteenth century, Bram Stoker popularised the Gothic through the figure of the vampire in *Dracula* (1890), while Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* first (1886) employed the concept of duality and doubling, making the Gothic more psychological.

<sup>4</sup> Trauma comes from an outside threat; it overwhelms the psychic defences of the subject and threatens its boundaries with collapse. In this sense, the subject develops 'unhomely' sensations which can be seen in the victim's detachment from reality as well as his inability to distinguish between what is real and what is not. The individual at this stage is subject to experiencing terror that shakes his vision of reality. That is to say, the boundaries of reality are transgressed by the constant return of the repressed memories from the war. Cathy Caruth points out that 'trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past, but rather in

will draw attention to the ghosts of Modernism that stem from the traumatic experience of the War affecting men and women alike. Focusing on the characters of Septimus Warren Smith and Lucrezia (or Rezia, as she is known), his Italian wife, in Virginia Woolf's war novel *Mrs Dalloway*, first published in 1925, I shall highlight the psychological effects that the atrocities of war had on men and equally on women. Septimus and Rezia both become detached from reality living as 'dejects', to borrow Julia Kristeva's term.<sup>5</sup> They come to share a space of liminality governed by its most active agents, darkness and the unknown.

Coming back from the trenches of the Western Front, Septimus finds himself locked up in his memories of his war experience while the spectral calls of Evans — his superior officer and comrade in arms who died in the War — 'hover on the periphery of his consciousness' (*Dalloway*: 45–46). The confining memories which now have the power to unsettle Septimus thus embody the Modernist ghost. Virginia Woolf, writing on the ghosts of Modernism in a review of Edith Birkhead's 1921 study *The Tale of Terror*, states that:

[T]he skull-headed lady, the vampire gentleman, the whole troop of monks and monsters who once froze and terrified now gibber in some dark cupboard of the servant's hall. In our day we flatter ourselves that the effect is produced by subtler means. It is at the ghosts within us that we shudder, and not at the decaying bodies of barons or the subterranean activities of ghouls. Yet the desire to widen our boundaries, to feel excitement without danger, and to escape as far as possible from the facts of life drives us perpetually to trifle with the risky ingredients of the mysterious and the unknown (Woolf 1988: 306–07).

Woolf's view implies that the modern ghost is located 'within us', meaning that the motif of the ghost continues to have such a hold over literary Modernism. To explain, the ghosts that the reader comes across in Modernist texts, specifically in the text under study, are ghosts that dwell in the mind rather than the medieval castles of the eighteenth century. The twentieth-century ghost is rather defined by 'subtler means' which are emblematic of distortion of the subject. When the individual's subjectivity is exposed to an external threat, in this case by trauma, the boundaries of reality dissolve, as is the case with Septimus, whose outer world becomes 'contaminated by his interior stresses in the form of a number of hallucinatory experiences' (Foley 2017: 115). In Septimus's case, these 'hallucinatory experiences' take the form of seeing ghosts and hearing voices that emanate from his past experiences during the War. This is made clear in Rezia's account of his deterioration:

He had grown stranger and stranger, he said people were talking behind the bedroom wall [...] He saw things too he has seen an old woman's head in the middle of the fern [...] he cried, into

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the way that its very unassimilated nature — the way it was precisely not known in the first instance — returns to haunt the survivor later on (1969: 4).

<sup>5</sup> The 'Deject' is a term utilised by Julia Kristeva by which she refers to the outcast; she says, 'the deject is in short a *stray*' (Kristeva 2010: 8; original emphasis).

the flames! and saw faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names, from the walls, and hands pointing round the screen (*Dalloway*: 72–73).

It can be suggested that those voices are part of the guilt of survival. Septimus had been among the first to volunteer. Going to France to fight for England, he had developed manliness and had soon won Evans' respect. When Evans was killed, not long before the Armistice, Septimus had been unable to show any emotions; as 'the last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference' (*Dalloway*: 95). Evans' ghostly revenant that haunts him after the War is a product of Septimus' feeling of guilt: "I have — I have, [...] committed a crime" (*Dalloway*: 105) — but he does not understand what that crime was. He concludes that the voices and apparitions are a reproach for his indifference towards his comrades' cries; the dead return in ghostly form to condemn him for his apathetic behaviour in the theatre of war. The connection he makes between his 'criminality' and the haunting is made clear by the narrative:

He had not cared when Evans was killed; that was worst; but all the other crimes raised their heads and shook their fingers and jeered and sneered over the rail of the bed in the early hours of the morning at the prostrate body which lay realising its degradation (*Dalloway*: 99–100).

Julia Kristeva's theory of 'Abjection' is useful in our understanding of Septimus's state in this passage.<sup>6</sup> According to Kristeva, the abject is that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (2010: 4). In this light, a link can be drawn between the ghost and the abject. This means that the ghost, in this novel, functions as an abject. The ghost of Evans is 'a psychotic symptom of shell shock' which conjures up a general sense that war memories can act as an unseen attacker (Foley 2017: 114). Hence, his ghost can be considered as an abject that threatens the subjecthood of Septimus, and his bodily 'degradation' is the product of the abject's pulverisation of the subject. As a result, the individual's subjectivity is thrown into a space of abjection which enacts a dual presence of fear and desire.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Septimus's fear is shown by his reaction to his first confrontation with Evans' ghost:

'For God's sake don't come!' Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead. But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards him. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds, he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried (*Dalloway*: 76).

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<sup>6</sup> Kristeva's concept of the abject and abjection comes in an essay in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, where she defines the abject as:

[a] massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognise as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me (2010: 2).

<sup>7</sup> Kristeva writes that the abject 'beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire' (2010: 1).

Septimus's rejection of the ghostly Evans is a manifestation of the fear engendered by his feelings of guilt for his lack of emotion when he witnessed his comrade's death. In another episode in the novel, he appears to identify with Evans' ghost because it reminds him of death, something that he, in the midst of the dark world of Modernity, desires, as is evidenced by his repeated statement: 'I will kill myself' (*Dalloway*: 107). He wishes to die not only because of his feelings of guilt but also because the way the society in which he lives denies the subject matter of trauma, compelling him to live like a ghost himself. In other words, Septimus becomes an abject himself, ghostly in his marginalised position.

Since the abject is that which 'disturbs identity', it can be suggested that Septimus' acting as an abject in the modern world disturbs the nation's project of restoring its pre-war identity because the nation still believes in the continuity of its imperialistic power and cultural superiority (Kristeva 2010: 4). As such, the traumatic symptoms of vulnerability and weakness are labelled as sins by the contemporary society of the post-war period. This recalls Vivian de Sola Pinto's views in *Crisis in English Poetry*:

The Nation at Home still believed in the patriotic myth of a beautiful, heroic war against diabolic enemies. The Nation Overseas was in touch with realities of life and death and was completely disillusioned with regards to the heroic nature of the struggle. Indeed, as the war went on, they became more and more solidly united in sentiment not against the Germans, but against (as it appeared to them) the callous, stupid Nation at Home, the government and, above all, the "brass-hats" of the staff (1958: 142).

The 'Nation at Home' in *Mrs Dalloway* is represented by Septimus' doctors, Sir William Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes, who cripple any sense of communication with him. Septimus thinks of Dr. Holmes as '[h]uman nature, [...] the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils' (*Dalloway*: 101), associated with a threatening society that refuses to recognise his illness and imprisons him in the modern world. Dr. Holmes, indeed, embodies the society that denies the subject of trauma; this becomes clear as he insists that 'there was nothing whatever the matter with [Septimus]' (*Dalloway*: 99). To preserve society's sense of stability the cause of the trauma needs to be discarded, just as the subject rejects the abject, society being the subject and the wounded veteran the abject. Although Kristeva's theory has been explained in terms of psychology, it can actually be applied to external purposes such as the example of society representing the subject who rejects the abject threatening its stability. Examples of the abject threatening the society's identity might include minorities such as homosexuals, people with

disabilities etc. Septimus, in this regard, represents ‘wounded masculinity’, a condition that the society in which he lives refuses to recognise and therefore rejects by denying it.<sup>8</sup>

Septimus is in what is known as a ‘space of liminality’, the notional borderland that separates two concepts, in this case, death and life, the ‘in-between’ zone where the ‘passenger’ is caught.<sup>9</sup> This passenger can be a monster, a ghost, or a vampire. Monsters such as, for instance, that created by Frankenstein are liminal entities because they exist in the ‘no man’s land’ between the natural and the supernatural.<sup>10</sup> The liminal in twentieth-century literature comes to define the place of traumatised veterans of war who occupy the in-between zones of time and space. Within this space, Septimus lives as a disembodied entity between life and death. This, in a way, recalls T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* published in 1922, where he refers to the city crowd flowing ‘over London Bridge [...] up the hill and down King William Street’ as bodies emptied of substance. In alluding to Dante’s phantasmagorical lines ‘I had not thought death had undone so many’ (1963: 60–66), Eliot encapsulates the disillusionment of post-war England with its people walking around in circles like walking dead. Septimus is an example of Eliot’s post-war man. Unwelcomed by his post-war society and constantly watched by his past, he lives in seclusion from his world, which becomes a space of anxiety to him. Even his doctor rejects him:

Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world  
(*Dalloway*: 102).

This is to say that the many men of post-war Britain experiencing a sense of ‘wounded masculinity’ reside in the margins of the society between two thresholds, between life and

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<sup>8</sup> The phrase ‘wounded masculinity’ is not a defined term used in psychology, but it is accepted as a way in which to express the gap between how a man feels about himself as a man and what he believes it means to be a man, the ideal of masculinity. His perception that there is a gap will often cause result in mental distress because the man feels that he is to some degree falling short of this ideal. The phenomenon of ‘wounded masculinity’ was prevalent after WW1 among the many men who had suffered life changing trauma, both physical and mental, and thus found themselves dependent to some degree on women, for whom they should be caring and providing according to received notions of masculinity.

<sup>9</sup> Liminality, Victor Turner maintains, ‘is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon’ (1974: 95). It refers to that state of transience inhabited by the female subject in this case. Liminality is key to our understanding of Kristeva’s theory of Abjection because the latter defines a boundary between two states of being that is ‘the me’ and ‘the not me’. In line with this, the soldiers returned from war that are found in the literature of Modernism inhabit a space of abjection.

<sup>10</sup> See Manuel Aguirre’s article on ‘The Rules of Gothic Grammar’ where he states that Gothic characters ‘are detained in the liminal stage, the victims of an incomplete or perverted passage’ (undated: 2). The men experiencing ‘wounded masculinity’ that are found in Modernism, although not Gothic characters, are likewise ‘detained in the liminal stage’.

death. Septimus thinks, 'I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet I am now alive' (*Dalloway*: 75).

Having seen the ghosts that populate Septimus's space, we should as well examine the ghosts that visit Rezia. This is to show that women have been equally affected by war trauma, and that they are drawn into the male space of liminality as a result. While their trauma does not necessarily spring from a personal experience of warfare in the trenches as does that of men, they have experienced a suffering equal to that of men from witnessing the way society has demeaned men who have been traumatised by their war-time experiences and from the guilt at their passivity during the War. Arguably, women's participation in the war effort, particularly that which entailed humanitarian work such as serving in hospitals, was motivated not only through necessity but also to alleviate the burden of this sense of guilt.<sup>11</sup> As well as physically participating in war work as nurses and in other capacities, women had also suffered psychologically from the anxieties that resulted from the effect of the War on those at home without men to support them. However, the responsibilities that women took on either through their work or having to be their family's emotional support had a psychological cost: they became almost like strangers to the absent men. After the War, women found themselves forced to return to their traditional roles, as this was expected by their menfolk. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Rezia exemplifies the body of women who had not taken part in any war effort but had endured a suffering equal to that of the men who had seen action at the Front. Dorothy Goldman supports this, when she states:

War literature is traditionally and narrowly defined as mud and trenches, barbed wire and slaughter; women's understanding of the war is inevitably less physical than that of men who fought at the front (1993: 6).

I argue that that one of the psychological costs of the War to women was that, when the men returned, women found themselves forced back into their traditional roles by the re-emergence of the 'Angel in the House' concept with the result that they became trapped in the web of domesticity.<sup>12</sup> Thus the Angel that Rezia confronts emerges as a result of Septimus'

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<sup>11</sup> See Angela Smith's introduction in *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (2007: 7).

<sup>12</sup> 'The Angel in the House' is the traditional and idealistic image of the female; it was coined by Coventry Patmore in his poem entitled with the same name, published in 1856. It soon became a label which the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century adopted. His poem encourages ideals of the perfect, charming housewife, the self-sacrificing goddess of the middle class. Marylu Hill, in discussing the *Angel* figure in some Modernist texts, affirms that it is often associated with the mother, hence most mothers of Modernist fictions she state are 'lovely, silent, and acquiescent (at least on the surface) to the whims of patriarchy; indeed, to a certain extent all these mother figures willingly internalize masculine conceptions of femaleness' (2016: 13). *Mrs Dalloway*, in this view, witnesses a return of the *Angel* figure, in that she returns to perform her incomplete duties of domesticity,

trauma. In her 'Henry James ghost stories', written after the First World War, Woolf states that 'we breakfast upon a richer feast of horror than served our ancestors for a twelvemonth [...] we are impervious to fear' (1988a: 321). At this level, Woolf implies that women experienced a new sense of 'horror' emblematic of war trauma in the trenches. In addition, it is important to notice that Rezia endures a sense of being confined even when she is in the public sphere, as she becomes a carer for her psychologically wounded husband. In this novel, the Angel finds that she can promote herself by the mothering of the broken male character Septimus. As she witnesses this shattered man who seems to be detached from reality, Rezia is thrust into the female space of ambivalence which is emerging as a characteristic of women's complex position in Modernism, particularly during and after the First World War. Therefore the 'feast of horror' that Modern women 'breakfast upon' originates from witnessing war atrocities and feeling the responsibility to appease the chaotic state of the male. Women's newly gained freedom is consumed by their reinforced performance of the maternal.

Septimus and Rezia have been married for five years, and the reader first meets them as they are walking in Hyde Park. Rezia's struggles start to occur at the point of the narrative where she witnesses her husband's horrified and alienated self. Burdened with the responsibility to cure him, she starts to project a sense of marginalisation similar to his. Indeed, Rezia is a neglected character who has been overlooked by scholars in discussions of the Gothic and Modernism. She brings to light the experience of women who had to bear the physical and psychological chaos of their male relatives in a time of women's feminist prosperity.<sup>13</sup> Septimus' trauma evokes the Angel within her; this Angel figure is characterised by being confined by and subservient to her husband. In a way that recalls a trope of eighteenth-century Gothic fiction whose heroines are often imprisoned in the underground vault of some gloomy castle, Rezia, in literary Modernism, is trapped in the liminal passages of London's 'Waste Land'.

It is important to note that the places where Rezia most experiences her moments of feeling trapped as well as alienation are outside the domestic space. In London parks and streets, she experiences her utmost agony about her loneliness and vulnerability in the face of her husband's

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particularly mothering the returned soldier. This means that 'Modernists can never be done with the past; they must go on forever haunted by it, digging up its ghosts, recreating it even as they remake their world themselves' (Berman 2010: 346).

<sup>13</sup> Goldman comments on women's war writings that despite their 'complaints about their pre-war restrictions and their wartime existence, there remains in their writing the pity for men's suffering. Even when there is outspoken opposition to the War, women express both pity and guilt: guilt at not being involved, at being merely onlookers of the massacre'; she also adds that the condition of the war has placed the woman into the 'archetypal female nurturing roles of mother, of nurse' (1993: 11).

haunted world. This is to say that women are insecure outdoors. Ironically, although the modern woman of the period has managed to escape the confines of the home, she is still confined outside the home. In this novel, she becomes confined as a result of witnessing the crisis of 'wounded masculinity' that engulfs post-war England.

Unlike Clarissa Dalloway, the central female character in the novel, who is portrayed with a sense of independence as she strolls in London streets, 'I love walking in London,' Rezia increasingly displays the appearance of being trapped as she accompanies Septimus for a walk (*Dalloway*: 6). This is made clear in the narrative: 'Help, help! She wanted to cry out to butchers' boys and women,' as Rezia listens to his war hallucinations of wanting to kill himself (*Dalloway*: 17). It can be noticed that there is a sense of 'unhomeliness' pervading both characters, for their experiences appear to be analogous. Their mutual suffering is dictated by foreignness and estrangement. Rezia is drawn to her husband's ghost-ridden world which renders her as vulnerable; she reflects 'far was Italy and the white houses and the room where her sister sat making hats, and the streets crowded every evening with people walking, laughing out loud, not half alive like people here' (*Dalloway*: 25). When she describes people as 'half alive', this does not, of course, exclude Septimus. Modernism generates an uncanny chaos spelled out by a crisis in the 'homely' of both of male and female consciousness. Nicholas Royle defines the uncanny as:

The crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature': one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world. But the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness and alienation. More specifically, it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar (2003: 1).

Modernist spaces become repositories of terrors for the individual; 'the crisis of the natural' here concerns both Septimus and Rezia. This crisis is manifested through their analogous experience of alienation and exile. As we know, Septimus's alienation stems from his trauma that confuses the ontology of time and space. Rezia, on the other hand, is exiled as she fails to restore her husband to normality and suffers as her efforts start to wane. Hence, she is marginalised not only because she is a foreigner but also because Septimus's mental condition marginalises her further. One instance occurs as Rezia witnesses Septimus's frightened self after seeing a passing motor car:

And there the motor-car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who is blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose?

“Let’s go on, Septimus,” said his wife, a little woman, with large eyes in a sallow pointed face; an Italian girl.  
“Come on”, said Lucrezia (*Dalloway*: 16).

Septimus lives in seclusion and his thinking that ‘[i]t is I who is blocking the way’ is indication of this. In his perspective, everything around him is a threat. The ‘motor car’ for instance functions as an object of horror emanating out of his war experience into post-war London. This act of surveillance can be explained through Derrida’s concept of ‘the visor effect’ which takes place when the person feels that he is watched by a spectral entity. Derrida says: ‘This spectral someone other looks at us, we feel ourselves being looked at by it, outside of any synchrony, even before and beyond any look on our part’ (1994: 7). While Septimus is watched by the ghosts of the battlefield, Rezia is observed by the ghost of the Angel that confines and silences her. In ‘Professions for Women’, Woolf says:

[the Angel in the House] was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it— she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel (2008: 141).

In this way, Rezia displays the same silence that is characteristic of the Angel that lives in her. This Angel figure presents itself in the form of a mother and a nurse. The novel illustrates this when it says, ‘Nothing could rouse him. Rezia has put him to bed,’ (*Dalloway*: 99); her act of putting her husband to bed both demonstrates her domestic role carried out by the Angel within her and epitomises his encapsulates infantilised situation. In addition to this, the Angel’s characteristics of being a self-sacrificing and a subservient woman are found in the woman carer of returned veterans, so the conditions resulting from the war have led women to embrace the traits of a figure that they despise. Furthermore, in a *Room of One’s Own*, first published in 1929, Woolf has given an illustration of the silent and victim woman writer who lacks freedom in a patriarchal society. Naming her Judith Shakespeare, Woolf argues that ‘she lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed’ (Woolf 2002: 111–12). Although it is beyond my focus, Woolf’s expression about the woman writer evokes a Gothic ideology of haunting which is relevant to the character of Rezia. In this respect, Miglena Nikolchina states that ‘both Shakespeare’s sister and the Angel in the House are Woolf’s allegories of female silence’ (2004: 90).

We have seen the sort of ghosts that Septimus sees, but Rezia’s ghosts are not as visible in the novel. Hers occupy part of herself of which she is not aware. This means there resides within

her a ghostly self, inherent in her invisibility as she strolls through the passages of Modernity. Her invisibility lies in the sense that her inner terrors are unseen, and her cries of horror and loneliness would go unobserved. This can be seen in a scene in which Rezia goes on expressing her estrangement from a place populated by the walking dead: “For you should see the Milan gardens”, she said aloud. But to whom? There was nobody. Her words faded’ (*Dalloway*: 25). Rezia’s current self is obscured by the ghost of the Angel whose task, during this period, is caring for the soldier who has returned in a shattered condition. Woolf has referred to such intrusive ghosts in her review of Henry James’s ghost stories, in which she states that:

Henry James’s ghosts have nothing in common with the violent old ghosts—the blood-stained sea captains, the white horses, the headless ladies of dark lanes and windy commons. They have their origin within us. They are present whenever the significant overflows our powers of expressing it; whenever the ordinary appears ringed by the strange (1988a: 324).

This passage recalls the way in which the unknown invades the familiar and the ordinary. For instance, ‘The ordinary’ marriage life that Rezia has desired appears to be ‘ringed by the strange’. In other terms, her life is ‘ringed’ by the terrors of her unknown and her neglected position. As such, her marriage only offers psychological entrapment. Although she is able to stroll in the city she remains imprisoned as long as she acts as a nurturer for Septimus. The following quote from the text shows the way she opts for a temporary release:

“Septimus!” said Rezia. He started violently. People must notice.  
“I am going to walk to the fountain and back”, she said.  
For she could stand it no longer. Dr. Holmes might say there was nothing the matter. Far rather would she that he were dead! [...] She spread her hand before her. Look! Her wedding ring slipped — she had grown thin. It was she who suffered — but she had nobody to tell (*Dalloway*: 25).

As she attempts to escape her role of nurse to Septimus, she ends up returning like she returns to him after her walk. Thinking that she might find him dead as ‘he threatened, to kill himself,’ Rezia is surprised to see him ‘still sitting alone on the seat’ where she has left him (*Dalloway*: 26). This, in a way, symbolises the way that the post-war modern world necessitated a return of women to domesticity and to the maternal. Furthermore, the scene of her ‘grow[ing] thin’ is symptomatic of her suffering caused by her traumatised husband. Arguably, the scene in which her wedding ring slips can be read as a metaphor for the way she is being repressed by her marriage and the element of estrangement between them that results from this. Moreover, her temporary retreat as she walks ‘to the fountain’ and losing her wedding ring implies the fact that she wants to free herself from the inner confines that the Angel figure imposes on her. “I am alone; I am alone!” She cried by the fountain in Regent’s Park’ (*Dalloway*: 26). In a way, marriage imprisons women like Rezia, but their existence outside it is one of the outcast,

insecure and psychologically exposed. Rezia, like Septimus, is thrown into a liminal space between his world of the dead and the unwelcoming atmosphere of post-war London and between her desire to rescue her marriage and to evade it. She attempts to restore Septimus to his pre-war state, but her efforts are unsuccessful as Septimus fails to respond, for he is immersed in his own world.

Women's literary Modernism is characterised by the ambivalence towards domesticity in general and the maternal in particular. For instance, Rezia expresses her agony about her marriage and the horror she is living throughout the novel:

Horror! horror! she wanted to cry (she had left her people; they had warned her what would happen).  
Why hadn't she stayed at home? she cried, twisting the knob of the iron railing (*Dalloway*: 29).

Yet she also discloses her anguish about not having children; on the one hand 'she must have a son like Septimus', on the other she immediately rejects this notion: 'One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals' (*Dalloway*: 98). Traditionally, the maternal role is one of the active agents of the Angel figure which promotes the domestic confinement of women. The figure still intrudes into Modernity through its element of mothering damaged masculinities. The writer's later statement signifies the reluctance of women towards Motherhood. In a way, this covers mothers' pain and agony as they relinquish their sons to the war only to have them returning to them wounded. Woolf's narrative here recognises the haunting of the Victorian patriarchal maternal role that is forced to re-emerge as women of this period feel the guilt about the deaths and wounding of young men like Septimus; this is made clear in Woolf's words 'London had swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; thought nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents have thought to distinguish them' (*Dalloway*: 92).

Distancing themselves from their past identities, women in these Modernist narratives become other to themselves. Throwing the Angel out of her is one of Rezia's attempts to escape from her 'confinement'. When Septimus asks her why she has taken off her ring, she replies: 'My hand has grown so thin. [...] I have put it in my purse' (*Dalloway*: 73). I have already argued that the scene in which her wedding slips can be read as a metaphor for the estrangement between Rezia and Septimus that results from the way her marriage represses Rezia; this scene of hiding her wedding ring in her purse could be read a metaphor for rejecting the domestic confinement of her marriage, thus rejecting the Angel. Refusing to be thrown out, the Angel reappears from her place of banishment to haunt her victim. Rezia is caught in the terror of the

in-betweenness where darkness and uncertainty are its main components; she laments, ‘But I am so unhappy, Septimus’ (*Dalloway*: 77).

The liminal space of the trenches and the terror associated with it during the War come to resemble the position of men experiencing ‘wounded masculinity’ and their women carers. The liminality experienced in the trenches by soldiers like Septimus is reflected by the nebulous position of women during this period. This means that, despite the fact that most women have had little physical experience either of the fighting on the Western Front or of being in the trenches, they face a terror equal to that of their menfolk both during the War and in its aftermath. The Gothic languages of ghostliness and haunting allow a better understanding of the anxieties of the returned veterans and their women companions in this regard. Whereas the liminal helps us define the place of the foreigner and the stranger, it can be seen that the liminal phase ‘can never be permanent else it can lead to fractured identities and cultures’ (Sharma 2013: 119). Indeed, the act of Septimus’s committing suicide as well as the unknown ending of Rezia at the close of the novel prove the ephemerality of this space. Although liminality seems to be threatening, it offers its passenger a temporary space of belonging where men and women are equal in their post-war experience.

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