

Haunted Words: The Ghost of *Hamlet* in *Mrs. Dalloway*

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The Burden of Introductions

Time, for us moderns, can be a terrible burden. It creeps forward at first, then starts to race. We stand, as Bernard de Chartres once said, on the shoulders of giants, peering ahead, hoping to see further than our predecessors. Then, suddenly, we arrive at the end and wish we could regain that very past we left behind. We look back—on memories, on histories and literatures—hoping to escape the endgame or find solace in what came before. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* catches the modern subject in this very plight. Originally titled *The Hours*, the novel is intimately concerned with how time mediates our engagement with the personal, cultural, and social past. Less certain is how and why the words and symbols of William Shakespeare wind themselves throughout the text. Does the novel see further, advancing aesthetically, once hoisted on the Bard's shoulders or do the references nostalgically yearn for an earlier England? Does protagonist Clarissa Dalloway develop his words to new, modern ends or does she harness them to flee from the burden of twentieth-century London? Within this uncertainty lies the temporal paradox of cultural modernity.

This paradox is best summarized in Matei Călinescu's *Five Faces of Modernity*, in which he delineates two simultaneous and opposed models of time: measurable, linear time and subjective, non-linear time (5). The first account emerges from disparate sources—Christian teleology; the industrial and scientific “doctrine of progress”; the Hegelian dialectic's development toward self-realization—which all posit that culture moves toward an expected outcome (41). Antoine Compagnon subdivides the linear model in his response to Călinescu, *Five Paradoxes of Modernity*, based on whether that outcome is utopia or apocalypse (5). Each endgame maintains a value judgment on linear time as ascendent or descendent: time either advances technological society or it pushes the subject ever closer to spiritual and literal death. The modern writer either rejects the giants of the past or yearns to recover their wisdom.

Opposing both ascendent and descendent linear models of time, cultural and literary modernists developed an alternative: non-linear, interior time. Whereas the linear models add measurable moments, the non-linear one does not cumulate; each instant offers the ability to select a new past, a choice that frees the present from the burden of prescribed history. This model, too, had a Christian origin: the apostle Peter synthesizes the ascendent and descendent value judgments into one non-linear cycle of destruction and rejuvenation.¹ The model gained theoretical support from turn-of-the-century discoveries in philosophy and physics: Henri Bergson's account of the *durée intime* and Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. It shifted the emphasis from one historical, measurable time to subjective time that can expand and cycle into the past as it ruminates and processes memories—a consciousness that found particularly rich expression in the now canonical modernist literature of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The first, linear model can be visualized in clocks, timetables, and trains—either advancing society or spelling its demise. The second, nonlinear and interior mode belongs to dreamers, wanderers, and visionaries. The conflict of these two models, the way the dreamer flees from yet remains chained to the clock, underlies the complex temporal representation of the moderns.

Călinescu's framework complicates the common narrative that literary modernity is purely anti-traditional—a serious of ruptures from the past—for ascendent linearity is only half the temporal and textual story. True, the cult of the immediate present and the innovative future can be

¹ In the Christian eschatological texts, the Messiah augurs both utopia and apocalypse, bringing together the ascendent and descendent value judgments. When Peter says, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" he casts the messianic arrival in apocalyptic terms (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*, 2 Peter 3: 11). Yet his advise is "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!" indicating an ascendent model where time *should* be hastened toward this end (2 Peter 3:12). Progress and the approach of destruction become equivalent for the prophet, and bringing the ascendent and descendent viewpoints together offers the hope of rejuvenation from apocalypse: "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). The prophetic synthesis of the two value judgments provides an early basis for the non-linear model.

seen from Friedrich Nietzsche's call to throw off history's shackles to Ezra Pound's famous dictum "make it new." Yet if twentieth-century writers actively depart from the conventions of their immediate predecessors, they also display a close dialogue with the premodern ancients and their early modern successors. The flood of cultural allusions and citations in writers like James Joyce or T.S. Eliot, for instance, indicates an increasingly serious and open engagement with tradition, even if that engagement manifests in parody or pastiche. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," for instance, Eliot argues for depersonalization and defines great poetry as the recombination of previous texts. The modern poet does not abandon history's burden but is rather "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings," a "catalyst" that takes old material and structures it in new ways (8). He does not position himself on the shoulders of giants, but rather grows organically from them—using old knowledge to create new art. This combination of atavism and originality seems paradoxical, yet this tension parallels the two cultural models of time outlined by Călinescu: ascendent linearity and cyclic return to the past.

Though Eliot's essay offered a nascent account of this modern tension, the theoretical framework to analyze texts as recombinations of earlier texts did not emerge for another half century. Then, in 1967, Julia Kristeva coined the term "intertextuality" to describe how a single text "is indebted to its outside" or defined by the works that created it and that it will in turn create (446). Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, which examined how multiple voices compose one text, Kristeva expanded the scope of those voices beyond the artwork and into its source material. The idea that the inside text was first and foremost a meeting place for these outside sources inspired an entire school of theory and analysis in the post-World War II era. Its methodology unfolds the relational structure of texts but notably ignores the models of time inbuilt in those structures. That is to say, it points out how giants provide foundations for textual moderns,

but ignores whether the moderns look linearly beyond the giants or take a cyclic refuge in ancient words.

Representations of time consciousness became the subject of another school of criticism, this one spearheaded by Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, which examined, in its final chapter, how Woolf and Proust stylistically delineate their characters' interior time from that of external events. His study more directly engage with Călinescu's psychological-philosophical models than Kristeva's, but both methodologies are practiced within and reveal an approach to the temporal paradox. Just as Clarissa Dalloway cycles backward into her personal past, *Mrs. Dalloway* returns to its cultural past by employing a dense web of Shakespearean allusions and references. Even as the author innovates, her work references and recalls its predecessors, so the intertext, like the modern subject, is caught between two time scales: the linear and non-linear.

What I am proposing here is a double claim: the first concerns the history of intertextuality theory and how the discourse can be reinvigorated today, while the second concerns literary history and the identification of *Mrs. Dalloway's* intertextual sources. By fusing the critical schools of Auerbach and Kristeva with Călinescu's framework, I propose a novel analytic tool: the intertext, being embedded with a specific representation of time, as a way to understand the relationship of both theorist and artist to the cultural past. I then make a case for a particularly resonant intertext in Woolf's novel: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which has only glancingly been discussed in the scholarship on *Mrs. Dalloway*. Employing the analytic tool of intertextuality as time consciousnesses on this case study reveals how *Hamlet* is the radical intertextual Ghost of *Mrs. Dalloway*: the novel's sometimes obvious, sometimes hidden song that unifies the writer, the text, and its characters with the cultural pasts that would otherwise overwhelm them. This synthesis through and with haunted language may carry serious social and psychological consequences, but by fusing their words with

those of the Bard, both Woolf and her subjects escape the burdens of irreversible, linear time and, for a moment, elude their own crises of modernity.

Chapter 1: Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: A New Approach To the Intertext

1.1 The Burden of Theory

If a Shakespearean reference or allusion simply linked *Mrs. Dalloway* to the cultural past, the theory of intertextuality would always trace the ways texts disrupt their linear development. Yet intertextuality is far from a single, unified methodology, and its critics lie on a vast spectrum from conservative to radical. Conservatives maintain the unity of a text, while radicals reject the idea there is any isolated text at all. Though these mindsets might seem synchronic or a-temporal, they embed specific and previously unexplored time representations. The more conservative the intertextual models the more progressive and ascendent its linear time consciousness. If, on the other hand, the model claims that the modern cannot be isolated from the giants that came before her, it relies on a radically non-linear model of time.

More conservative intertextual critics maintain the autonomy of texts, treating the intertext as a relational device that traces how specific citations, allusions, motifs, and structures develop older textual ideas. These practices rely on a more ascendent linear approach to history and time, for while they identify how a text cycles back to old material, they also indicate that progress or greater depth is achieved through the reuse of that old material. A tour de force of this structuralist sensibility, Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests* categorizes at length the ways a "hypertext" can develop the source material from its "hypotext." Genette's work maintains the organic structure of the individual text and implies that each text evolves as a progression from its source material. Wolfgang Iser's "Titles and Mottoes as Intertextual Devices" more directly engages with temporal progress when it describes "overcoding": the way intertextuality adds layers of additional

meaning and cultural capital to the target text (128). That is to say, later texts see further than the giants on which they stand: they benefit from both their inherent meaning and that of what has come before. Thus while intertextual devices might disrupt a text's linear progression and cycle back to older source material, the theoretical underpinnings of a structuralist intertextuality rely on the ascendent, linear progress of time.

Differentiating between the structuralist intertextual devices of pastiche, imitation, irony, and parody corroborates that each embeds a linear model of time, albeit with varying value judgments. In "Bypassing Intertextuality," Hans-Peter Mai argues that a fundamental shift occurred between the older *imitatio* tradition and modern intertextuality. The first is reverential and pays homage to classic texts, displaying a descendent linear model in which newer writing remains inferior to that of its predecessors. Pastiche includes a similar value judgment, for the new hypertext will be, at best, a copy of the truly innovative material that came before. Popular modern devices like irony and parody, on the other hand, subversively harness old material for the ends of its newer target (32-3). These devices invoke an ascendent linear model, for the past is revisited only to avail the present. Any references within the text are ultimately interpreted in terms of how they enable linear development, so while the intertext may behave non-linearly, the structuralist model emphasizes the way it always moves forward. Conservative intertextuality, then, broadly relies on a model of linear time, though the specific devices used differentiate the value judgment between ascendent and descendent.

Radical intertextual theory, on the other hand, elides the ironic or imitative distance and the authorial intent demanded by both the ascendent and descendent linear models. Taken to its extreme, the concept dissolves all textual boundaries, an idea that employs a fully non-linear account of time: if no text develops independently from its predecessors, each text has already been pre-conditioned and created in the past. Kristeva and her post-structuralist colleagues from *Tel Quel*

championed this model. Roland Barthes, for instance, defines the intertext in *Le Plaisir du texte* as “l’impossibilité de vivre hors du texte enfin—que ce texte soit Proust, ou le journal quotidien, ou l’écran télévisuel,”² indicating that the literary past (Proust) could never be isolated from present-day reporting, nor the simulacrum on the television, nor one’s own life (59). Barthes’ equation of forms from disparate time periods implicitly removes the positive-or-negative value judgment required by linear time. Michel Foucault makes a similar point in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, arguing that each book “is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences” and thus “constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse” (42). When Barthes announced the author’s death and Foucault made him a mere function, they dismissed the authorial agency posited by Genette and with it the need for a value judgment on cultural progress. As with Eliot, the writer does not break from history, for history has already pre-selected his textual choices. Language is no longer the object of an agent’s speech act, but rather speaks that agent into acting.

These post-structuralist arguments reveal a time consciousness on the side of the theorist that moves freely between present and past, doing away with the ascendent-descendent value judgment and adopting a non-linear temporality. This is the most radical version of Călinescu’s second model. If the individual text is a repository of previous texts, reading that text becomes a diachronic exploration: rather than advancing in one direction, the text cycles constantly back to previous times, and no word or phrase exists outside that intertextual past. Each molecule of the modern’s body would be inseparable from the giant’s flesh, so she could not be said to have come chronologically after them. Whereas the conservative theory of intertext reads those cycles as advancing or overcoding the text, radical post-structural theory reads the present moment as

² The impossibility of living outside the text after all, no matter if the text be Proust or the daily newspaper or the television screen.

infinitely expanding into the intertextual past. By deconstructing the full boundary between the interior and exterior text, the methodology renders the supposed organic text inseparable from the texts it alludes to and the ones it will inspire. Correspondingly, the present moment is inseparable from the past and future; external time can be fully expanded and warped in the internal text.

Intertextuality as a theory and praxis is thus caught within the temporal dialectic of modernity, and each intertextual theory has embedded a parallel model of time. The more radical the theory, the more the non-linear model predominates, whereas the more the text is seen as a singular, unified entity, the more the linear model of time prevails. A descending value judgment sees that unified modern text as an inevitable decline from the ancients, whereas an ascendent one typifies the predecessors as the basis for parody, fodder to overcode the present. Intertextuality and psychological-philosophical models of time thus exist on parallel continuums that affect and dictate each other. Traditionally, each axis has been seen as an independent metric, but what I am proposing here is to synthesize them into a novel tool addressing how new texts relate to the cultural past.

1.2 The Burden of Literary History

That tool reframes and relativizes the modern artistic dilemma of confronting an overwhelming literary history, for the crisis of originality is only sensible within a linear time model and conservative intertextuality. John Barth outlines that predicament in “The Literature of Exhaustion” and “The Literature of Replenishment” explicating the ways that modern art confronts the idea that everything has been said before. There is no clearer example than Stéphane Mallarmé’s famous lines from “Brise Marine,” “La chair est triste, hélas! et j’ai lu tous les livres,”³ a point theorized in Walter Jackson Bate’s *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* and taken up in Harold Bloom’s concept of “anxiety of influence”: the fear that modern poets cannot both engage

³ The flesh is sad, alas! and I’ve read all the books.

seriously with tradition and create original work. When the search for novelty becomes itself a tradition, it would seem that the giant can grow no further, that no new space remains for future artists to clamber onto his shoulders. This sense of exhaustion, however, relies on a linear model of time and a conservative intertextuality, in which art gradually digests all available material and is left with nothing more to say. Just like a human life, it seems to ascend through the novelty of each new movement, but ultimately descends as those opportunities are consumed. Modern art, in the darkest interpretation, has chased “make it new” too far, climbed too high on the shoulders of giants—never realizing it would, like Icarus, only approach its demise.

Barth’s solution to the problem is that the very crisis of that endgame is a new sort of rejuvenation, a proposition that brings together ascendent and descendent linear models into a non-linear synthesis. Like the apostle John, he recasts the apocalypse as a new beginning, displaying a prophetic time consciousness that cycles and rejuvenates itself. Jorge Luis Borges, for Barth, epitomizes this ability to create from the ashes of modernity: “His artistic victory, if you like, is that he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work” (69-70). Engaging with the intertextual past, for Barth, offers the way out of the apocalyptic end to linear time, but this is no mere nostalgic escape into the bodies of giants.⁴ Though each writer can be seen as the result of his predecessors, he also, in Borges’ words, “creates his own precursors”: new material constantly re-instantiates and reinvents the past (74). This redemptive idea builds on Foucault and Barthes elision of the author and parallels Bloom’s own non-linear escape route from the dilemma. James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, in his account, is a misreading of Shakespeare’s Hamlet that creates a new Shakespeare (Joyce’s). This position develops a radical intertextuality and an entirely non-linear model of time—highlighting that the present can revise the past and thus

⁴ Indeed, Barth argues, the frustration with the burden of the past, with the inability to craft new language is thousands of years old: it is, perhaps, the very origin and unifying quality of the universal intertext.

need not feel burdened by it. The cultural accounts of modern novelty thus depend, like intertextual theories, on certain time consciousnesses. Artistic innovation has either reached its endgame apocalypse or remains possible precisely because it revisits and rescripts the burden of textual history.

That same dialectic of hopelessness and potential as it pertains to intertext and time is central to modern literary texts themselves. The following chapter of this essay will examine the authorial and personal parallel to Barth's dilemma, bringing the theoretical tool to bear on the modernist case study of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as an intertextual rewriting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Chapter 2: Ghosts, Ghosts, Ghosts: The Nature of Language in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Mrs. Dalloway begins with the past. Clarissa sets out to buy the flowers herself and, finding the morning “fresh as if issued to children on a beach,” is transported back to her adolescence (3). The novel's first age marker is “eighteen,” her age in the memory rather than the present, so the burdens of linear, cumulative time seem to plague her very little. But her reveries are quickly interrupted by Big Ben's ring—“There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable”—a sound that augurs the conflict of interior and exterior temporalities that predominates the novel (4). Even as the various Londoners lapse into Auerbach's “dreamlike wealth of a process of consciousness” (538) and expand a passing moment, they, like Clarissa, are always drawn back by Big Ben's chime. The clock's “leaden circles” connect the urbanites to a single measurable time source, playing a cohesive social function much like the mysterious royal car and the party that begin and end the novel. Like the crests of an ocean's swell, Big Ben's sonic waves may be composed of circular moments, but taken together those moments construct a linear line. Time moves forward within these oscillations just like a breaker approaches the shore. Yet, for all

its poetry, the chime is “irrevocable”: it truncates youth’s potential and brings the aging characters one hour closer to death. There is no better image for the linear model of modern time, both advancing industrial Londoners and spelling their demise. It makes personal and literal the modern crisis of exhaustion; Clarissa’s attempts to suspend time by recalling her youth seem foiled by Big Ben’s boom.⁵

That crisis manifests most strikingly in Septimus Warren Smith, the World War I soldier whose perceived insanity and eventual suicide pervade the novel’s atmosphere. Smith’s illness is characterized by his extended meditations on both the beauty and the horror of the world, musings that epitomize Bergson’s *durée intime*. Social forces like his wife and doctors, on the other hand, become extensions of Big Ben: tethering him to external, industrial time. For instance, Rezia’s injection, “It’s time,” jolts Septimus from a dreamy meditation on swallows and gold-spotted trees. He reflects:

The word ‘time’ split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. (68)

⁵ The ensuing work builds on a long history of Woolf scholarship on time. Ann Banfield’s “Time Passes” works on the philosophical inspirations and implications of different temporal models in the novel. Martin Hägglund’s *Dying for Time* discusses the role of chronophobia in Woolf, deconstructing the idea that modernism posits a possible transcendence of time. Julia Briggs, Paul Tolliver Brown, and Holly Henry, on the other hand, explore Woolf’s relationship with modern scientific discoveries like the theory of relativity. Rachel Bowlby performs a feminist reading of the novel’s temporal structure in *Feminist Destinations*, delineating between the oppressive, masculine time of Big Ben and the liberating, feminine model within the modernist mind. My addition to this critical body of work is the application of the theoretical tool developed earlier in which the intertext provides a novel way to analyze a writer’s or text’s specific representation of time.

Language, here, is reified for Septimus, just as Big Ben's "leaden circles" reify the linear time imposed on modern London (4). Time's "riches," though, are far from a "musical" chime. The "husk" becomes the "shell" of a missile, and the words "imperishable" and "immortal" only highlight with irony the perishability and mortality of Septimus' war-time friend Evans. If Clarissa reckons with the personal approach toward death, Septimus confronts the historical legacy of descendent linear time that led to the apocalyptic World War I. When Septimus goes on to describe seeing the dead Evans before him, his internal time does not simply expand an external moment, but rather cycles fully into the past: the first of a series of phantasmic visions that rebel against that descendent linear model. Trying to re-position her husband in the linear present, Rezia chimes as Big Ben once more: "The time Septimus [...] What is the time?" thus bookending the interior dilation with combative linear markers.⁶ With these two protagonists, *Mrs. Dalloway* positions the burden of time on a personal level: a World War and old age threaten to crush Clarissa and Septimus just like literary legacy does to the modernists.

2.1 Discerning the Ghost

Redemption lies, as it does with Barth, in the use of the intertext, and *Mrs. Dalloway*'s highly intertextual nature has been well established. Molly Hoff traces "the irreverently transmigrated Homeric facets" in Woolf, though she does little with them but assert that they—among 600 other "paraphrases and parodies"—are necessary to a "meaningful reading" (188, 202). In "Mrs. Dalloway: Literary Allusion as Structural Metaphor," Jean Wyatt latches onto the Bard's

⁶ Auerbach, too, notes that direct temporal indexes frame the wandering stocking moment in *To the Lighthouse*, but his reading ignores the broader modern battle between time models and thus opts for a more harmonious interpretation in which "an insignificant exterior occurrence releases ideas and chains of ideas" and which will culminate in "unification and simplification" (540, 553). Woolf's own notes on *To the Lighthouse*, however, call into question this reading. Describing the middle "Time Passes section" as "this impersonal thing, which I'm dared to do by my friends, the flight of time and the consequent break of unity in my design," casts the modern representation of time as jolting and rupturing content rather than harmonizing it (July 20, 1925).

words, arguing that the lines “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun/ Nor the furious winter’s rages” from his *Cymbeline* “create an intricate symbolic system” throughout Woolf’s novel (440). Clarissa first sees them in a bookstore window, and they reoccur in the minds of various characters, growing from direct citations to reassuring mantras. Wyatt traces the line’s sun and frost images throughout the novel, spying *Cymbeline* everywhere she turns. *Othello* citations, for her, work in a similar fashion, creating a parallel and a sense of unity between Peter-Sally-Clarissa and Rezia-Septimus (449). Though Wyatt never explicitly mentions intertextuality theory, she relies on a conservative model similar to Genette’s and an ascendent, linear model of time, arguing that Shakespeare intertexts operate stylistically to underscore the theme of unity.⁷

If critics have carefully documented citations of *Cymbeline* and *Othello*, they have all but ignored the more subtle ways in which the unnamed *Hamlet* structures *Mrs. Dalloway* at a figural, semantic, and symbolic level. Ralph Samuelson remarks that Clarissa and Septimus share “a Hamlet-like, death brooding bent” (62) and Victor Brombert notes a resonance between the “flooded” water imagery used to describe Big Ben and “the Ophelia motif” (436)—but these insights remain largely unexplored. Yet *Hamlet*’s dramatic action, like *Mrs. Dalloway*’s, can be read primarily as a conflict between interior and exterior time. Torn between the Ghost’s insistence that he swears vengeance and Horatio’s reassurances, Hamlet ends the first Act saying, “The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite,/ That ever I was born to set it right!” (1.5.195-6). Septimus and Hamlet are thus situated in the same predicament: the cyclicity that resurrects both Ghost and Evans causes time to be “out of joint,” for the internal perception of time conflicts with the linear model imposed by rational society. This unresolvable rift prompts the question “to be or not to be,”

⁷ Wyatt, however, lacks Genette’s attention to parody and its embedded ascendent linear model. She all but misses that the *Cymbeline* lines are cited ironically by Woolf. In the source text, they are spoken during a mistaken funeral eulogy for a protagonist who has not in fact perished. The supposedly dead character will indeed have to face more heat and rages.

rephrased by Woolf in the words of Holmes' patients: "In short, this living or not living is an affair of our own?" (99).⁸

Woolf's *Hamlet*-haunted words do not, however, simply overcode the problem of disjointed time. Rather, the intertextual moments themselves operate as suspensions and dilations of the linear model that plagues both Clarissa and Septimus. This fusion of form and content makes Shakespearean language a metonym for radical intertextuality, embedding a belief that *Mrs. Dalloway* does not simply develop Shakespearean material in a linear model, but is fully fused with the Bard's work. A pervasive linguistic haunting, then, itself solves the problem of disjointed time, for it reminds both character and artist that they need not be burdened by the past. They escape the modern tragedies of irreversible time—world history and old age—just like Barth escapes the modern crisis of aesthetic exhaustion: by recognizing that their sad modern flesh is already one with the shoulders of intertextual giants.

2.2 Mapping the Ghost

That Evans' ghost is rendered with theatrical imagery may establish a figural and symbolic transfer from hypotext *Hamlet* to hypertext *Mrs. Dalloway*. Repeated references to Evans speaking behind a "screen" (91, 137, 142) imply a separation between the action of a visible on-stage and the invisible off-stage. Like Hamlet's father in both the oath and the closet scenes, Evans' ghost speaks from behind a divide, directing Septimus like a performer in the theatre. Friends and doctors grow skeptical of the actions inspired by these phantasmic directors, and both are charged with descending into madness even as they orate with poetic grace. The symbolic parallels grow

⁸ In "Mrs. Dalloway and the Social System," Alex Zwerdling reads Septimus and Clarissa as two case studies of individuals coming to terms with a restrictive society, arguing that Septimus presents a threat to order because he "insists on remembering the past" (75). In opposition to London's restrictive forces, Shakespeare citations become an "indication that the soul has survived, that some kind of sympathetic imagination is still functioning" (74). Though his points highlight the interior and redemptive nature of the intertext, as well as the perceived social threat of exiting the present, Zwerdling does not engage directly with the modern temporal paradox and how it underlies the broader conflict of individual and society.

increasingly evident as *Mrs. Dalloway* progresses. When Septimus calls Rezia to burn “his papers, the things he had written, the things she had written for him,” he wipes himself clean of his textual memory (144). In doing so, he recreates Hamlet’s deletion of memory at the Ghost’s request: “I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records/ All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past/ That youth and observation copied there” (1.5.98-101). Both protagonists replace the written and linguistic records that archive their lives with a single command from the dead: deceased language of the giants overtakes their present judgment. In the same scene, Septimus calls for Evans, then describes, “There was no answer. A mouse had squeaked, or a curtain rustled. Those were the voices of the dead,” a moment that calls to mind *Hamlet* from several points of view: the “mouse” of the play-within-a-play *The Mousetrap*, the curtain from the same production, and the “voices” of ghosts that have been multiplied from one father to the millions slaughtered in the war (142).

With this expansion, Woolf adds the collective tragedy of war to the individual psychology of Hamlet. The madman is made mad because of the linear march of history that led to WWI—a horror Woolf addresses explicitly in *Three Guineas*—so the *Hamlet* dilemma that “time is out of joint” develops both intratextually and intertextually. Septimus departs from the social, linear model of time when he speaks to Evans, but his figural parallel to Hamlet indicates the text itself departs from the modern moment. The Shakespeare intertext lifts Septimus from his specific, tragic historical context, suspends his interior time, and moves him cyclically into a premodern textual past. Text and intertext’s capacities to affect time consciousness become more clear when Septimus says, “how the dead sing behind rhododendron bushes; odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare; Evans, Evans, Evans” (144). “Odes to Time” refers to both the songs sung by war heroes and to the literary intertexts, both his dead friend and the dead Bard. Within this context, the triplicate of “Evans, Evans, Evans” rhythmically resonates with the famous “words words words” of *Hamlet* (2.2.190), a parallel that casts language, like a song of the dead, as a ghost bringing the

past to bear on the present. If Evans is an intratextual example of Septimus' departure from linear time, then *Hamlet* provides a parallel intertextual exit. Figural relationships between *Hamlet* and *Mrs. Dalloway* seem to indicate points where a model of cyclic time consciousness rebels against Big Ben's linear impositions.

Shakespeare's intertextual appearance extends beyond the figural transplant of Ghost to Evans and Hamlet to Septimus. By playing on the Bard's use of both "coward" and "nature," Woolf grafts his material at the linguistic level, displaying an even more intimate connection between the hypertext and its relevant hypotexts. Just after Septimus commits suicide, Dr. Holmes cries, "The coward!" (146), an application of the word that inverts its use in *Hamlet*. In Shakespeare's text, Hamlet first asks "Am I a coward?" when hesitating to avenge his father—cowardice, there, is the result of inaction (2.2.492). At the end of the "To be or not to be" speech, he resolves, "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all" indicating that the awareness and the fear of what comes beyond death prevents him from committing suicide (3.1.84). Hamlet perceives himself to be a coward because he cannot act, whereas others perceive Septimus to be a coward because he does act. That the intertextual parallel between Septimus and Hamlet occurs on a semantic in addition to figural level seems to reveal a more minute interweaving of text; his work structures *Mrs. Dalloway's* central conflict, but also whispers offstage through the very words we read.

An even more complex linguistic development takes place with *Mrs. Dalloway's* use of "nature." Septimus repeatedly equates human nature with Dr. Holmes: "human nature is on you. Holmes is on you"; "human nature, that is Dr. Holmes"; "'Human nature,' he called him" (90, 91, 137)—all uses where the word signifies the natural human desire to control, constrain, and restrict the antisocial, supposedly monstrous impulses in Septimus. This use plays on an extended semantic constellation of "nature" in Shakespeare's works, which trace nature from an inherent, positive quality to reason to consciousness in *Macbeth* to wild, uncontrolled psychology in *Othello* to a set

of moral, existential laws and a desire to restore order in *Hamlet*: “If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not,” *Hamlet*’s Ghost urges, commanding the prince to ignore order and law, to opt for vengeance instead (1.5.81). Woolf, however, ironically rewrites Shakespeare’s “nature,” casting the impulse to order as a constraining aspect of society, for it restricts Septimus by drawing him out of interior reverie and back to linear, social time.

This use of Shakespearean language to signify social constraints might imply that Woolf’s interweaving of his language and symbols reflects a conservative approach to the intertext and its more linear model of time. The complexity of her semantic stylings seem to posit a high level of authorial agency, and one could read the figural and symbolic transfers outlined previously as examples of that model: an author taking old textual material and explicitly developing it for the future. This reading would make *Mrs. Dalloway* a distinct entity standing on *Hamlet*’s shoulders and growing linearly upward—but also toward Barth’s cultural and Clarissa’s literal demise. If Woolf’s term “nature” stands on and sees just a bit farther than the Shakespearean word, its form operates like its content: playing a constraining, if socially unifying, role.

2.3 Radicalizing the Ghost

“Nature,” however, does not only refer to the restrictive social forces on the conservative-linear side of intertext-time model, and its double signification reveals Woolf’s more radical vision of intertextuality. Septimus repeatedly uses “nature” to denote the environment as a connective space, for it provides the trees he describes as the unifying basis for a new religion (22, 24, 66). These reveries deteriorate the boundaries between Septimus and his surroundings, allowing him to transcend object and time barriers just like his conversations with Evans’ ghost. “Nature,” in this sense, represents the most radical model of non-linear, interior time, for it passes beyond all social constraints and suspend Septimus in a unified world. When Rezia’s “It’s time” interrupts these meditations, the juxtaposition corroborates that this second, environmental nature opposes external

linear time: if social “nature” inhibits Septimus through Dr. Holmes, environmental “nature” liberates him and lifts him beyond those constraints. The word itself lies within two paradoxical models of the intertext and time consciousness: it can stand for both strictly linear and entirely emancipatory forces.

This second use of nature, however, also functions as a metonym for Shakespearean language, indicating that the emancipatory side of “nature” and not the restrictive one is correlated with the intertext’s semantic-symbolic network. After once more citing the *Cymbeline* lines, Septimus reflects on the wonder of nature: “by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollow hands Shakespeare’s words her meaning” (136). Here, nature is both the speaker and the spoken; “her meaning” can be read as both the signifier nature lifted from Shakespeare and the signified nature cooing in Septimus’ ear. The aesthetic depiction of nature becomes not only a synecdoche for or example of Shakespeare’s words, but also a metonym for the Bard’s intertextual presence in the novel. Septimus’ reveries on nature, like his incarnations of Evans, deteriorate the boundaries between himself and the Shakespearean text—and those moments thematize how intertextuality creates a radical cohesion across time. If “Evans” is haunted by Shakespeare’s “words,” “nature” embodies how Shakespearean intertext is itself a pervasive haunting, a textual ghost. Reread in this light, “conversations with Shakespeare” denotes a two-way communication evocative of Barth’s and Borges’ point that the successor revises the giants he stands upon. Woolf, in this sense, does not simply see herself as grafting the word “nature” and develop it in an ascending linear model. The very use of the term embeds a radical account of intertextuality: Septimus finds solace by fully fusing with “nature” as both Shakespearean signifier and signified.

The equation of Shakespearean intertextuality with environmental nature and non-linear time does not only address Septimus’ burdens. Clarissa’s identification with Septimus through

Hamlet as a mediating intertext corroborates that Shakespearean haunting lifts characters beyond their given temporal and social context, unifying them both synchronically and diachronically. This three-tiered identification builds on the double-imagery of drowning and self-immolation in *Hamlet*'s first Act: Horatio cautions Hamlet "What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord/ Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff," an aqua-phobia well founded considering Ophelia's fate, while the Ghost must depart at daybreak "When I to sulf'rous and tormenting flames/ Must render up myself" (1.4.69-70, 1.5.5-6). Water and fire thus become *Hamlet*'s two central symbolic representations of death. When Rezia says of Septimus, "He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on a cliff with the gulls screaming over him" she expresses a similar fear as Horatio down to the specific word "cliff" (137). She then recounts how Septimus would "cry that he was falling down, down into the flames!" completing the binary of fire and water (137). When Clarissa hears of Septimus' suicide, she employs similar imagery, first reflecting "Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident her dress flamed, her body burnt" and "She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more" (179, 180). While Clarissa's preoccupation with flowers may corroborate "the Ophelia motif" noted by Brombert, she will only throw money into the water, never herself. These imagistic resonances cause Clarissa to transcend her present plight, for they link her to both Septimus and Hamlet.⁹ She thinks of the suicide,

"Somehow it was her

⁹ Other textual evidence for this link abounds. The first time the *Cymbeline* lines appear, for instance, Clarissa moves from meditating on personal mortality ("death ended absolutely") to a broader model of descendent time ("This late age of the world experience") (9). Here, "this late age" would probably be demarcated by the First World, so while Clarissa does not experience the tragedy of the War like Septimus, the *Cymbeline* intertext induces an identification between her own decline and Europe's broader "late age." Furthermore, Big Ben rings as Peter departs from Clarissa's home, she yells after him "Remember my party to-night!" desperately trying to impose her own time-scale on the otherwise overwhelming irrevocable noise (47). The language, as well as the conflict between individual and social time, recalls the Ghost's command "Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me," when he demands Hamlet avenge him (1.5.91). The echoing "remember me" motivates Hamlet to relentlessly pursue this goal, while Peter himself turns the command into a refrain "speaking to himself rhythmically" (47) and Clarissa repeats the desperate injection to Elizabeth as she leaves with Miss Kilman (123). While Septimus' remembrance disrupts linear time to recover his dead friend, Clarissa's intertextual graft reflects a desperate attempt to hold onto a youth

disaster—her disgrace,” implying that Septimus’ decision “not to be” unifies them and allows her to reach back through time to recover and embody his “disgrace” (181). It is this action, at the novel’s end, that offers her cathartic release from her own temporal burden, bringing her to peace with the youth that haunts her, with the irrevocability of linear time. That she arrives at this conclusion by traveling through fire and water to first Septimus, then to Shakespeare, demonstrates that *Hamlet* provides a still unifying but non-linear alternative to Big Ben. Through the radical intertext, Clarissa can resonate both across London and through the cultural past, a dispersion that connects her to giants and frees her from the burden of personal decline.

Mrs. Dalloway, then, foregrounds the radically non-linear time consciousness embedded in haunting a modern novel’s language with resonances of textual pasts. From the character of Evans to the word “nature” to the symbolism of the theatre to flowers, water to fire—Woolf’s novel repeatedly lifts both reader and character into what Kristeva calls the intertextual déjà, suspending them in a reverie of Shakespearian song. Though the conservative critic might maintain that she linearly develops the Bard’s material, its very employment thematizes the radical, non-linear model of the intertext. Shakespearean language does not simply halt the linear narrative, but shows how that supposed linearity is actually always recalling the past. If we only listen closely enough to the haunted resonances of language, we realize that *Mrs. Dalloway* is inseparable from the giants on which it stands. Peter highlights this time-transcending role of language when the tune, “ee um fah um so/ foo swee too em oo,” represents a “love which has lasted a million years” through a voice with “no age or sex” (79). Shakespearean language operates in this exact way, allowing the love or trauma of a single character or artist to move beyond the present moment and remember its linkage to the textuality of the previous millennia. In this way, it absolves the modern of the burdens of

epitomized by Peter. Both’s declarations, however, recall the Bard himself—so, again, Shakespeare’s language disrupts Big Ben’s linear time by bringing the aging woman and the soldier together within a single haunted language.

time, be they age or war, just like radical intertextuality redeems Barth's exhaustion. One need fear no more because that very citation of *Cymbeline* renders the sad flesh of Clarissa and Septimus inseparable from Hamlet's.

Woolf's personal reflections on time and text extrapolate this very idea, demonstrating that this redemptive relationship with the past belongs not just to the moderns within the text but also to the modernist writer. Woolf's diary entries are littered with anxiety about the loss and flight of time, particularly in relation to her own writing. Yet she also notes how a "writing mood" can give her "the exalted sense of being above time and death," indicating that language lets her escape that flight (September 18, 1934). Her reassurance, "I shall be reading Greek when I'm old; old as the woman at the cottage door, whose hair might be a wig in a play, it's so white, so thick" links Greek literature to the idea of age as a malleable performance: simply referencing the text transforms elderly hair into an actor's wig, a parallel to Clarissa's memories and Shakespearean references (August 18, 1921). Indeed, Septimus mentions Grecian voices and shadows in conjunction with the same nature song representing Shakespeare. Nature becomes, for him, a Greek chorus providing commentary on and unifying his life as a theatrical production just as Shakespeare. In "Virginia Woolf on Reading Greek," Rebecca Nagel details the language's importance to Woolf, in particular as a way to connect directly with the texts of the ancients and experience history as a living phenomenon in which, Woolf says, "our minds are all threaded together-how any live mind today is of the very same stuff as Plato's and Euripides" (January 5, 1903). Greek functions, for her, much like Shakespeare's intertextual song for her characters, so it's unsurprising that Woolf goes on to express pity for "the poor who don't read Shakespeare" (August 18, 1921). They cannot access the melody that would suspend linear time by fusing them with the giants on which they stand. Woolf's own writings thus reflect more broadly the novel's use of intertext as embedding a cyclic time consciousness in which Greeks and Shakespeare speak through her. Unlike Genette, she does not

posit an authorial agency of harnessing old text to improved, new ends, but rather displays a sensibility more like Kristeva in which her craft is inseparable with what has been spoken before. A non-linear time representation and its redemptive mediation of self and cultural past is thus embedded not only in the novel and its characters, but in the author herself.

2.4 Disseminating the Ghost

To see texts as providing facile escapes from the burdens of linear time, however, reduces the nuance of Woolf's relationship to the cultural past. It was Mallarmé's reading of all the books, after all, that made his flesh sadly burdened by history, and *Mrs. Dalloway's* conflicted portrayal of literature's legacy indicates that fully fusing with the past may be emancipatory but can neither be induced by all intertexts nor be sustained in modern society.

Many of the texts listed by name in *Mrs. Dalloway* highlight linearity, indicating that intertexts do not automatically liberate the modern by fusing her with the past. When Clarissa reminisces on her days with her early lover Sally, saying she "read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour," she casts books themselves as linear time markers (33). Plato delineates breakfast; Shelley chimes like Big Ben for each hour. That all three authors are utopian writers underscores this idea: Morris' socialist and Marxist ideology surfaces in *News from Nowhere*, which presents a utopian society with no private property; Shelley espoused an idealism and non-violence doctrine that influenced the Pre-Raphaelite poets, Thoreau, and Gandhi—who would quote his *Masque of Anarchy*; Plato's *The Republic* outlined a model society. Thus all three authors express the unlimited *potential* of a society to move toward a utopia: a linear ascendent model of time. This idealism contrasts with the memoirs Clarissa reads as she ages, which display a "realistic" approach toward linear time's irrevocable arrival at death: the value judgment switches to descendent as she grows old. Septimus' readings include "Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilization* [by Henry Buckle], and Bernard Shaw" (83). Though the first summons the non-linear

model now associated with Shakespeare's haunted words, the other three rely on models of ascendent linearity: evolution, Buckle's characterization of human progress, and Shaw's posited utopia. So books alone do not always permit an escape from linear time; indeed their content often reiterates the dilemma. Shakespeare's case is unique because of the radical way he winds through the text, becoming no mere reference but rather a pervasive haunting that reminds the characters of their fusion with the past. The process of interweaving the self into text can rebel against the social model of linear time, but text may also bring one in accordance with that accepted linearity.

Shakespearean intertextuality, too, does not offers a perfect escape from the burdens of personal and historical linear time. The conflicted role played by the Bard comes into focus when Septimus says:

How Shakespeare loathed humanity—the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly! This was now revealed to Septimus; the message hidden in the beauty of words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair. Dante the same. Aeschylus (translated) the same. (86)

Shakespeare does speak a “secret signal” that runs through all of literature from Dante to Aeschylus, and the citation of the authors in reverse chronological order emphasizes how a current intertextual instance of the signal was both prophesied by its textual predecessors and is capable of rewriting them. From this possibility stems rejuvenation for the cultural theorist, aging woman, and war veteran alike. Yet reflecting on this lineage also induces the horror and tragedy of *Mrs.*

Dalloway, so the non-linear signal becomes “loathing, hatred, despair” as it brings the intertextual thinker to the brink of madness. The translated Aeschylus reiterates this more perverse portrayal of intertextuality: Septimus is one of those people Woolf pities for not reading Greek in the original, reiterating that not all hauntings can cause one to recognize how they are fused with giants. He

lacks primal access to some of what came before, and what he does access is a double edged sword: it emancipates him from modern burdens but also separates him from modern society.

Indeed, if half of Septimus' madness is his cyclic move into the past of WWI, the other half is the way he lives in a textual rather than referential world. Shakespeare may become a unifying song, a ghost, and an environmental nature whispering in Septimus' ear—but that same non-linear suspension cannot coexist with a Big-Ben world always calling him back to linear time. London society in the novel cannot make sense of a radical intertextuality, in which Septimus converses with Shakespeare, embodying and reinterpreting Hamlet—even if that very process seems to solve the burdens of modernity. Wyatt supports this point saying of Septimus, “When he goes mad he becomes little more than a compilation of literary fragments culled from his voracious reading” (440). What distinguishes Septimus from Clarissa is only that she can call herself back from *Cymbeline's* song to reality, that her own *Hamlet* rewriting “Remember my party to-night!” is so firmly located in the social structure of London that she will never fully lose herself in the expansive reveries of previous texts (47). In her diary, Woolf notes, “Somehow, extraordinary emotions possessed me [...] It is a general sense of the poetry of existence that overcomes me” attesting to the mixed blessing of fully fusing with the textual giants (June 13, 1923). The transcendent emotions may be radically connective, but Woolf must also “control [her] excitement—as if [she] were pushing through a screen”: she risks becoming as manic as the ghost-seeing Evans (June 13, 1923). Intertextuality may offer an escape from the linear progress of time by reminding the modern that she is inseparable fro giants, but its infinite interior expansion also makes one unfit to live in a Big Ben society. Solving the issue of disjointed time requires abandoning the ability to respond to someone saying “It's time.” So Woolf's time representation, as understood through the intertext, is ultimately conflicted. It presents a radical model to confront the

burdens of modernity both inside and outside the novel, but it also recognizes the limitations of that solution given the current social conditions.

Mrs. Dalloway embeds, nonetheless, a relatively affirming interpretation of the intertext as a connective force that ameliorates the burdens of modernity, but the specter of a constraining society would rise more prominently in the post-modernist preoccupation with temporality and history. Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine*, for instance, offers a compelling point of extension on the Hamlet-Woolf study, for it interrogates how the historical weight of communism affects the intertext's mediation between present and past. Müller's text is ripe for analysis using this new approach toward intertextuality as revealing a specific representation of time. Potential points of interest include the mechanization of Hamlet; the internalization of Big Ben into a time bomb; and the expansion of the Ghost-Hamlet conflict into both an autobiographical issue and question of Communist Ideology haunting the artist—the later idea taken up by Jacques Derrida's "hauntology" in *The Specter of Marx*.

If moderns like Woolf confront the giants' burdens by haunting us so radically that we fuse with them, we have to wonder how postmodern distance, irony, meta-fiction, late capitalism, and engagement with communism warps the burdens of time—and the solutions. Continuing to map the (post)modern relationship between intertext and time offers potentially original approaches to fields outside of literature like sociology, psychology, and medicine, for it presents frameworks for confronting grief and mortality, trauma and madness. The analytic tool I have outlined asks, ultimately, how we deal with personal histories and collective tragedies, with cultural legacies and literary heritage, with that simple, overwhelming fact that there is never enough time.

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