

# Peculiarly Festooned with Prepositions: Aspects of Liminality in *Mrs Dalloway*<sup>1</sup>

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## **Summary**

In this essay, Turner's conceptual framework of social analysis – involving the ideas of liminality, the hierarchy system and *communitas* – has been employed to direct attention onto the dominant meaning system in *Mrs Dalloway*, complicit as it is with political power, moral value, private ownership, definitions of mental health and the construction of gender. London society of 1923 – it is contended – is a single organism with effective mechanisms for maintenance and the expulsion of pathological components. The aim of this anthropological approach to the text is to foreground the singularity of the social corpus, one in which characters are to be seen as elements, effects and agents of conformity or disruption rather than individuals with a high degree of volition and independence. The text is thus viewed as an instance of the enactment of social drama.

## **Opsomming**

In hierdie artikel word Turner se konseptuele raamwerk van sosiale analise – wat die idees van liminaliteit, die hiërargiestelsel en *communitas* behels – aangewend om die aandag te vestig op die dominante betekenisstelsel in *Mrs Dalloway*, medepligtig soos die roman is aan politieke mag, private besitreg, definisies van geestesgesondheid en die konstruksie van geslag. Die Londense samelewing van 1923 – dit word aangevoer – is 'n enkele organisme met effektiewe meganismes vir die onderhoud en verdrywing van patologiese komponente. Die doel van hierdie antropologiese benadering tot die teks is om die merkwaardigheid van die sosiale korpus op die voorgrond te plaas, 'n korpus waarin die karakters gesien moet word as elemente, effekte en agente van konformiteit of disrupsie, eerder as individue met 'n hoë graad van wilskrag en onafhanklikheid. Die teks word dus beskou as 'n voorbeeld van die afspeel van sosiale drama.

It is the interior specificity or the individual idiosyncrasy of the characters Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith that most often constitute the central focus in studies of *Mrs Dalloway*. Virginia Woolf's tunnelling process creates these two compellingly detailed and complex instances of individuation. The present study will approach Clarissa and Septimus as aspects of cultural context and process, thus emphasising the superordinate role of “the

cultural unconscious” (Rossi 1974) or deep-structure cultural operations. The frame or ordering principle of this study will be aspects of cultural anthropology, particularly Victor Turner’s notions of cultural order, liminality and *communitas*. In this sense, Clarissa and Septimus become players in a social drama, the form and process of which will be given some attention.

Turner has made substantial contributions to the study of culture, particularly to the ways in which cultures respond to crisis or negotiate change. Implicit in Turner’s work, following Durkheim and Levi-Strauss, is that the world of social action, of community in process, is informed and conditioned by a structure of norms and values, rituals and symbols. Turner states:

This community is the repository of the whole gamut of the culture’s values, norms, attitudes, sentiments, and relationships. Its representatives in the specific rites – and these may vary from ritual to ritual – represent the generic authority of tradition. In tribal societies, too, speech is not merely communication but also power and wisdom.

(Turner 1977: 103)

Liminality is the name Turner borrows from Arnold van Gennep and applies to states of transition, thresholds and *rites de passage*. This phase “comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a ‘state’), or from both” (Turner 1977: 102). Liminal individuals are absented from “society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” or “less” (p. 96). Such individuals experience a state of *communitas*, defined by its difference from the status system: homogeneity over heterogeneity, community over hierarchy, equality over inequality, absence of status over status, absence of property over property, sacredness over secularity, absence of rank over distinctions of rank, acceptance of pain and suffering rather than avoidance of pain and suffering, sacred instruction rather than technical knowledge. A state of *communitas* is typified by a sense of deep connection to all humans (even all living things) and visionary understanding beyond the confines of authorised “social” knowledge. Turner explains how the original tribal episodes of liminality become institutionalised in complex industrial societies:

The reader will have noticed immediately that many of these properties constitute what we think of as characteristics of the religious life in the Christian tradition. Undoubtedly, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews would number many of them among their religious characteristics, too. What appears to have happened is that with the increasing specialization of society and culture, with

progressive complexity in the social division of labour, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities “betwixt and between” defined states of culture and society has become itself an institutionalised state. But traces of the *passage* quality of the religious life remain in such formulations as: “The Christian is a stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveller, with no place to rest his head”. Transition here has become a permanent condition.

(Turner 1977: 107)

Of course, liminality can exist only because of its resistance to, and exclusion from, social structure and cultural meaning. Liminality comes into being precisely as a radical alterity and is thus an effect of culture, always to be viewed in its oppositional relation to the dominant. *Communitas* is “spontaneous and self-generating”, “an indispensable human requirement” (Turner 1974: 243).

Clarissa Dalloway in many respects represents dominant culture (although I will indicate that her role in this social drama exceeds, even contradicts, her elevated position). She chooses Richard over Peter as a spouse, in large part because he represents stability, status, social position and protection. A considerable part of Clarissa’s identity, by the time she is fifty-three, is lodged in her being Richard’s wife:

She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway, not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway.

(MD, 13)

She defines herself here by her socially inscribed relationship, and is indistinguishable from “the rest of them”. In return for protection and status, she fiercely upholds the dominant moral system: when informed, by Sally, that a gentleman had married his housemaid, and that this woman had had a baby before the marriage, Clarissa responds, “Oh, I shall never be able to speak to her again!” (MD: 66). Clarissa has become an adjunct to propriety and conformity: Richard Dalloway is a pure – and purely dull – expression of the socially dominant, thereby conforming in every way to the social code:

In all this there was a great deal of Dalloway; a great deal of the public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit, which had grown on her, as it tends to do. With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes – one of the tragedies of married life.

(MD, 85-86)

Implicit in this study is that the correlation between Turner's work on social dominance and *Mrs Dalloway* is not coincidental: Virginia Woolf is acutely aware, in *Mrs Dalloway*, of the symbolic system of norms, protocols and hierarchy that controls English society in 1923, replicating itself and exterminating opposition by means of its agents.

If Richard Dalloway is one of the more elevated agents of the dominant code, then Hugh Whitbread is one of its lap dogs: Peter Walsh says of Hugh, "He blacked the King's boots, or counted bottles at Windsor ..." (MD, 209) and "Hugh had the most sublime respect for the British aristocracy of any human he had ever come across" (MD, 81), whereas Sally Seton tells Hugh "that he represented all that was most detestable in British middle-class life" (MD, 81). And Woolf sums him up as follows:

He did not go deeply. He brushed surfaces; the dead languages, the living, life in Constantinople, Paris, Rome; riding, shooting, tennis it had been once. The malicious asserted that he now kept guard at Buckingham Palace, dressed in silk stockings and knee-breeches, over what nobody knew. But he did it extremely efficiently. He had been afloat on the cream of English society for fifty-five years.

(MD, 114)

Woolf presents Hugh Whitbread as no more or less than a small, insignificant cog in the social machine, protecting hierarchy and privilege.<sup>2</sup> But if Hugh is a figure whose reverence and support for the social order is worthy only of dismissive contempt, not all social agents are as inconsequential. Woolf draws attention to the foot soldiers of the social order in the following passage:

Boys in uniform, carrying guns, marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England.

(MD, 57)

Here is blind, mindless obedience – droves of young men grateful for the opportunity to lay down their lives, not for England, but for the protection of the social order – of hierarchy and privilege. And Sir William Bradshaw represents social agency at its most cruel, efficient and sinister. But before examining his socially regulative role, it is appropriate to visit the presentation of liminality in *Mrs Dalloway*.

The first time we meet Septimus, he is presented as a visionary, one who attempts to read languages beyond the socially constructed system of meaning:

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to Me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet: but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him, in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness, one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signalling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty.

(MD, 25)

Septimus is outside the loop of meaning, seeking (in a shamanistic, liminal fashion) to read the “smoke words”. His quest is to uncover reality, a system of meaning beyond – and untainted by – culture and social structure. Nature precedes culture, and it is in the natural world that Septimus begins to read ultimate meaning:

But they beckoned; leaves were alive, trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement .... All taken together meant the birth of a new religion.

(MD, 26)

In *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, Turner offers the following summary account of the differences between structure and the liminal experience of *communitas*:

Implicitly or explicitly, in societies at all levels of complexity, a contrast is posited between the notion of society as a differentiated, segmented system of structural positions (which may or may not be arranged in a hierarchy) and society as a homogenous, undifferentiated *whole*. The first model approximates to the preliminary picture I have presented of “social structure”. Here the units are statuses and roles, not concrete human individuals. The individual is segmentalized into roles which he plays. Here the unit is what Radcliffe-Brown has called the *persona*, the role-mask, not the unique individual. The second model, *communitas*, often appears culturally in the guise of an Edenic, paradisiacal, utopian, or millennial state of affairs, to the attainment of which religious or political action, personal or collective, should be directed.

(Turner 1974: 237-238)

Septimus is devoid of a role-mask. Before going off to war, he occupied a structural position within the world of work, one in which he was valued highly. The experience of war dislocates Septimus, dislodging his mind from satisfied and satisfying participation in socially sanctioned employment. His mind and attention are now deployed outside of the system of hierarchy; he seeks the “unseen” in order to propose a new dispensation for hierarchy:

Look, the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society ...

(MD, 29)

Septimus takes up a position outside of conventional meaning. He no longer functions as an effect within the meaning-system (a person whose meanings are made possible by the operating system comprising norms, imperatives, axioms, horizons) but becomes generative of meaning, originating significance rather than replicating it. When he passes people in the street, he acts as an omniscient observer: “He knew all their thoughts, he said; he knew everything. He knew the meaning of the world, he said” (MD, 74). His role becomes nothing short of the prophetic; his purpose is now to inaugurate a new age of meaning, a new human vision:

He, Septimus, was alone, calling forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning, which now at last, after all the toils of civilization – Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin, and now himself – was to be given whole to .... “To whom?” he asked aloud, “To the Prime Minister”, the voices which rustled above his head replied. The supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first, that trees are alive; next, there is no crime; next, love, universal love, he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so deep they were, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them for ever.

(MD, 75-76)

The role he now assumes, of religious prophet, coincides strongly with the description of *communitas* offered by Turner (quoted above) on page 107 of *The Ritual Process*. Septimus is the weary pilgrim, one whose abstention from the world of hierarchy and convention precipitates the glorious understanding of universal love, the common denominator of ecstatic revelation in almost all religions. From a position outside of the loop of contained meaning, he recasts the fundamentals of the meaning-system. Anthropologically, one might propose that Septimus functions as a foil to the social contract, which operates to protect individual rights, properties and

position. The social contract, manifesting as a system of co-operation, serves principally to entrench difference in status and wealth, thereby promoting differentiation, self-oriented labour and inequality. Septimus's foil to this system is to propose instead a social unity based on love and not competition, one in which neither wealth nor status requires protection precisely because all are equal and all share equally. This is exactly the meaning of *communitas*, an Edenic proposal – fundamental to most religions – that hovers outside of structured social meaning, at once offering to release society from suffering and threatening to subvert (even overthrow) the prevailing social contract. The doctrine of universal love thus acts as an “anti-thesis” to the terms of the social contract, balancing materiality with transcendence, and offering redemption. Thus, *communitas* is meaning beyond structure, structure un-bundled, the dream of the final and perfect unity of the family of man. Turner identifies the necessity of moments and places of *communitas* (liminal events and liminal communities) as the inevitable antagonist to hierarchical power, the encapsulation of the capacity of the species to yearn for return – to an imagined perfect origin in the garden of Eden – or transcendence. The natural world is perceived afresh as a place of wonder and delight, in Septimus's “new religion”:

[T]o watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite delight. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them ...

(MD, 77)

Having rid himself of the norms and cultural axioms that constitute the prevailing system of knowledge, Septimus is able to “cleanse” his capacity to see. Perception that is no longer constrained by the social order permits a revision of the natural world, one that expresses the language of transcendence. For Septimus, the transition into this liminal state of visionary perception and understanding is nothing less than having been reborn: “I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still, he begged ...” (MD, 77). The process of transition into liminal being is often rendered, in mystical religious texts, as a death and rebirth: the image of the phoenix, in hermetic writings, indicates that enlightenment necessarily involves the death of the socially constituted self. Hermetic transcendence requires the complete annihilation of the social self, because enlightenment is a turning away from social knowledge. Septimus becomes the liminal agent within Georgian society.<sup>3</sup>

The redemptive vision (“No crime; love; he repeated, fumbling for his card and pencil” (MD, 76)) of the liminal prophet is the only real threat to the

hierarchical system, and is nothing less than a deep-structure rebellion. As he tinkers with the foundations of meaning, Septimus at times loses the thread of the anti-thesis and finds himself bereft of meaning altogether: “It might be possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window, as they left Newhaven; it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning” (MD, 98). Either as anti-thesis or as absence of thesis, Septimus poses a profound threat to meaning-as-usual. Society, however, has mechanisms for dealing with corrosive liminality. In a metaphor of disease and the maintenance of order in the human body, Turner describes the response to liminal acts or individuals as follows:

Order is threatened; reordering courses of action, the “antibodies” of the group, are produced in response to that group’s contact with a socio-cultural “antigen”, interpreted by the representatives of the group’s ideal solidarity and continuity as the “toxins” of particular interest and ambition.

(Turner 1987: 104)

If Septimus is the antigen, then Dr Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw are the antibodies whose function is to protect the hierarchical system. Septimus soon becomes aware, in his liminal condition, of the dangers of being a visionary:

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

(MD, 102)

Septimus understands clearly that Holmes is not a malign individual but a social agent, acting on behalf of “human nature” to expel antigens. It is the entire organism – the social whole – that creates and sanctions Holmes’s social-regulatory function. Holmes functions on behalf of society; he expresses its will and protects its interests: “Dr Holmes seemed to stand for something horrible to [Septimus]. “Human nature”, [Septimus] called him” (MD, 155). Thus, Septimus is entirely reasonable when he concludes that his own death is in the interests of maintaining social order: “So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes” (MD, 102). Septimus is faced with the unhappy realisation that the role of the prophet is also the role of the martyr, and that society might close ranks against his liberating vision:



For the truth is (let her ignore it) that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen.

(MD, 99)

No sooner has Septimus taken on the role of prophet, than he is forced into the role of fugitive: "Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you" (MD, 108). At one point towards the end of his life, Septimus asks himself, "Why, then, rage and prophesy? Why fly scourged and outcast?" (MD, 158).

*Mrs Dalloway* is less a tale of individuals, individual pathology and individual choice, than of a social drama being played out. Characters perform roles rather than express personal idiosyncrasy. Woolf goes to great lengths to indicate that while Sir William Bradshaw is cruel, odious and supremely sinister, he is a social agent rather than a self-created pocket of malignity. Bradshaw is the regulator, operating on behalf of "England":

Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion.

(MD, 110)

The prosperity of England (the system of hierarchy and individual rights to capital and property) depends in part on its capacity to spot, and to eliminate, social antigens. Bradshaw ensures that the "unfit" (those threatening the health of the system) are unable to "propagate their views" (or spread the viral infection of the meaning system). As in medicine, the antigen is first isolated then destroyed. It is no coincidence that Bradshaw is a doctor – his field of operation is the social body, the hierarchical corpus. Lunacy is the term designating those who attempt to destabilise the system of meaning, and its attendant reason, and is thus the incarnation of "unreason". Reason is co-opted, commandeered, enlisted to increase the marginalisation of the socially dis-ruptive. This is a ploy, a sleight of hand, a sneaky trick; Septimus is entirely capable of reason, for example, when he realises that Holmes and Bradshaw are social agents delegated to their function by the social whole. But for the effective containment of the dangerous antigen, the category of reason must be seen to be on the side of society. By designating the antigen as lunatic, the whole process of preventing the spread of the disease – by incarceration – can be shown as an act of mercy, of medical care and responsibility. Not only does the species hunt in packs; when the fallen are

hunted down, the act is marketed as a medical procedure undertaken by healers. What is at stake here is that the mechanism of social control is rendered as care for individual illness. By focusing on the individual and on illness, the social agents are able to deflect attention from the very social and repressive nature of the act.

Proportion and conversion are the sister concepts employed by Bradshaw to describe the operations he performs.

But Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged ... in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace.

(MD, 110-111)

Proportion is the perfect term of the middle ground: it denotes balance, proper relation of the parts, harmony. The concept of proportion is difficult to fault: it is in accord with nature, with reason, with good sense, and with beauty. Proportion is marshalled by Bradshaw to designate “health”. Bradshaw is the social doctor; the health that he lovingly restores is Proportion, which is nothing more or less than the system of meaning and value operative in hierarchical society. Conversion refers to the mechanism whereby proportion – conformity to the social order – is effected: “But conversion, fastidious Goddess, loves blood better than brick, and feasts most subtly on the human will” (MD, 111). Conversion is the term given to the surrender of the individual to prevailing meanings and values; conversion is the surrender of communitas to hierarchy, of liminality to normality. And to cut a long story short, this system of social regulation and the fancy metaphors in which it presents itself (in terms of health, medical care and proportion) results in the raw exercise of power. Septimus comes to this awful realisation shortly before taking his own life:

So he was in their power! Holmes and Bradshaw were on him! The brute with the red nostrils was snuffing into every secret Place! “Must” it could say!

(MD, 163)

The brute is given a mandate by society to say “Must”. If the integrity of the system of hierarchy is threatened, then the social agents have the authority to eliminate the threat.

*Mrs Dalloway*, however, consists of more than the binary struggle of the norm and the liminal: there is Clarissa. She exists at the top of the food-chain; she has status, money and property, and among the guests at her party are

people of power, title and privilege, including the Prime Minister. Clarissa is proud to have the Prime Minister in her house because, as Woolf tells us, he is the epitome of hierarchy, the essence of English society:

Nobody looked at him. They just went on talking, yet it was perfectly plain that they all knew, felt to the marrow of their bones, this majesty passing; this symbol of what they all stood for, English society. Old Lady Bruton, and she looked very fine too, very stalwart in her lace, swam up, and they withdrew into a little room which at once became spied upon, guarded, and a sort of stir and rustle rippled through everyone openly: the Prime Minister!

(MD, 190)

In the hierarchy, Clarissa is so close to the top that she reaps all of the rewards and none of the punishments of the system of private ownership and inequality. There is thus no reason for Clarissa to be any different in attitude to, say, her own husband. We know that she chose Richard over Peter at least in part because Richard would provide status, money and property. Moreover, we know that Clarissa is timid, wishing to hide within convention rather than to question it: “She had always, even as a girl, a sort of timidity, which in middle age becomes conventionality” (MD, 55). Peter identifies this socially complicit tendency in Clarissa when he says, “The obvious thing to say of her was that she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on in the world ...” (MD, 85). Yet, early in the novel, it is clear that Clarissa exists uneasily within dominant meaning and value: “She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone ...” (MD, 11). One might expect that the hierarchy system – which works so well to Clarissa’s advantage – should make her feel entirely at home, but she is plagued by a sense of dislocation. There is a moment towards the end of the novel when Clarissa has a moment of pure *communitas*, similar to the visionary states entered by Septimus:

But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not here, here, here; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or anyone, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter – even trees, or barns.

(MD, 169)

Singular identity is a cornerstone of the hierarchy system: the very definition of status involves separation, difference and distinctions of rank. Clarissa

experiences a sense of the extension of her being into all that surrounds her, thereby eliminating difference. While she does not have Septimus's revelation of universal love – the essence of *communitas* – Clarissa's experience is of the same type if not the same intensity. In the final pages of the novel, it becomes abundantly clear that Clarissa is, and has been, a kind of prophet in the closet, a liminal creature who nevertheless has an acute awareness of the dangers of seeking *communitas* in a world of hierarchy: "she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (MD, 11). When she hears of the death of "this young man" (Septimus), she has two strong responses. The first is to identify Bradshaw as the "obscurely evil" agent of the social order:

Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage – forcing your soul, that was it .... Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that ...

(MD, 204)

Clarissa's second revelation is that she seems to know, immediately and completely, the circumstances and significance of Septimus's death. Her party is the perfect expression of the hierarchy system, and from this she quietly withdraws, to contemplate death:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

(MD, 204)

With no evidence whatsoever, Clarissa intuits the meaning of the suicide: death defies the hierarchy system, because it is the attempt to achieve the ultimate communication with other beings that defines *communitas*. In the tradition of religious mystics, Clarissa identifies this communion as a religious goal, the mystical centre. The world of the living is governed by separation, difference and inequality, whereas in death, there is "an embrace", the annihilation of distinctions of rank. Clarissa herself is the embodiment of the thesis of hierarchy and the anti-thesis of *communitas*; she lives the contradiction of submitting to the former while yearning for the latter. *Communitas* is the hidden subtext of her life, a dream of supreme connection and wholeness carefully concealed because it is socially seditious. Clarissa is

ultimately pleased by the young man's suicide, because it is a momentary expression of mystical achievement:

But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living.

(MD, 206)

Clarissa may be culpable of a timidity that renders her subject to the social order, but she remains a rebel in hiding, resentful of the social contract and full of loathing for its agents.

The aim of this essay has been to indicate that Woolf's focus in *Mrs Dalloway* is not on individual pathology, individual action and individual responsibility, but on Georgian society as a single living whole, within which different roles are enacted by agents of conformity or disruption. The drama that unfolds is a representation of health and disease in the social corpus, of a body fighting infection.

## Notes

1. The first part of the title is borrowed from Victor Turner. The opening lines of his essay, "Rokujo's Jealousy: Liminality and the Performative Genres" read,

Members of our species, *homo sapiens*, are peculiarly festooned with prepositions, with relational and functional connectives. If we are, visibly, islands, we are genetically and culturally linked by ties of love and hate, by the pleasure-bond, by the pain-bond, by the duty chain, by noblesse oblige, or by innate or induced needs for dominance or submission. We are for, against, with, towards, above, below, within, outside, or without one another.

(Turner 1987: 99-122)

2. Even the young, innocent and naive Elizabeth Dalloway does not escape judgement for her complicity in the social order. Woolf says of her future, "She might own a thousand acres and have people under her. She would go and see them in their cottages" (MD, 151). The tone here is ambiguous in that Elizabeth might be granted some measure of redemption by her author, for taking the trouble to care for the underclass but, if this is the case, it is rather a back-handed compliment.
3. Incidentally, another famous liminal character emanating from the fringes of the "Bloomsbury Group" is Professor Narayan Godbole, in E.M.Forster's *A Passage to India* [1924]1970. When questioned about the crime committed on

Adela Quested in the Marabar Caves, he finally asserts that “[i]t was committed by no-one”, an utterance remarkably similar to the declaration by Septimus, in the above quotation, that “there is no crime” (MD, 75). The concept of crime entails a concept of individual responsibility and thus punishment, all of which are antithetical to the indivisible unity entailed in *communitas* and universal love.

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