



The Patriarchal Construction and Its Impact on Personal Identity in Virginia Woolf Mrs Dalloway

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Abstract. This study examines the influence of structural patriarchy on personal identity formation and psychological distress in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway through the character of Septimus Warren Smith. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the research analyzes narrative passages, dialogues, and character experiences using Sylvia Walby's theory of structural patriarchy. The findings reveal that patriarchal structures operate through interconnected cultural and institutional mechanisms that regulate masculinity and suppress emotional vulnerability. Septimus internalizes dominant masculine ideals that equate strength with emotional restraint, leading him to repress grief and trauma following his wartime experiences. His psychological suffering is further intensified by medical authorities, particularly Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw, whose concepts of Proportion and Conversion function as instruments of social conformity rather than genuine care. These institutional interventions marginalize Septimus's experiences, diminish his personal agency, and accelerate the fragmentation of his identity. Ultimately, his suicide emerges as the tragic consequence of a prolonged conflict between individual subjectivity and patriarchal power. The study concludes that Woolf critiques a social system that prioritizes conformity, productivity, and masculine ideals over empathy and psychological well-being, demonstrating how patriarchy can adversely affect both women and men.

Keywords: Masculinity; Personal Identity; Psychological Distress; Septimus Warren Smith; Structural Patriarchy.

1. INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, gender roles subtly yet powerfully dictate how individuals are expected to behave, a dynamic that is frequently visible within fundamental family structures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2015). For instance, behavioral distinctions between siblings or parental expectations are often established early on; daughters might be expected to naturally manage domestic responsibilities, while sons are conditioned to be providers and remain emotionally resilient (Gough, 2018). These societal scripts often manifest differently depending on the social environment. In rural communities, traditional patriarchal values tend to dictate clear, rigid boundaries between masculine and feminine duties, where men are strictly seen as the stoic head of the household and women as primary caretakers. In contrast, urban areas, driven by modern lifestyles and diverse professional environments, appear to offer more flexibility. However, this flexibility is often an illusion; women in cities who pursue careers are still frequently questioned about their commitment to family, while urban men facing intense modern workplace stress are still expected to maintain a strong, emotionless facade (Vandello & Bosson, 2016). Regardless of these geographical and modern differences, deeply

ingrained social expectations persistently shape personal identity and emotional expression across society.

The persistence of these expectations is also reflected in global mental health patterns. Various international reports indicate that suicide rates among men remain higher than among women in many countries, a phenomenon often associated with rigid norms of masculinity that discourage emotional expression and help-seeking behavior (Cleary, 2019). At the same time, research shows that women who participate in the workforce frequently continue to bear a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities, illustrating how traditional gender divisions persist even in modern societies. These patterns demonstrate that although opportunities for participation in public and professional life have expanded, social structures continue to influence how individuals experience their roles and responsibilities (Giddens, 2013). Understanding these dynamics is crucial because prolonged social pressure can affect not only social behavior but also psychological well being, identity development, and interpersonal relationships.

Social expectations surrounding masculinity often discourage men from expressing emotional vulnerability. In many societies, men are expected to remain strong, rational, and emotionally controlled, which creates an environment where psychological struggles are frequently suppressed rather than openly communicated (Kupers, 2015). Patriarchal social structures contribute to the formation of these expectations by constructing ideals of masculinity that emphasize strength, authority, and emotional restraint. Consequently, many men internalize emotional distress and avoid seeking psychological support, even when experiencing severe mental pressure (Seidler et al., 2016). Contemporary studies also indicate that rigid gender norms can contribute to the higher prevalence of psychological distress and suicide among men in various parts of the world, particularly when individuals feel unable to fulfil socially constructed expectations of masculinity (Prinsloo, 2021). In this context, emotional suffering is often interpreted as a personal weakness rather than a response to broader social pressures.

A similar pattern of psychological pressure can also be observed in contemporary societies, particularly in discussions surrounding male suicide and mental health. For instance, South Korea has consistently reported one of the highest suicide rates among developed countries. Scholars often associate this phenomenon with intense social pressure, rigid expectations of male success, and cultural stigma surrounding emotional vulnerability and mental health treatment (Scull, 2015). In societies where masculinity is closely associated with

emotional restraint, men are frequently discouraged from expressing psychological distress or seeking professional help. As a result, many individuals internalize their emotional struggles, which may lead to severe psychological isolation. This condition reflects the broader consequences of patriarchal expectations that equate masculinity with strength and emotional control, a situation that closely parallels the experiences of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*, whose trauma and emotional suffering remain largely misunderstood by society around him.

Literary works often serve as a medium for exploring psychological and social tensions that are difficult to articulate directly in real life (Felski, 2015). Modernist literature, in particular, frequently focuses on the complexity of human consciousness and the fragmented nature of modern identity (Dawson, 2020). One notable example is *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, which portrays the experiences of individuals living in post-World War I British society. Among the characters presented in the narrative, Septimus Warren Smith represents a war veteran who suffers from severe psychological trauma after experiencing the horrors of war. His condition reflects the difficulties faced by individuals who struggle to reconcile their personal experiences with societal expectations. In a society that values rationality, emotional restraint, and masculine strength, Septimus' psychological distress is often misunderstood or dismissed.

Previous studies on *Mrs. Dalloway* have primarily focused on female subjectivity, trauma, and the psychological consequences of war (DeMeester, 2018; Snaith, 2015). Feminist scholars have examined Woolf's critique of gender inequality and the restrictions imposed upon women in early twentieth-century British society, while trauma-oriented studies have analyzed Septimus Warren Smith's psychological breakdown as a consequence of his wartime experiences (Leese, 2017; Meyer, 2019). Although these studies provide valuable insights into gender oppression and psychological trauma, they tend to examine these issues separately. Limited attention has been given to how patriarchal structures and dominant norms of masculinity contribute to the psychological struggles experienced by male characters (Lomas, 2018). Therefore, the writer applies Sylvia Walby's theory of structural patriarchy to examine how patriarchal institutions shape Septimus Warren Smith's identity and intensify his psychological distress in *Mrs. Dalloway*. This limitation indicates the need for a broader perspective that considers patriarchy as a structural system shaping both gender identity and psychological experience (Pleck, 2017).

Drawing on the concept of structural patriarchy proposed by Sylvia Walby, patriarchy can be understood as an interconnected system operating through institutions such as the

household, the workplace, cultural norms, and state authority (Walby, 1990; Walby, 2015). These structures influence not only the roles assigned to women but also the expectations placed upon men (Hunnicut, 2019). From this perspective, the psychological struggle experienced by Septimus Warren Smith can be interpreted as a reflection of the tension between individual trauma and societal expectations of masculinity. By examining how patriarchal social structures shape Septimus' experiences in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the writer aims to provide a deeper understanding of how literary narratives represent the relationship between gender norms, mental health, and personal identity.

2. THEORITICAL REVIEW

Structural Patriarchy Theory

Patriarchy refers to a social system that places men in dominant positions within various spheres of life, including the family, culture, economy, and state institutions. According to Sylvia Walby, patriarchy operates not only through interpersonal relationships between men and women but also through interconnected social structures that sustain unequal power relations (Walby, 1990). Walby identifies several major structures of patriarchy, including the household, paid employment, the state, violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. Through these structures, society establishes norms and values that define gender roles and regulate individual behavior according to prevailing social expectations. Consequently, patriarchy functions as a systemic mechanism that shapes both social relations and individual experiences.

From the perspective of structural patriarchy, oppression is not limited to women but can also affect men who fail to conform to dominant masculine ideals. Patriarchal systems construct standards that require men to be strong, rational, productive, and emotionally restrained. Individuals who are unable to meet these expectations often face social marginalization and psychological pressure (Hunnicut, 2019). Furthermore, patriarchal institutions reinforce these expectations by rewarding conformity and discouraging vulnerability. Therefore, structural patriarchy theory provides an important framework for understanding how social institutions and cultural norms influence identity formation and mental well-being, particularly in literary representations of masculinity and psychological distress.

Masculinity and Personal Identity

Masculinity is a social construct that refers to a set of characteristics, behaviors, and values considered appropriate for men within a particular society. According to R. W. Connell and Messerschmidt (2015), the concept of hegemonic masculinity describes the dominant form

of masculinity that emphasizes strength, independence, competitiveness, and emotional control. These ideals are continuously reproduced through family upbringing, education, media representation, and social institutions, creating expectations that men must fulfill to gain social acceptance. As a result, emotional vulnerability is often viewed as incompatible with masculine identity, leading many men to suppress their feelings and personal struggles.

Personal identity, meanwhile, refers to an individual's understanding of who they are, which develops through interactions between personal experiences and social environments (Branje, 2022). Identity formation is influenced by cultural values, social relationships, and gender expectations imposed by society. When personal experiences conflict with socially prescribed gender roles, individuals may experience identity tension and psychological distress. Seidler et al. (2016) argue that men who strongly adhere to traditional masculine norms are less likely to express emotions or seek psychological support, increasing the risk of emotional isolation and mental health problems. Thus, masculinity plays a significant role in shaping both personal identity and psychological well-being.

Literature, Psychological Trauma, and Mental Health

Literature serves as a medium through which complex psychological experiences and social conflicts can be explored and represented. According to Felski (2015), literary works provide valuable insights into human experiences by reflecting cultural, historical, and emotional realities. Modernist literature, in particular, frequently focuses on the inner consciousness of characters, emphasizing themes such as trauma, alienation, and identity fragmentation. Through narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness, authors can portray the psychological struggles of individuals while simultaneously critiquing the social structures that shape those experiences.

Psychological trauma refers to an emotional response resulting from deeply distressing experiences such as war, loss, violence, or prolonged social pressure (Leese, 2017). When trauma is ignored or invalidated by society, it may develop into more severe psychological conditions, including depression, anxiety, and social isolation. Research has shown that traditional masculine norms often discourage emotional expression and help-seeking behavior, making it more difficult for men to cope with psychological suffering (Cleary, 2019). Consequently, literary representations of trauma provide an important lens for examining the relationship between social expectations, identity formation, and mental health. Through such representations, literature highlights the human consequences of rigid gender norms and institutional pressures.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the representation of patriarchal structures and their influence on the formation of personal identity in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. A qualitative approach is appropriate for literary research because it enables scholars to explore and interpret complex social and cultural phenomena presented in narrative texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this method, the writer can examine how social norms, gender expectations, and institutional influences are reflected through characters and narrative events. Qualitative research allows the writer to gain a deeper understanding of meaning and context within literary works, particularly when analyzing social issues embedded in the narrative. In addition, the method supports close reading of the text, allowing the writer to analyze narrative elements such as characterization, dialogue, and internal reflection in order to reveal broader social meanings within the story (Brummett, 2018).

To answer the research objectives, the writer identifies and analyses narrative data that reflect the operation of patriarchal structures and their influence on the characters' personal identities. The data are collected by selecting relevant passages, dialogues, and narrative descriptions from the novel that illustrate gender roles, social expectations, and institutional authority. The analysis focuses on how these elements shape the characters' experiences and internal conflicts. The structural theory of patriarchy proposed by Sylvia Walby is used as the main theoretical framework to interpret the data (Walby, 1990). Walby explains that patriarchy operates through several interconnected social structures that influence power relations and gender roles in society (Walby, 2015). Furthermore, the analysis is conducted through interpretative reading by connecting textual evidence with theoretical perspectives to produce a deeper explanation of the social meanings embedded in the narrative. This process reflects abductive reasoning, which allows the writer to link empirical observations from the text with relevant theoretical concepts in order to develop a comprehensive interpretation (Klag & Langley, 2013).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes the experiences of Septimus Warren Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* through Sylvia Walby's theory of structural patriarchy. The study examines how patriarchal structures operate through cultural norms and institutional authority, particularly in shaping expectations of masculinity and regulating emotional expression. The findings reveal that patriarchal structures operate through interconnected cultural and

institutional mechanisms that regulate masculine identity and marginalize emotional vulnerability. These mechanisms are represented through medical discourse, institutional authority, and the systematic erosion of individual agency experienced by Septimus Warren Smith.. The first explores the manifestation of patriarchal authority through medical discourse represented by Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw. The second examines how institutional interventions intensify Septimus' psychological distress and identity fragmentation. The final part discusses the conflict between individual agency and structural power, culminating in Septimus' suicide as a response to overwhelming social and institutional pressures.

Patriarchal Institutions and the Regulation of Masculinity

To understand the psychological deterioration experienced by Septimus Warren Smith, it is necessary to examine how patriarchal structures regulate masculine identity long before institutional intervention occurs. According to Walby (1990), patriarchy operates through interconnected social structures that shape gendered expectations and maintain social order. These expectations define masculinity through characteristics such as rationality, emotional restraint, courage, and productivity. Men who fail to embody these ideals are often perceived as weak or socially inadequate. In this regard, Septimus's psychological collapse cannot be understood solely as the result of war trauma. Rather, his suffering is intensified by a patriarchal system that provides little space for emotional vulnerability and continuously pressures men to conform to rigid masculine standards.

The influence of these expectations can already be observed in Septimus's response to the death of Evans during the war. Reflecting on the loss of his closest companion, Woolf writes, “Evans was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy. Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably” (Woolf, 1925, p. 62). At first glance, this reaction appears to demonstrate emotional strength and maturity. However, a closer reading reveals that Septimus evaluates his response according to the dominant masculine ideals of his society. Instead of allowing himself to grieve, he takes pride in his inability to express emotion. The phrase “congratulated himself” suggests that emotional suppression is perceived as an achievement rather than a warning sign of psychological distress. Woolf therefore exposes the extent to which patriarchal values have been internalized by Septimus himself. He does not merely obey external expectations; he actively disciplines his own emotions according to the standards of masculinity he has learned to admire.

This internalization of masculine ideals reflects what Seidler et al. (2016) identify as one of the central features of traditional masculinity. Men are often socialized to perceive

emotional expression as a threat to their masculine identity. Consequently, vulnerability becomes associated with weakness, while emotional restraint is celebrated as evidence of strength and self-control. Such expectations are particularly powerful within military environments, where courage and stoicism are regarded as essential masculine virtues. As a soldier, Septimus is encouraged to suppress grief in order to perform the role expected of him by both the military institution and society at large. While this suppression initially appears functional, Woolf demonstrates that it ultimately prevents him from processing the trauma of war. Rather than disappearing, the emotional pain remains unresolved and gradually resurfaces in increasingly destructive forms.

The consequences of this emotional repression become evident after the war, when Septimus begins to experience feelings of numbness and alienation. Significantly, his greatest fear is not the traumatic memories themselves but his inability to feel. Woolf writes, “The panic was on him—that he could not feel” (Woolf, 1925, p. 86). This statement reveals a profound contradiction within patriarchal masculinity. During the war, Septimus was rewarded for emotional detachment, yet after the war the same detachment becomes a source of psychological suffering. The qualities that once allowed him to conform to masculine expectations now contribute to his emotional fragmentation. Through this contradiction, Woolf critiques a social system that demands emotional suppression from men while failing to address the long-term psychological consequences of such expectations.

The regulation of masculinity becomes even more visible through the medical discourse that surrounds Septimus after the war. Within Walby's framework, cultural institutions function as mechanisms that reproduce dominant social values and regulate acceptable forms of behavior. This process is represented through Dr. Holmes, who consistently dismisses Septimus's suffering and interprets his condition as a temporary weakness rather than a legitimate psychological injury. When examining him, Holmes insists that “There was nothing whatever the matter” (Woolf, 1925, p. 65). Instead of recognizing the symptoms of shell shock, Holmes reassures both Septimus and Rezia that no serious problem exists. His diagnosis reflects a broader cultural assumption that men should be capable of overcoming emotional difficulties through willpower alone.

Holmes's response illustrates how patriarchal norms are reproduced through everyday social interactions. Rather than challenging dominant beliefs about masculinity, he reinforces them by encouraging Septimus to resume normal activities and regain self-control. He advises, “Health is largely a matter in our own control. Throw yourself into outside interests; take up some hobby” (Woolf, 1925, p. 65). Such advice reduces psychological trauma to a matter of

personal discipline and individual responsibility. In doing so, Holmes ignores the structural and emotional dimensions of Septimus's condition. Woolf's portrayal of Holmes therefore extends beyond a critique of medical incompetence. The character functions as a cultural agent who reinforces patriarchal expectations by denying the legitimacy of male vulnerability. Through Holmes, Woolf demonstrates how patriarchal culture often interprets men's emotional suffering as a personal failure rather than a consequence of broader social pressures.

From Walby's perspective, this interaction reflects the operation of cultural structures that regulate behavior through informal norms rather than direct coercion. Holmes does not threaten Septimus with punishment, yet his refusal to acknowledge trauma effectively pressures him to conform to accepted standards of masculinity. Septimus is expected to recover not because he has received adequate support, but because society demands that men remain rational, productive, and emotionally stable. As a result, his psychological condition becomes increasingly isolated from public recognition. The more intensely he suffers, the more his suffering is dismissed. Woolf uses this dynamic to reveal how patriarchal structures maintain their authority not only through institutions of power but also through ordinary assumptions about what men should be.

The Exacerbation of Psychological Distress through Institutional Authority

The psychological suffering experienced by Septimus Warren Smith does not end with the dismissal of his trauma by Dr. Holmes. Instead, his condition becomes increasingly severe when it is subjected to institutional authority represented by Sir William Bradshaw. While Dr. Holmes functions as an agent of cultural norms that encourage masculine self-control, Bradshaw embodies a more formal and coercive mechanism of patriarchal power. According to Walby (1990), patriarchy is maintained not only through cultural expectations but also through institutional structures that possess the authority to regulate, discipline, and normalize individuals. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf portrays this institutional dimension through the psychiatric system, which prioritizes social conformity over genuine psychological understanding. As a result, Septimus's trauma is no longer treated as a human experience requiring empathy but as a social deviation that must be corrected.

Before examining Bradshaw's treatment of Septimus, it is important to clarify the concepts of *Proportion* and *Conversion*, two terms explicitly created by Virginia Woolf within the narrative. These concepts are not formal psychiatric theories but fictional constructs used by Woolf to criticize the coercive nature of social and medical authority in post-war Britain. While *Proportion* functions as an ideal standard of social normality, *Conversion* represents the mechanism through which individuals are compelled to conform to that standard. Together,

these concepts reveal Woolf's critique of institutional systems that prioritize social order and conformity over individual well-being.

This institutional authority is most clearly represented through Bradshaw's concept of "Proportion." Rather than describing mental illness through conventional psychiatric terminology, Bradshaw evaluates individuals based on their ability to conform to socially accepted standards of behavior. Woolf explicitly states that "Sir William said he never spoke of 'madness'; he called it not having a sense of proportion" (Woolf, 1925, p. 96). At first glance, the term "proportion" appears neutral and reasonable. However, Woolf's narrative suggests that it functions as an ideological standard that determines who is considered normal and who is regarded as deviant. Within this framework, psychological health is measured not by personal well-being but by an individual's ability to fulfil the expectations imposed by society. Septimus is therefore not viewed as a traumatized veteran struggling with the consequences of war but as a man who has failed to perform his expected social role.

From Walby's perspective, this reflects the operation of state and institutional authority within patriarchal structures. Institutions often define acceptable forms of behavior and marginalize individuals who fail to conform to dominant norms. Septimus's inability to return to a productive and emotionally controlled life positions him outside the boundaries of what Bradshaw considers acceptable masculinity. Rather than questioning the social conditions that contribute to his suffering, Bradshaw identifies the problem within Septimus himself. Consequently, the psychiatric institution transforms a social and psychological crisis into an individual deficiency. This process demonstrates how patriarchal authority shifts attention away from structural pressures and instead frames vulnerability as personal failure.

Woolf further intensifies this critique through her depiction of Bradshaw's devotion to "Proportion." The narrator observes that "Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views" (Woolf, 1925, p. 97). This passage reveals that proportion extends far beyond a medical principle. It becomes a mechanism for maintaining social order and preserving dominant values. Woolf's phrase "Worshipping Proportion" suggests that Bradshaw treats social conformity as an unquestionable principle rather than a medical guideline. The use of the verb "worshipping" elevates Proportion to the level of an ideology that prioritizes order, productivity, and obedience over individual well-being. Through this characterization, Woolf criticizes how institutional authority imposes rigid standards of normality upon individuals who fail to conform. From Walby's perspective, this reflects the operation of patriarchal institutions that

regulate acceptable behavior and marginalize those who deviate from dominant social expectations. The phrase “penalised despair” is particularly significant because it suggests that emotional suffering itself is treated as a form of deviance. Rather than responding to despair with care and understanding, the institution responds with discipline and exclusion. Woolf thus exposes the authoritarian dimensions of psychiatric practice, illustrating how the language of treatment can be used to conceal the exercise of power.

The oppressive nature of this system becomes even more evident through the concept of “Conversion,” which Woolf presents as the darker counterpart of proportion. While proportion establishes the standard of normality, conversion functions as the process through which individuals are forced to conform to that standard. Woolf personifies this concept through a striking metaphor, describing Conversion as a powerful force that is “engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance” (Woolf, 1925, p. 100). This imagery emphasizes violence, domination, and the destruction of difference. Rather than accommodating alternative experiences or perspectives, conversion seeks to eliminate them entirely. Through this metaphor, Woolf suggests that institutional authority does not merely diagnose deviation but actively attempts to reshape individuals according to predetermined social ideals.

In Septimus's case, conversion takes the form of psychiatric intervention designed to restore him to the model of the rational, productive, and emotionally controlled man. His inability to conform to this ideal is interpreted as evidence of illness rather than as a response to trauma. Contemporary scholars have similarly argued that institutional responses to psychological distress often pathologize behaviors that deviate from socially valued norms (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018). This observation resonates strongly with Woolf's portrayal of Bradshaw, whose treatment prioritizes conformity over understanding. Instead of helping Septimus process his traumatic experiences, the institution seeks to suppress the symptoms that disrupt social expectations. As a result, treatment becomes a mechanism of normalization rather than healing.

The consequences of this institutional intervention are reflected in the gradual erosion of Septimus's personal agency. Throughout the novel, he increasingly perceives himself as powerless in relation to the authorities who claim to know what is best for him. This loss of autonomy is captured in one of the most revealing moments of the narrative: “Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew are applied” (Woolf, 1925, p. 102). Through the imagery of torture instruments such as the rack

and thumbscrew, Woolf transforms psychiatric treatment into a form of persecution. The comparison suggests that institutional intervention is experienced not as care but as punishment. Septimus no longer perceives doctors as healers; instead, they appear as agents of a system determined to discipline and control him.

This perception highlights the profound gap between Septimus's internal experience and the external logic of institutional authority. While he desperately seeks recognition of his suffering, the system responds by questioning his rationality and restricting his autonomy. His voice is gradually displaced by the voices of experts who interpret his experiences on his behalf. Consequently, the psychological fragmentation initiated by war trauma becomes intensified by institutional power. Septimus is no longer alienated solely from society but also from his own ability to define and communicate his reality.

Through the character of Sir William Bradshaw, Woolf ultimately reveals how patriarchal institutions transform vulnerability into deviance and suffering into a problem of social conformity. The psychiatric system represented in the novel does not merely fail to heal Septimus; it actively contributes to the deterioration of his psychological condition by denying the legitimacy of his experiences and imposing rigid standards of normality. Viewed through Walby's theory, this process demonstrates how institutional authority operates as a central mechanism of patriarchy, regulating behavior and marginalizing those who are unable or unwilling to conform. In Septimus's case, the consequence is not recovery but a deeper fragmentation of identity and an increasing sense of isolation from both society and himself.

The Fatal Consequences of Structural Patriarchy

The cumulative effects of patriarchal regulation become most visible in the final stage of Septimus Warren Smith's experience. As discussed previously, the cultural expectations of masculinity represented by Dr. Holmes and the institutional authority embodied by Sir William Bradshaw continuously deny the legitimacy of Septimus's trauma. Rather than receiving empathy and psychological support, he is repeatedly encouraged to conform to social standards of rationality, productivity, and emotional restraint. Consequently, the issue extends beyond psychological suffering itself. The more patriarchal institutions attempt to normalize Septimus, the more they erode his ability to maintain a coherent sense of self. Through this process, Virginia Woolf illustrates how structural patriarchy does not merely regulate behavior but can also contribute to the destruction of individual identity.

The deterioration of Septimus's identity becomes increasingly evident when Bradshaw decides that he should be removed from his domestic environment and placed under institutional supervision. This decision represents the culmination of the principles of

Proportion and Conversion discussed in the previous section. From Bradshaw's perspective, Septimus is not a traumatized veteran requiring understanding but a socially dysfunctional individual who must be corrected. Such treatment demonstrates how institutional authority privileges conformity over individual well-being. According to Walby (1990), patriarchal institutions maintain social order by regulating those who deviate from dominant norms. In Septimus's case, his emotional vulnerability and inability to perform conventional masculinity position him as a subject who must be disciplined. As a result, the institution transforms his trauma into a problem of social deviance rather than recognizing it as a consequence of war and psychological suffering.

This institutional intervention further intensifies Septimus's sense of alienation. Throughout the novel, he struggles to communicate experiences that cannot easily be understood by those around him. However, each attempt at articulation is met with misunderstanding or dismissal. The psychiatric authorities claim to know his condition better than he does himself, thereby replacing his personal understanding with institutional interpretations. Consequently, Septimus gradually loses the ability to define his own reality. Woolf emphasizes this experience through his growing perception that external forces are relentlessly pursuing him. Reflecting upon his situation, Septimus observes, "Once you fall, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you" (Woolf, 1925, p. 102). The repetition of the phrase "are on you" conveys a sense of persecution and surveillance, suggesting that institutional power has become an oppressive presence in his life. Rather than functioning as sources of care, Holmes and Bradshaw appear as agents of control who seek to impose conformity upon an individual already struggling with psychological trauma.

The consequences of this domination are particularly devastating because Septimus's remaining emotional support is also threatened. Throughout the narrative, Lucrezia Warren Smith functions as the only person who consistently attempts to understand and protect her husband. While medical authorities dismiss his suffering, Rezia continues to recognize his humanity and emotional pain. Nevertheless, Bradshaw's treatment plan involves separating Septimus from his wife and placing him under institutional observation. Such a decision reflects the prioritization of professional authority over personal relationships. Within Walby's framework, the state and institutional structures frequently override individual needs in order to preserve social order. By removing Septimus from the domestic sphere, the institution effectively eliminates one of the few remaining connections that anchor him to reality. His isolation therefore becomes not only psychological but also social and emotional.

As institutional pressure intensifies, Septimus increasingly perceives himself as trapped within a system from which there is no escape. The medical discourse surrounding his condition leaves little room for negotiation or resistance. His trauma is denied, his voice is ignored, and his future is determined by others. Under these circumstances, the fragmentation of identity reaches its most critical point. Septimus no longer experiences himself as an autonomous individual capable of directing his own life. Instead, he becomes the object of institutional judgment and regulation. Woolf's portrayal suggests that the most destructive consequence of patriarchal authority is not merely emotional suffering but the gradual erosion of personal agency itself.

This conflict ultimately culminates in the novel's most tragic moment. When Dr. Holmes arrives to take him away, Septimus realizes that the final remnants of his autonomy are about to disappear. Woolf writes, "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did THEY want?... Holmes was at the door. 'I'll give it you!' he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings" (Woolf, 1925, p. 149). This passage is particularly significant because Woolf explicitly states that Septimus "did not want to die." The narrative therefore challenges interpretations that view his suicide as a simple desire for death. Instead, the immediate threat comes from the institutional authority represented by Holmes, whose arrival symbolizes the continuation of the patriarchal system that has repeatedly invalidated Septimus's experiences.

From this perspective, Septimus's suicide can be interpreted as the final consequence of a prolonged conflict between individual subjectivity and patriarchal control. Throughout the novel, every significant institution—the military, medicine, and broader society—demands conformity to masculine ideals of strength, rationality, and emotional restraint. Yet Septimus's trauma makes such conformity impossible. Faced with a situation in which all avenues of self-determination have been removed, he chooses an action that remains entirely his own. However, this decision should not be romanticized as a heroic victory. Rather, it demonstrates the extent to which patriarchal institutions have failed to provide meaningful recognition, understanding, and support. His death is tragic precisely because it represents the collapse of all alternative possibilities for recovery and reconciliation.

Woolf reinforces this critique through the reaction of Dr. Holmes immediately following Septimus's death. Rather than expressing sympathy or reflecting upon the circumstances that contributed to the tragedy, Holmes dismisses the act by declaring, "The coward!" (Woolf, 1925, p. 150). This response encapsulates the persistence of patriarchal values throughout the novel. Even after witnessing the devastating consequences of

psychological suffering, Holmes continues to interpret the situation through the framework of masculine expectations. The accusation of cowardice reduces a complex experience of trauma to a simple moral failure. In doing so, it reproduces the same ideology that contributed to Septimus's suffering from the beginning. Woolf therefore exposes the inability of patriarchal institutions to understand emotional vulnerability, demonstrating how systems that claim to preserve social stability often silence and marginalize those most in need of compassion.

Ultimately, Septimus Warren Smith serves as Woolf's critique of a patriarchal society that equates masculinity with emotional control and social productivity. Through his tragic fate, Woolf reveals that patriarchy does not exclusively oppress women but also harms men who fail to conform to its rigid expectations. By tracing Septimus's journey from trauma to institutional intervention and finally to suicide, the novel illustrates the profound psychological consequences of a system that values conformity over humanity. Viewed through Sylvia Walby's theory of structural patriarchy, Septimus's death becomes not merely an individual tragedy but a powerful indictment of the social and institutional forces that contribute to the destruction of identity and the silencing of emotional suffering.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the experiences of Septimus Warren Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* through Sylvia Walby's theory of structural patriarchy. The findings reveal that Septimus's psychological suffering cannot be understood solely as a consequence of war trauma. Instead, his condition is significantly intensified by patriarchal structures that regulate masculine behavior through cultural expectations and institutional authority. Through the characters of Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw, Woolf demonstrates how patriarchal society constructs ideals of masculinity based on emotional restraint, rationality, and social productivity while simultaneously denying the legitimacy of male vulnerability and psychological distress.

The analysis further shows that the concepts of *Proportion* and *Conversion*, which are fictional constructs created by Woolf, function as narrative mechanisms that expose the coercive nature of patriarchal institutions. Rather than providing empathy and support, these institutions attempt to normalize individuals according to dominant social expectations. Consequently, Septimus's trauma is repeatedly invalidated, his personal agency is gradually diminished, and his psychological condition deteriorates further. The study therefore confirms that patriarchy operates not only through interpersonal expectations but also through

institutional practices that regulate acceptable forms of masculinity and marginalize individuals who fail to conform to them.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that Septimus's suicide represents the tragic culmination of a prolonged conflict between individual subjectivity and structural power. His death is not merely the result of personal psychological instability but also reflects the failure of social and medical institutions to recognize and respond to emotional suffering. Through this portrayal, Woolf criticizes a patriarchal system that prioritizes conformity, discipline, and productivity over human compassion and psychological well-being. The novel ultimately reveals that patriarchy harms not only women but also men who are unable to embody hegemonic masculine ideals.

This study contributes to existing scholarship on *Mrs. Dalloway* by shifting the analytical focus from trauma-centered and psychoanalytic interpretations toward an examination of structural patriarchy as a crucial factor shaping Septimus's experiences. Unlike previous studies that primarily interpret his condition as an individual psychological consequence of war, this research demonstrates how institutional authority and masculinity norms actively contribute to the fragmentation of identity and the intensification of psychological distress. In doing so, the study expands the application of Walby's theory within literary studies and highlights the interconnected relationship between gender norms, institutional power, and mental health.

Finally, the findings remain highly relevant to contemporary discussions surrounding masculinity and mental health. In many societies today, men continue to face social expectations that discourage emotional expression and help-seeking behavior, often resulting in psychological isolation and vulnerability. By portraying the devastating consequences of these expectations through the character of Septimus Warren Smith, Woolf's novel continues to offer a powerful critique of gendered social structures and a valuable perspective for understanding the ongoing relationship between patriarchy, identity, and psychological well-being.

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