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THE CONNECTION BETWEEN VIRGINIA WOOLF AND CLARISSA
DALLOWAY:
A REVIEW IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER MELANCHOLIA

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**The Connection Between Virginia Woolf and Clarissa Dalloway: A Review in
the Context of Gender Melancholia**

**Virginia Woolf ve Clarissa Dalloway'in Arasındaki Baęlantı: Cinsiyet
Melankolisi Baęlamında Bir İnceleme**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
ÖZET.....	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: MOURNING VS. MELANCHOLIA; ABSENCE VS. LOSS ON FREUDIAN MELANCHOLIA	9
1.1. FREUD'S THOUGHTS ON MELANCHOLIA	9
1.2. EGO IDEAL IN MELANCHOLIA	12
CHAPTER 2: MELANCHOLIA AND MOURNING IN JUDITH BUTLER'S PERSPECTIVE	14
2.1. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SEX AND GENDER, THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX AND THE PERFORMATIVITY THEORY OF JUDITH BUTLER	14
2.2. UNDERSTANDING JUDITH BUTLER'S MELANCHOLY	20
CHAPTER 3: VIRGINIA WOOLF, MRS. DALLOWAY, AND GENDER MELANCHOLY	33
3.1. GETTING TO KNOW VIRGINIA WOOLF.....	33
3.2. VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS. DALLOWAY.....	39
3.3. VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FREUDIAN MELANCHOLY'S REFLECTION THROUGH CLARISSA DALLOWAY.....	43
3.4. VIRGINIA WOOLF'S BUTLERIAN GENDER MELANCHOLY'S REFLECTION THROUGH CLARISSA DALLOWAY	56
3.5. A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S SUICIDE IN THE LIGHT OF HER GENDER MELANCHOLY	68

CONCLUSION.....	75
REFERENCES.....	79

ABSTRACT

Melancholy has always been a controversial mental situation, and different explanations and definitions have been put forward about it. However, Freud's emphasis on what is lost and what that loss causes in individuals in melancholia and how Butler built upon it with her gender melancholy theory opens up a new dimension for understanding the roots and the causes of melancholia. This thesis's primary focus is to explain how Virginia Woolf could have experienced gender melancholy by taking Sigmund Freud's and Judith Butler's melancholia theories. By exploring Virginia Woolf's diaries, essays, and Clarissa Dalloway's expressions in her semi-autobiographical novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, this study will critically analyse how gender melancholy and Woolf's reflections are parallel. In other words, it will identify and detailly analyse how Freud's melancholia theory and Butler's gender melancholia theory match what Woolf conveyed through her diaries and essays alongside Clarissa Dalloway as the character in which Woolf mirrored her inner self and own experiences.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, Gender Melancholy, Clarissa Dalloway, Homosexuality

ÖZET

Melankoli her zaman tartışmalı bir ruhsal durum olmuş, hakkında farklı açıklamalar ve tanımlamalar yapılmıştır. Ancak özellikle Freud'un melankolide bireylerde neyin kaybolduğuna ve bu kaybın neye yol açtığına yaptığı vurgu ve Butler'ın toplumsal cinsiyet melankoli teorisini bunun üzerine nasıl inşa ettiğİ, melankolinin kökenlerini ve nedenlerini anlamak adına yeni bir perspektif ve boyut kazandırır. Bu tezin birincil odak noktası, Sigmund Freud ve Judith Butler'ın melankoli teorilerini temel alarak Virginia Woolf'un toplumsal cinsiyet melankolisini nasıl deneyimlemiş olabileceğini açıklamaktır. Bu çalışma, Virginia Woolf'un günlükleri, denemeleri ve yarı otobiyografik romanı *Bayan Dalloway*'deki Clarissa Dalloway'in kendini ifade etme şeklini keşfederek, toplumsal cinsiyet melankolisi ile Woolf'un yansıttıklarının nasıl paralellik gösterdiğini eleştirel bir şekilde analiz edecektir. Diğer bir deyişle, Freud'un melankoli teorisi ile Butler'ın toplumsal cinsiyet melankolisi teorisinin, Woolf'un kendi içsel benliğini ve kendi deneyimlerini yansıttığı karakter olarak Clarissa Dalloway'in yanı sıra günlükleri ve denemeleri aracılığıyla aktardıklarıyla ne kadar örtüştüğünü tespit edecek ve detaylı bir şekilde analiz edecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Virginia Woolf, Bayan Dalloway, Cinsiyet Melankolisi, Clarissa Dalloway, Homoseksüellik

INTRODUCTION

Melancholy has a controversial and lengthy history in which many critical names in different areas had different perspectives and statements about the notion. Although melancholy has found its place in the field of psychology, it is a subject that needs to be evaluated through an interdisciplinary approach. The curiosity upon melancholy is so apparent that it has always been a topic that every discipline was interested in. As Jennifer Radden puts forward in her book *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*,

For most of western European history, melancholy was a central cultural idea, focusing, explaining, and organizing the way people saw the world and one another and framing social, medical, and epistemological norms. Today, in contrast, it is an insignificant category, of little interest to medicine or psychology, and without explanatory or organizing vitality.¹

The issue of melancholy, explanations that had been made about how it affects people and in which states or conditions it shows itself, goes back to ancient Greece. Although we nowadays accept melancholy as depression and as an illness, previous opinions from important names in history form a map for what we've come so far for the definition of melancholy. Every description made and put forward about melancholy is different and has interactive features. While investigating the various opinions surrounding melancholy, I gained new perspectives, which pushed me to reevaluate the issue. Also, owing to the historical background of melancholy, I realized that all the notable names in this field had developed each other's suggestions further. As Radden states:

Contemporary discussions in philosophy, psychology, cultural and feminist studies, and the history of ideas all introduce distinctions and

¹ Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Preface VII.

perspectives that require us to reconsider earlier writing about melancholic states.²

Therefore, my first aim in this thesis will be to gather essential background information about melancholy from the very beginning, where it has turned out to be a topic that grasped attention. There are differences and similarities between descriptions of melancholy since the ancient Greeks, but there was a shift in the 19th century where the previous opinions of melancholy dissociated. In the modernist period, along with Freud's article on melancholy, a fierce division between the mourning experience and melancholy appears. Also, a description that is directly related to clinical depression and psychology develops, which is the closest to our current time. Therefore, after Freud, in the late 19th and 20th centuries, based on the previous descriptions, new theories and opinions developed that focused on explaining the "lost object" in melancholy. Focusing on what could be lost in melancholy that is different from what is lost in mourning and how that loss could affect the identity of an individual, Judith Butler, in 1997, then later in 1999 again established the theory of gender melancholy based on her reading of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." Thus, the second aim of this thesis is to focus on Sigmund Freud's article "Mourning and Melancholia" and Judith Butler's Gender Melancholy as the general framework. Freud outlines a theoretical description of melancholy, and Butler goes beyond Freud's theory by adding a new concept based on the connection between gender and melancholy. Giving brief information about melancholy's historical background and using Butler's and Freud's theories on melancholy as the framework, this thesis will then switch its focus connecting the concept of melancholy to the field of literature and Virginia Woolf, one of the most famous modernist writers. Virginia Woolf is a pioneer in modern literature. Woolf used experimental language in her works, expressing and portraying the psychology of each character in her novels. The fact that she had lost

² Ibid: Preface VIII.

her mother, sister, and father one after another drastically impacted her mental stability. Not only the losses affected her life and soul, but she also had been through several traumas. When she reached the limit where she couldn't bear up with her life, Woolf took her own life. The reason behind my choice of *Mrs. Dalloway* out of all the outstanding novels of Woolf is that I believe it is the novel that she mirrored herself the most. At the same time, it reveals a woman's experiences (her own experiences) and seeks to create an alternative lifestyle to the male-dominated reality; it also shows essential traces of melancholy she might have suffered throughout her life.

I will be exploring Virginia Woolf's - who had been diagnosed of depression and ended her life by committing suicide - semi-autobiographical novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Virginia Woolf is known as the melancholic queen of literature. Like any writer, Virginia Woolf also wrote about her personal experiences through the battle in her life. What makes a literature piece tremendous and memorable is the reader having the potential to read that piece in terms of its different aspects. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* can be read through very different approaches, including how after-war effects have been described, how the woman is depicted in the novel based on some characters, and many more. What I focused on in this thesis was to read *Mrs. Dalloway* and protagonist Clarissa, side by side with Virginia Woolf's own life similarities, and to suggest reasoning about and an explanation for what could be lying behind the basis of her decision to commit suicide within the framework of Freud and Butler's melancholy. Therefore, the question of this thesis is: Is gender itself a melancholy, as Butler states, and if so, how Butler's notion of gendered melancholy, which grew upon Freud's theory can fit Clarissa as the reflection of Virginia Woolf in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway* and Virginia Woolf's experiences and suicide based on her diaries, essays, letters, and suicide note?

Melancholy is defined as "a feeling of being very sad that lasts for a long time and

often cannot be explained”³ in the Oxford Dictionary. While this definition is somehow linked to what Freud suggested about melancholy, I believe that many of us are confused about the term, and this definition is not enough to understand what melancholy is and how it reflects the people that are going through melancholy. Through the past decades, mourning has been researched in-depth. Many had put forward various theories; however, melancholia had always been left out somehow, leaving many in the concept with more and more questions. Finally, in 1917, Sigmund Freud proposed the well-known and most popular theory about melancholy and the difference between mourning and melancholia. And after his thoughts on these two similar but very different concepts, many other important names, such as Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler, developed further studies about melancholy. Freud was not the first to delve into melancholy and mourning; however, his work was the first to explore and argue the differences between them specifically directly and how we respond to each of them psychologically.

Today, melancholy is mainly linked to depression, as if the two experiences are practically the same, and the term seems outdated. Mourning had grasped the attention of the researchers more, leaving melancholia as a concept that couldn't gain much ground in the mental health field and evolve as depression or depressive thoughts today. I believe it would be accurate to say that melancholy is a concept that describes the human psyche and deserves more attention since it is a fact that this concept has a huge place in history and was investigated by many important names before Freud pointed out his arguments. From the period after Ancient Greeks up to the 1900s, melancholy was associated with sadness, fear, loss, delusion, and abnormal thoughts. Still, today it is expressed more as a depressive mood in the field of mental health, especially in the field of psychiatry.

On the other hand, a melancholic person is defined as one who shuts down the

³ Oxford Dictionaries, s.v., “melancholy”, accessed on June 13, 2021, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/melancholy_1?q=melancholy

doors to the external world and leans more into the internal due to a state of sadness. This essay will aim to explore the concept of melancholy, which had its own place in our language and history for millennia, by focusing on what Freud pointed out in his fundamental work “Mourning and Melancholia” and what Butler further developed about Freud’s theory. The aim is to ask whether we should understand melancholy as a mood state or a personality pattern depending on two different understandings of melancholy developed by Freud and Butler.

There were many theories and explanations about melancholy before the notion was explored in the field of psychology, specifically by Sigmund Freud. The focus of this essay on the history of melancholy will be based on Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen’s approaches to melancholy in the pre-modern medical period. In the pre-modern medical period, determinations about human health were associated with the changes or balance in the ratios of four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. The Greeks, in general, but significantly Hippocrates had outlined this theory of four humors and believed that for humans to be in ideal health, the four humors, which were equal in proportion, had to have perfect balance. The theory of four humors did not have any specific discussion solely based on melancholia; however, melancholy was defined as a disease caused by the imbalance or excess of black bile in the spleen of the human body and that it was signaled by fear or sadness. As stated in “U.S. National History of Medicine,”

Emphasizing the humors gave classical medicine what modern philosophers call a "reductionist" bias--the humors were used to explain more complex phenomena like emotional states in much simpler physical terms. For example, when a patient was melancholy, physicians assumed that his or her complicated feelings of sadness and depression resulted from the physical excess of black bile.⁴

The Hippocratic theory associated melancholy with the season of autumn, the

⁴ “Emotions and Disease: The Balance of Passions,” U.S. National History of Medicine, accessed June 13, 2021.

element earth, the organ spleen, and qualities of dryness and coldness. The text named “Problems connected with thought, intelligence, and wisdom,” which is assumed to be written by someone who followed Aristotle proves that Hippocratic theory had a significant effect on non-medical views of melancholy. As stated in *The Nature of Melancholy from Aristotle to Kristeva*, “the Aristotelian author assumes that excesses of black bile result in melancholia and more severe states of mental disorder, while a lesser and more stable imbalance of humors with additional black bile produces the melancholic temperament or disposition”.⁵ In simple words, the Aristotelian text argues that individuals who have this temperament in smaller amounts could be considered as normal, while individuals who are more inclined and have a more significant portion of the temperament are abnormal. So, there was a distinction between normal and excessive temperament since the Aristotelian text not only linked melancholy with coldness and dryness, but it also found a relationship between black bile being too cold or too hot. According to the Aristotelian text, “When the mixture due to black bile becomes colder, it gives rise to all kinds of despair, but when it is hotter, it gives rise to cheerfulness”.⁶ As argued in the text, the follower of Aristotle argued that when the temperament was cold, baseless despair was produced, and for the individuals who were more inclined to melancholy, these baseless despairs were felt and experienced more in-depth than it does in other individuals. Both in Hippocrates’s definition and the Aristotelian text, it could be seen that there is a particular view that links melancholy to long-lasting fear and sadness. While Hippocrates mentions that melancholy caused by the excess of black bile is signaled by fear or sadness, what makes the Aristotelian text different is that it suggests that black bile could be both very hot or cold, and this has an impact on the character of the individual. According to the Aristotelian text, nature has both coldness and heat; it could be presumed that it is the same for melancholy regarding the black bile

⁵ Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56.

⁶ Ibid.: 59.

being either too hot or too cold. So, going through the phases of different stages like happiness to sadness, the excessiveness of two sides makes the melancholic abnormal not because of disease, as stated in Hippocrates, but by nature. Regarding his views of Galen on melancholy, Galen accepts the humoral theory the Aristotelian text and Hippocrates developed. What makes Galen's view on melancholy different are several points he puts forward. First, as the Aristotelian text argued, Galen believed that the imbalances were not that extreme and opposite to each other, and the balance between the four humors' qualities were the determinants of temperament varying in individuals. The excess of blood or yellow bile was a sign of acute disease, while the excess of phlegm or black bile was a sign of chronic illness for him. Galen stated that atrabilious humor or atrabilious blood was his preference for the term black bile and the tendency for melancholy, which has the possibility of showing itself in different parts of the body rather than just the spleen, as Hippocrates argued. As stated in *The Nature of Melancholy* "Galen's classification of melancholia into three kinds rests on the location in the body of the source of affection: whether in the brain, throughout the bloodstream, or in the stomach."⁷ Although all Galen's, Hippocrates's, and Aristotelian texts have a lot more to discover about what had been said about melancholy and how it was viewed in history, the common thing they all point out is the emphasis on the subjective states of fear and despondency directly linked to melancholia. Hippocrates, in part, and Galen, more significantly, underlined that black bile damages the homogeneous mixture of the brain, and so it has an impact on the intellect. What can be summed up by these three texts as critical historical assumptions of melancholy is, as stated in *The Nature of Melancholy*, that

although each melancholic patient acts quite differently than the others, all of them exhibit fear or despondency. They find fault with life and hate people; but not all want to die. For some the fear of death is of principal

⁷ Ibid.: 63.

concern during melancholy. Others again will appear to you quite bizarre because they dread death and desire to die at the same time.⁸

The concepts and assumptions made in the pre-modern medical period are indeed obsolete and far different from the understanding of melancholy today since they, one way or another, link melancholy to the excess of black bile and qualities of four humors. While they prove that melancholy had always been a subject open for more exploration and great interest, it was also one of the crucial concepts that contain the extensive history of humorism which still shows its effects in the modern medical period. Numerous other names explored melancholy, but they all depend on their base assumptions on the Hippocratic and Galenic views of melancholy. It was essential to understand how melancholy had been shaped in history and been connected to the emotions of fear and despondency because later on, Freud's argument of melancholy, which focuses on the two central notions: loss, not being able to get over that loss, and the emptiness that loss leaves behind, they still serve as an important way of understanding melancholy today.

⁸ Ibid.: 68.

CHAPTER 1:
MOURNING VS. MELANCHOLIA; ABSENCE VS.. LOSS IN FREUDIAN
MELANCHOLIA

1.1. FREUD’S THOUGHTS ON MELANCHOLIA

“Mourning and Melancholia” was written in 1917 by Sigmund Freud. He aims to define, analyze, and compare the notion of mourning and the state of melancholia. He believes that the cause for both behavioral disorders are quite similar. Still, they differ from each other at some points, and an individual gives different responses to them. According to Freud, mourning appears as a reaction to loss when someone loved or something important to the individual is not accessible anymore. On the other hand, although melancholia also appears as a reaction to someone or something loved who is lost, it contains some elements different than mourning. Mourning is identified as a healthy and appropriate period of growth in order to recover from the loss that any individual might face. Yet melancholia is a dangerous state that lasts for a lifetime and can cause critical outcomes for the person. If we put the features that are similar and distinct between melancholia and mourning, we could say that, in both mourning and melancholia, there should be a real or moral loss of an object or a person for whom an individual cared. However, in melancholia, the loss is not apparent to the subject or the others around them. Even when the loss comes within death and the person is aware of the loss of the object or person, he/she cannot consciously identify the importance or disturbance that object causes after it's lost. As Freud states,

In one set of cases, it is evident that melancholia too may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object. Where the exciting causes are different one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died but has been lost as an object of love. In yet other

cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind has occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost.⁹

In other words, the melancholic may not perceive what he/she has lost, even when he/she knows that he/she has lost something. In Freud's words: "[s]he knows whom [s]he has lost but not what [s]he has lost in them."

Thus, mourning is a conscious act in which it is possible to overcome the situation, while melancholia is a reaction that appears through the unconscious so that getting over it is almost impossible. In melancholy, one is aware of what/who one has lost but is unaware of how that loss affected them and caused them to lose something inside. Through melancholia, the person feels worthless and loses respect for oneself. One sees oneself as worthless since the loss is not about the object or the person directly but of the person's ego.

Furthermore, Freud argues that, "the melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning- an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale."¹⁰ A painful experience is available in both melancholia and mourning and it is for sure that both states cause pain and cut the person's excitement for life, but mourning is an explainable state, which lasts for only a period of time and it can be healed. Thus, mourning is not seen as a pathological disorder as melancholia does.

However, there is an unsolvable painful process in melancholia. This, according to Freud, happens because of the fixation for the libidinal object or person, which is not reachable anymore. As Freud explains it,

An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then owing to a real slight or disappointment coming

⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 245.

¹⁰ Ibid.: 246.

from that lost object, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different. (. . .) The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego.¹¹

Therefore, the force of the libidinal drive, which wants to stay connected to the lost object or person, puts the person in conflict. And when the libidinal drive cannot get over the force coming from it, it turns back to the object or person's ego which causes self-accusations and underestimations that is directed to the self. While dividing mourning as a healthy phase and melancholia as a mental disorder we must keep in mind that in treatment, telling the individual such things like he/she is not worthless as a reply to his/her regardless situation won't help. As it is stated in Freud's article:

It would be equally fruitless from a scientific and a therapeutic point of view to contradict a patient who brings these accusations against his ego. He must surely be right in some way and be describing something that is as it seems to him to be. Indeed, we must at once confirm some of his statements without reservation. He really is as lacking in interest and as incapable of love and achievement as he says.¹²

The main focus should stay on understanding and analyzing the individual's psychological state while he/she keeps on accusing himself/herself instead of trying to prove the opposite. Because the critical point is that although the individual downgrades oneself all the time, the feeling of shame is not available during the self-reproach as it is in a normal person. When we think about an ordinary individual who seems to think of himself/herself as worthless, he/she usually gets ashamed while talking and mostly prefer not to talk about it. But in

¹¹ Ibid.: 249.

¹² Ibid.: 246.

melancholia, as Freud states, individuals become more talkative and seek occasions in which they will expose themselves. The reason that lies beneath this shameless self-reproach is that the individual is not expressing that downgrading attitude towards himself/herself. Comparatively, he/she is relating the criticisms made in his/her mind about the lost thing, object, or person. As Freud states,

In melancholia, countless separate struggles are carried on over the object in which hate, and love contend with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to maintain this position of the libido against the assault.¹³

In mourning, which we described as a healthy phase, the lost libidinal object or person eventually gets replaced with a new one, and ego frees itself. The contradiction in melancholy is that the individual develops the lost object, thing, or the person, into a more personalized and identified subject with his/her ego.

1.2. EGO IDEAL IN FREUDIAN MELANCHOLY

When Freud explains the situation of the individual who continually accuses himself/herself, he states that the accuser is an independent agency. This part of the ego, which has split up, controls and directs the remainder of the ego. As Freud explains,

we see how in him one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object. Our suspicion that the critical agency which is here split off from the ego might also show its independence in other circumstances will be confirmed by every further observation.¹⁴

Eventually, when an individual enters a state of melancholia, this

¹³ Ibid.: 256.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 247.

split/independent part of the ego criticizes and downgrades the rest. The independent division is called the “ego ideal.” The ego-ideal is the inner voice that tells the individual what to do and how to act and have a prior role in giving decisions. In a brief sentence, the ego-ideal starts to act contrary to the actual ego. As a result, an ambivalence occurs towards the loss because it turns out to be classified with the individual’s ego and becomes to be treated as the object/person. Reflecting the criticisms and antagonism towards the ego itself genuinely reveals the feelings towards the loss. As Freud states,

if the love for the object—a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up—takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies, just like the corresponding phenomenon in obsessional neurosis, a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self in the ways we have been discussing.¹⁵

The explained situation above, precisely shows us that the individual says and acts like he/she is a unworthy person that doesn’t deserve anything because he/she reflects the internalized narcissistic identification of the object to her/his external self or person in the form of his/her ego itself. The whole process is about the “narcissistic identification” through the loss, according to Freud. In “narcissistic identification,” loss object or the person becomes a part of the ego of the individual, and this pushes the individual to treat the object or the person as disgusting or despised, which he/she identified with oneself.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 250.

CHAPTER 2: MELANCHOLIA AND MOURNING IN JUDITH BUTLER'S PERSPECTIVE

2.1. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SEX and GENDER, THE HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX, and THE PERFORMATIVITY THEORY OF JUDITH BUTLER

Before trying to understand Judith Butler and how she explains her theories of gender performativity and heterosexual matrix alongside melancholy by associating it with gender, it is necessary to understand the difference between sex and gender. People often use gender to refer to biological sex; therefore, when talking about gender or sex, these two terms seem to join each other through confusion. The distinction between gender and sex has been an issue for a long time, and in one way or another, we all have been raised with the idea that our sex determines our gender. Furthermore, we think that sex is something stable, so naturally, we evolve around the idea that, first and foremost, sex and gender are binary. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by Judith Butler reformulates feminism's attempts against patriarchy by questioning the harmful impacts of our ingrained belief in gender and identity. Butler begins her book with Simone De Beauvoir's famous statement, "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one."¹⁶

De Beauvoir's account needs to be understood in detail because it gives the grounds for Butler's argument, which argues that gender is constructed, and the terms gender and sex are not wholly different from each other. Our biology is not the thing that determines our gender, but it is the culture that pushes us to be socially constructed as gendered. Although gender is acknowledged as a social construction, it is separated from the biological sex with this acknowledgment. At this point, Butler asks the question in *Gender Trouble*:

¹⁶ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (London: Jonathan Cape Thirty Bedford Square London, 1956)

Can we refer to a 'given' sex or a 'given' gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given, through what means? (. . .) Is there a history of how the duality of sex was established, a genealogy that might expose the binary options as a variable construction?¹⁷

With her questions on the issue mentioned above, Butler concludes that sex and gender are no different from each other. Accepting that gender is socially and culturally constructed, when we look at the examples of people who go under an operation to change their sex into what they know they are, it is undoubtedly seen that they are doing this to fit the current cultural norms. The cultural norm is binary and leads us to believe that one can only be either female or male. Throughout *Gender Trouble*, Butler tries to deconstruct the concept of gender and sex since she believes that the norms of sex and gender are created by power. Butler thinks that sex is also constructed, just like gender, by stating,

if the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.¹⁸

Even though Butler's argument is thorough, still, the main reason people cannot accept biological sex as constructed as gender is that the majority are raised to affirm that our identity is directly concerned with our gender and sexuality. Furthermore, we all live in a society where heterosexuality is ideal. With the term "heterosexual matrix," Butler tries to designate the structure that heterosexualizes desires, gender, and bodies within the context.

The concept of a heterosexual matrix lies underneath the idea that there must be a "gender intelligibility" that assumes that different sexes exist together if only there are hierarchical notions; for example, only masculinity can express the male, and femininity can express the female. But as Butler argues, "there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: 10-11.

to which gender aspires.”¹⁹ The main problem is that society consequently believes that what is rooted in our minds is the ideal man and woman as the substantial truth of the definition of gender and sex. So, we continuously act according to society’s expectations. Therefore, we can conclude that the reason behind the idea that women should be feminine, and men should be masculine is a socially determined fact, not a biologically determined one.

When the issue is acting accordingly to normative gender roles and behavior, addressing Butler’s “gender performativity” right here appears to be crucially necessary. Butler’s view in which she assesses gender as performative, a direct connection with the heterosexual matrix can be made. Keeping in mind that hierarchical notions shape and stereotype gender and sex, it becomes impossible to view gender detached from the idea that it is produced and maintained through cultural intersections. Our gender performance becomes a way of surviving in the heterosexual matrix since people are penalized for the wrongdoing of their gender. As Butler states: “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”²⁰ Thinking that if one is born female, one will be woman and feminine and be attracted to men without a doubt (same applies for men, being men/masculine/attracted to women) is not something we can call natural, according to Butler. We believe we have biologically inherent femininity and masculinity and therefore think we are expected and compelled to act through. Butler’s comparison of the repetition of our acts to a ritualized production is an essential aspect of understanding this concept. Acknowledging that some specific actions are continuously repeated, it is not hard to connect the heterosexual matrix and gender performativity. Our view about what is expected and what is not normal can be changed easily if, for example, something we would consider as not usual starts to repeat itself over the years. The fact that humans can easily change the general course of seeing or accepting something as normal or not normal, underlines that people actually do

¹⁹ Ibid.: 178.

²⁰ Ibid.: 43.

not construct gender; instead, people are being constructed. Gender being performative doesn't mean that we are acting our gender as a performance; rather, it means that we are actively constructing it as we act it out. If today, men start to wear makeup and continue to do so by repeating this act, it would be normalized one way or another. Hence, as long as we are willing to go on with the normative truths about gender and sex and see them as necessary or as something natural by playing them out, the binary ideal will remain the ideal truth.

On the other hand, if we refuse to perform our gender script, there will be no such thing as the ideal gender truth. The general view Butler presents in her theories can be summed up with the statement where she argues that "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results."²¹ Then gender, as well as, sex, are constructed concepts that always focus on preserving the idealized and normalized view of masculinity and femininity and hiding and repressing "other" desires that may be felt by humans. Thus, the heterosexual matrix of Butler underlines that there are invisible norms that are repetitively being applied which forces individuals to fit into specific sexualities and dispositions. As Tredway states,

Judith Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' (a sex-gender-sexuality tripartite system) accounts for how we make assumptions based on what we see. Her theory explains the experiences of most people, where sex and gender are the known categories, so the viewer, then, assumes a particular sexuality.²²

The determinant heterosexuality, and therefore the heterosexual matrix, create the concept and notion and the normative structure of gender. What individuals learn throughout their lives about their biological sex is not limited to how their organs differ, and they function differently. Instead, there is a vast history that

²¹ Ibid.: 33.

²² Kristi Tredway, "Judith Butler Redux – the Heterosexual Matrix and the Out Lesbian Athlete: Amélie Mauresmo, Gender Performance, and Women's Professional Tennis," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 41 (2014): 163.

defines sex and that sex's acceptable and required roles, characteristics, actions, and sexual preferences are directly being imposed on individuals starting with the first day they are born. What Butler underlines with her term heterosexual matrix is that we are directly born into a world where there is only male and female. Moreover, males and females are required to perform their sex and gender through a specific set of rules, values, and norms that had been accepted and normalized way before we could imagine. When it comes to the performativity aspect of Butler, on the other hand, it becomes evident that Butler underlines we are letting the status quo of gender and sex be pursued in the way it already is by following the dominant conventions of these concepts. As Butler explains it, "Within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names."²³ By naming and accepting gender or sex as the umbrella terms of two specific components, male and female, and by following the guidelines that are imposed on us about male and female roles and sexualities, we are enacting and producing the concept of masculinity and femininity in the way we are told we are supposed to.

In other words, with naming and believing in the heterosexual matrix, even though sometimes this naming and presenting evidence of its operation is being done by researchers or theorists to explain how gender and sex are constructed concepts, we are turning the concept of gender and sex into a performative act. Therefore, even if the aim is to subvert or deconstruct the heterosexual matrix and its implications, we undoubtedly reinforce and reinscribe it repetitively by performing masculinity and femininity in the way we had been taught. Acting out our gender performatively has nothing to do with gender or sex's primary truths about the body; instead, they belong to an ideology that existed and still exists beyond us. As Butler explains it,

the act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular

²³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13.

actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.²⁴

The repetitive and daily act of gender we perform every day allows the hegemony of heteronormative standards to pursue their power. Moreover, the heteronormative standards are the very thing that keeps us performing the constructed acts of gender. Starting from the daily things we do to the way we talk, walk, wear, and gesticulate; we unconsciously keep living in the script written for us about what a man or a woman should do be doing. For instance, when people need to announce that they will be having a new addition to their families, they would link a girl directly with pink and a boy with blue. Even though this may seem like a very innocent idea imprinted and encouraged in our minds, this thing we do even prior to a new human's arrival underlines that there is a constructed ideology entirely designed to support an oppressive status quo. As Butler also argued, even the distinction between private and the public is a fiction designed with hegemonic ideologies, supporting the oppressive status quo, which directly shapes and scripts our personal acts and the way we live our lives.

Throughout the arguments and perspective Butler represent in her theories, she highlights the constructed nature of gender and the artificial rules of normative heterosexuality. The reason behind this is her intention to show that there is a vast oppression of some individuals just because they do not conform to those rules and the script about normalized gender concepts. But besides the battle she gives for the individuals being enforced to act and behave in a specific way, Butler also pays great attention to explaining the beginning and nature of this gender constructionism. While continuously analyzing the binary gender system, Butler, in chapter five, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," in her book *The Psychic Life of Power*, deconstructs the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality by analyzing the relationship between constructed heterosexual gender identities and melancholy. Therefore, by accepting "it may first seem strange to think of gender

²⁴ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no.4 (1988): 526.

as a kind of melancholy, or as one of melancholy's effects,"²⁵, Butler argues that gender identities are constructed upon the fact that gender itself is a melancholy, holding an ungrieved loss. Thus, she analyzes Freud's melancholy concept in the context of heterosexual gender identities and their connection to melancholy.

2.2. UNDERSTANDING JUDITH BUTLER'S THEORY OF GENDER MELANCHOLY

There have been many attempts to understand the roots of melancholy after Freud clarified the difference between mourning and melancholy, positing that there are different responses to loss. Some of the most known and recognized theories, like Irigaray's, directly connected melancholy with femininity, and Julia Kristeva identified motherhood with melancholy. However, Butler had a different explanation about how melancholia occurs. The originating point which led Butler to analyse melancholy and gender hand in hand was her thinking that "there has been little effort to understand the melancholic denial/preservation of homosexuality in the production of gender within the heterosexual frame."²⁶ Therefore, primarily building upon Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," Butler introduced the basis of "melancholy gender" in *Gender Trouble* in 1990 and then explained her theory more intensely in *The Psychic Life of Power*'s "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification" chapter. While the two texts focus on different points, when read as a whole, Butler's notion of melancholy gender underlines gender itself as melancholy. Moreover, she considers melancholy as one of the regulatory operations psychic form powers establish.

In other words, Butler once again emphasizes the fact that there is a constructed system we live in and, therefore, must abide by. Analysing melancholy, she focuses

²⁵ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 132.

²⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 73.

more on defining how gender construction that starts the day we are born and the heterosexual structure we are forced to comply with results in a melancholy where there is an unavowed and forbidden view on homosexual attachments. The roles constructed for gender are decisive representations in terms of the subjectivity and sociality of the individual. Therefore, this constructed framework, which is based only on being female or male, directly applies the expectations of the dominant values regarding the roles of the gender in question and their production and reproduction. Butler, explaining and deconstructing the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, accentuates the normalized regulatory operation of normative heterosexuality and suggests that the interiorized ungrieved loss, which we call melancholy in its most basic definition, is directly related to the structure and construction of gender. As she states that gender is “acquired at least in part through the repudiation of homosexual attachments,”²⁷ Butler argues that what she calls gender melancholy occurs because of the grief we never had and never could have about homosexual attachments due to its forbidden structure. In this manner, Butler not only views and tries to understand melancholy psychoanalytically, but she also sees melancholy as one of the results the heterosexual matrix causes in everyone and assesses it through a political, social, and cultural context.

In all her theories, Butler's emphasis is on the fact that the concept of gender is constructed and imposed, and the accompanying roles assigned to masculinity and femininity exclude homosexuals, transsexuals, and intersexuals from the accepted scenario. According to Butler, this structure draws a normative boundary between sexualities, and this accepted, constantly imposed scenario operates in a multidimensional way. Masculinity and femininity are based on a heteronormative basis, not only in terms of sexuality but also in terms of freedom of expression, professional career opportunities, and family relations, which are among the requirements of being a social being. As a result of this imposition, a person accepts that having a sexual orientation other than the pairing of man/woman is forbidden

²⁷ Judith Butler, “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification”, in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 136.

and abnormal. Based on this idea, Butler believes that we should look for traces of heteronormativity in perhaps the most inexpressible emotional investments, the sensation of melancholy, and the relationship with loss.

Butler builds upon Freud's theory by believing that what is highlighted in the Freudian theory is that all kinds of identifications are the result of a loss, even though Freud does not directly link all identifications with loss. Knowing that there had been many criticisms of Butler's gender melancholy, I would like to underline that this thesis focuses on trying to explain how an individual/a female author (Virginia Woolf) might have found herself trapped and banned in the heterosexual matrix, thus experienced the gender melancholy in the way Butler explains. I'm aware that some points of Butler ignore the real implications Freud tried to make. I'm also aware that her theory seems like she is not paying attention to the individuals who can develop a heterosexual desire without losing or mourning a loss of a same-sex object. Moreover, I'm aware that her primary focus is on the unallowed and forbidden same-sex desires as a cultural formation only in all her conclusions and assumptions.

However, I believe Butler's gender melancholy theory focuses on speaking the unspoken. And I think that the reaction she shows to Freud's theory and overviews some of his implications is because of the fact that Freud surrounds his theory around a heterosexual structure. The fact that Freud stated the heterosexual system is the mere normal when understanding gender formation, identification, and melancholy pushes Freud to analyze these concepts from a deficient approach, just as Butler only focuses on same-sex desires and objects. Butler continuously dwells on a point where she underlines how homosexual attachments are denied from the very first place, and the identifications or the gender formation phase we go through is a limited and restricted one. In my opinion, Butler encourages us to think of the concepts we readily accepted within a broader context and different understanding that highlights how we're beginning to be structured in a specific form from the first day we take a step into this world. Thus, her theory will be read and analyzed as one of the most compelling and original theories about the reproduction of gendered

identifications in this thesis. And will further relate to Virginia Woolf, one of the greatest authors of her time, who chose suicide and had possibly dealt with gendered melancholy throughout her life, as this thesis will suggest.

Arguing that “identifications substitute for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss”²⁸, Butler sees melancholy as the paradigm of ego formation and ties all identifications to the lost objects. In other words, she generalizes all identifications as the result of replacing lost objects. Since Butler’s theory is based upon the melancholic identification argument of Freud, it is necessary here to remember what Freud’s mourning and melancholia essay’s main point was about melancholia. As it is summed up by Enderwitz,

Freud's essay emerges more clearly when we look beyond his detailed comparison with mourning and focus on the complex dynamics between the melancholic subject and its loved object. The melancholic's identification with the loved object promises insights into the general set-up of the ego. The essay first elaborates on the ego-ideal as a critical agency. Second, it introduces identification as a paradoxical relation that is constitutive of but also interferes with the integrity of the ego where identification becomes the driving force in the constitution of character.²⁹

Therewithal, what is different and read differently in Butler’s theory is her claim about underlining how much melancholy’s centrality plays a role in the acquisition of gender identity in individuals. Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*, suggests that in the melancholic identification process “internalizing lost loves becomes pertinent to gender formation when we realize that the incest taboo initiates a loss of a love-object for the ego and the ego recuperates from this loss through internalization of the tabooed object of desire.”³⁰ Since Freud links desire directly to gender identity, Butler argues that Freud’s

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 80.

²⁹ Anne Erdewitz, “Freud’s Melancholic Subject”, in *Modernist Melancholia*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 22.

³⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 75.

theory is restricted and faulty as within his theory, it is easily underlined that feminine disposition only desires males and masculine disposition only desires females. Freud's understanding of the masculine and feminine dispositions as the impact of uncertain accomplishment and that he links melancholy to an uncertain loss underline that his knowledge of these dispositions is established through prohibitions for Butler. Butler believes that these prohibitions directly demand the loss of specific sexual attachments, such as feminine disposition only desiring man and masculine disposition only desiring women, cuts out all other possible sexual attachments to be lost, avowed, and be in a place where they can't be grieved at all. So, as we have learned through Freud's analysis that in melancholia a loss is refused and therefore internalized as a loss in the psyche; as a part of the refusal mechanism, the object no more can show itself in the external world and, therefore, it always stays inside of us. Butler's questioning and her focus on melancholia within this context are on finding out whether gender identifications that are at the center of our gender formations could be produced through melancholic identification or not. Butler argues that the masculine and feminine dispositions understood from Freud's perspective are established within a prohibition that strictly demands individuals to lose sexual attachments and identifications that are not feminine or masculine for good. Therefore, they can never be grieved or spoken about due to the heterosexual structure. Therefore Butler, argues that

if the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand the force of this accomplishment as mandating the abandonment of homosexual attachments or, perhaps more trenchantly, preempting the possibility of homosexual attachment, a foreclosure of possibility which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss.³¹

Let's remember that Freud's very well-known Oedipal complex underlines the process where a child's sexual desire reaches to its normative or non-normative end.

³¹ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 135.

In other words, in the Oedipal process for Freud, there is an acquisition of gender identity taking place, and this is precisely where a child accomplishes an identification, a feminine or a masculine disposition according to their weaknesses or strengths within these dispositions. Freud's understanding of sexual dispositions sees sexual dispositions as the primary facts of the human's essence. Therefore, for Butler, Freud's view on sexual dispositions is shallow. Butler reads Freud's Oedipal conflict from the point of view where she understands that according to Freud's oedipal conflict theory, there is already a very sharp distinction made between the heterosexual desire and the homosexual desire, starting with the point where the taboo of incest is placed. For Butler, within the Oedipal conflict, it is readily accepted that the heterosexual desire is the normal disposition and the most direct disposition; therefore, the bias upon the same-sex desire or the homosexual attachment and the division between homosexual and heterosexual is imposed. In this sense, Butler argues that sexual dispositions are the "produced effects of a law imposed by culture and by the complicitous and transvaluating acts of the ego ideal,"³² since the taboo and the banning of incest prepare the ground for a structured perspective where the incest taboo becomes the forefront of the prohibition of homosexuality and results in the desire becoming a heterosexualized one with no other options seen as possible or understandable. She argues that "the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual dispositions by which the Oedipal complex becomes possible."³³ Moreover, she believes that neither masculine or feminine are not dispositions, rather they are "accomplishments, ones which emerge in tandem with the achievement of heterosexuality."³⁴ She strongly argues that Freud sees sexual dispositions as they are divided into two only because he believes that gender is formed and established through a heterosexual culture, where anything that goes against this structure and

³² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 81.

³³ *Ibid.*: 82.

³⁴ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 135.

cultural logic seems like a threat both to the heterosexual matrix that is repetitively being reproduced by society and to the gender itself.

What could be concluded so far from Butler's analysis of Freud's thoughts on gender formation and sexual dispositions is that Butler believes that the heterosexuality-focused structure of gender construction is prevalent in each and every cultural aspect of our everyday lives because it is the gender formation and sexual disposition form that is accepted as the cultural norm and value. And this, in return for her, makes the prohibition against homosexuality the primary prohibition individuals face about themselves unconsciously. As stated by Anaïs Touati,

Butler, assuming the existence of a homosexuality taboo before the existence of an incest taboo in an attempt to understand how denial and the melancholy preservation of homosexuality produce gender within the heterosexual matrix, implies considering in some way the status of the object and its loss. Indeed, if a heterosexual union is prohibited, the prohibition is directed at the object and not the desire, as it is in the Oedipus myth. Yet, in the context of prohibition imposed upon homosexuality itself, it is both the object and the desire that the subject must abandon. And it is precisely in this dual abandonment, at the origin of identification through incorporation, that Butler situates melancholy.³⁵

Butler underlines the difficulty of living in a culture that can barely mourn the loss of a homosexual attachment by expressing the importance of melancholic identification in determining the gendered character of the ego in her theory of gendered melancholia. According to this idea, masculine and feminine positions entail the loss of specific sexual attachments or even not grieving over these losses. The abandonment of homosexual affiliations is thus imposed, even if this possibility is denied in advance. In this context, understanding the domain of heteronormativity and tracing it even in the most ordinary moments of daily life requires focusing on such an act of rejection, which also denies mourning. Starting

³⁵ Anaïs Touati, "Metapsychology of Hate and Gender Constructions: The Paradigm of Melancholy," *Research in Psychoanalysis* 29, no.1 (2020): 35.

from Freud's idea of reconstructing a lost object within the ego, Butler states that such a replacement determines the form the ego takes and has a great role in establishing what is called character. Although a precondition for letting the object go can be achieved through the melancholic identification that occurs here, the meaning of "letting the object go" changes, for there is no final severance of attachment. Attachment is embodied as identification, and identification becomes a form of protecting the object. Paradoxically, letting the object go is not leaving it; it is internalizing it by changing its status. This characterizes the melancholy that includes self-reproach, deepening the relationship with the loss, and an intimacy that is impossible by nature.

Emphasizing the idea that masculine and feminine positions require the loss of specific sexual attachments throughout her theory, Butler's loss underlines that gender identifications are somehow produced through melancholic identification. The precondition of being a woman is not wanting another woman; if a woman is wanted, she may lose her femininity. In this case, when it comes to being banned, gender positions demand loss and not grief over it, as well as prohibition. There is also the desire for what is not in gender construction, for which it is not enough to reject the other simply. In this way, the prerequisite of being a man is to refuse to be a woman, as well as to desire the "woman" that he can never be and cannot be. Here the desired woman on behalf of the man is his rejected identification. While prohibitions cultivate heterosexuality, one of the objects of these prohibitions is homosexual attachments whose loss is imposed. By this logic, heterosexual identity is acquired through the melancholic incarnation of denied love. According to Butler, a man who insists on heterosexual consistency will claim that he has never loved and therefore lost another man. This love and commitment, thus, correspond to a double denial of never-loved and never-lost. Butler states that this is based on the heterosexual subject, an example of a confession of commitment to the subject's identity and a refusal to grieve. It is also a lost love, and the process of internalizing it is related to gender formation, as mentioned above. In this situation, in which desire and object are renounced because it is forbidden, both desire and object are exposed to the internalization strategies of melancholy.

Then, desire needs to overcome an identification that will never be completed. Both the obstacles of identification and the continuity of an impossible intimacy and loss present an appearance in which desire is staged as both a denial and a self. Absolute femininity or masculinity in the heterosexual sense is impossible since heterosexual femininity or masculinity are also subject positions that emerge by surrendering to the concepts produced by social power. As Butler states,

the fear of homosexual desire in a woman may induce a panic that she is losing her femininity, that she is not a woman, that she is no longer a proper woman, that if she is not quite a man, she is like one, and hence monstrous in some way. Or in a man, the terror of homosexual desire may lead to a terror of being construed as feminine, feminized, of no longer being properly a man, of being a "failed" man, or being in some sense a figure of monstrosity or abjection.³⁶

Butler's words in the quote above underline that the heterosexual matrix and the construction of gender create gender anxiety and panic due to the prohibition and fear imposed upon same-sex desire or homosexuality. The double denial of never-loved and never-lost rejects homosexuality for both women and men and makes it the way to perform heterosexual masculinity or femininity. And at the same time, this denial becomes the encompassing of that very denied homosexuality in the end. Moreover, as Butler puts forth, "This "never-never" thus founds the heterosexual subject, as it were; it is an identity based upon the refusal to avow an attachment and, hence, the refusal to grieve."³⁷ This refusal to grieve and the prohibition against homosexuality is culturally what is accepted and imprinted on individuals and still, today, continues to be practiced repetitively and in a ritualized construction. The roles and expectations imposed on femininity and masculinity disavow and reject homosexuality resulting in a heterosexual matrix that becomes more powerful and persistent. Heterosexualized desires and the culture that favors heterosexuality

³⁶ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 136.

³⁷ Ibid.: 140.

leave individuals with no other choice but to suppress other performances that are not of being feminine or masculine.

Consequently, focusing on her arguments as a whole, if we understand gender as a concept that reflects the obscured feelings and orientations about sexuality, then Butler's gender melancholy underlines the inevitable emotion of guilt in homosexual desires. Going hand in hand with Freud's depictions of melancholy at this stage, melancholy could be understood as an experience of self-beratement, as Freud explained in his "Mourning and Melancholia" article,

In the clinical picture of melancholia, dissatisfaction with the ego on moral grounds is the most outstanding feature. (. . .) so, we find the key to the clinical picture: we perceive that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient's own ego.³⁸

According to Butler's reading of Freud, the unresolved conflict with the other reestablishes itself in the psyche, and the anger that is toward the other becomes anger that one feels toward oneself, which leads one to self-beratement on the ego itself. Rephrasing Freud's thoughts on the experience of guilt and how it can be read as "the turning back into the ego of homosexual attachments,"³⁹ Butler underlines that the loss that cannot be lived externally or that is not articulated returns to the ego as a super-ego. Then according to Butler's conclusion, the loss and the aggression that is not lived externally towards the other, especially when it comes to the categories of desire, an identification that is being made in the ego is made through repudiation. At this point, it becomes impossible to differentiate the melancholic ego from the prohibition of the super-ego. As Butler underlines, "the ego-ideal, what Freud calls the "measure" against which the ego is judged by the super-ego, is precisely the ideal of social rectitude defined over and against

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 247-248.

³⁹ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 141.

homosexuality.”⁴⁰ The prohibition upon homosexuality, and this common ideal of humanity for ages that limits desire within only heterosexuality, as Freud underlines in “On Narcissism”,

binds not only a person's narcissistic libido, but also a considerable amount of his homosexual libido, which is in this way turned back into the ego. The want of satisfaction which arises from the non-fulfilment of this ideal liberates homosexual libido, and this is transformed into a sense of guilt (social anxiety).⁴¹

Moreover, when one has a loss that one cannot mourn, externalize, or live outwardly, one transforms it into aggression, hate, and continuous self-accusation; it leads to melancholy because of the combat between the ego and the super-ego against the unfillable and gender-structured ideal. As Butler reads it, what Freud suggests about the aggression toward the ideal in “On Narcissism”,

is not that one treats oneself as harshly as one was treated but rather that the aggression toward the ideal and its unfulfillability is turned inward, and this self-aggression becomes the primary structure of conscience: "by means of identification [the child] takes the unattackable authority into himself"⁴²

This is precisely why one accuses, degrades, and gets ashamed of themselves in melancholia. Even though Butler believes that all heterosexual people suffer gender melancholy and that it doesn't matter which sexual position is being talked about, all sexual positions are cursed with what is excluded from them, I believe that Butler's theory should be read especially for individuals who feel more inclined to homosexual desires, whether they are consciously aware of it, or not because of the cultural structure imposed on them. In my opinion, Butler's theory makes very

⁴⁰ Ibid.:141.

⁴¹ Sigmund Freud. “On Narcissism,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 101-2.

⁴² Judith Butler, “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification”, in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 142.

generalized assumptions about all humans. Still, the actual context is on how the heterosexual matrix impacts an individual's ego and identification formation. Especially when one feels excluded, shut down, and trapped in an "ideal" system where they can't even mention, speak or talk about what they had been forced to lose in the very beginning, and their ideal faces a conflict with what is expected of them. Therefore, according to Butler, this imposed and forced unfulfillability of the ego ideal turns inward in an individual, which creates melancholia, where

the super-ego can become a gathering place for the death instincts. (. . .) In this way, melancholia attracts the death instincts to the super-ego, the death instincts being understood as a regressive striving toward organic equilibrium, and the self-beratement of the super-ego being understood to make use of that regressive striving for its own purposes⁴³

Melancholy represents two different things at the same time; while there is a refusal against grief, there is also an incorporation, an identification made off with the loss. Therefore, even though it may not result in death instincts becoming more superior in one that can lead them to suicide, the incorporation and the identification with the loss indeed imitates a death that cannot be mourned or grieved, contrary to what happens in mourning. Thus, this death that cannot be mourned directly affects the individual with increasing death instincts. At this point, I wonder whether the death itself or this imitation of death where the individual experiences harsh self-beratement because of the melancholia and the process where the loss and aggression turned back into the ego as the super-ego is worse. I feel that there's a feeling of a huge entrapment in melancholia, where the self finds itself in pain, unable to understand or mourn the possibilities it could have lived. The fact that the loss of homosexual objects had become a foreclosed concept because of the prohibition upon it and because of the dominant heterosexual culture does not directly mean that each individual goes through this process and melancholia for me. However, I believe that Butler's theory becomes an evolutionary one when it is read to try to understand the foreclosed and prohibited culture amongst

⁴³ Ibid.: 142.

homosexuality and how homosexual individuals continue to live a gender melancholy all their lives. Moreover, especially when it is read with trying to understand how the results of this melancholy can turn into a life-lasting torture for these individuals. This life-lasting torture or the decision of suicide happens because the prohibition of homosexuality leads to a melancholic identification where the prohibited homosexuality and desire turn back into the self, and this creates the situation where “homosexuality is not abolished but preserved, though preserved precisely in the prohibition on homosexuality”⁴⁴, as Butler states. I believe that in this aspect, the gender melancholy theory opens up a brand-new way to understand how homosexuality is a taboo imprinted on our minds and sheds light on a very social, political, and cultural issue: The oppression, loneliness, desperation and the gender melancholy homosexual individuals feel and experience in the heterosexual matrix.

The way Woolf suffered with an ungrievable loss inside her and decided to take her own life after coming to a different understanding about death at the end of her life pushed me to evaluate her experiences, the language, and techniques she used in *Mrs. Dalloway* as a reflection of a gender melancholy. The next section of this thesis will discuss the parallel experiences of Virginia Woolf and her book *Mrs. Dalloway* and provide a detailed analysis of the underlying meaning of Woolf’s words and how she expressed her thoughts on death, life, sexuality, and homosexuality through the main character Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and in her diaries while experiencing melancholia and gender melancholy in both Freudian and Butlerian terms.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 142.

CHAPTER 3

VIRGINIA WOOLF, *MRS. DALLOWAY*, AND GENDER MELANCHOLY

3.1. GETTING TO KNOW VIRGINIA WOOLF

Looking at her essays, memoirs, and the underlying critical meaning behind her novels, everyone can understand that "Who am I?" is a question asked by Woolf to herself frequently. And that it had always been like this until she decided to take her own life. Providing a complete biography of Woolf is not the aim of this thesis. However, this section will focus on trying to connect her expressions and self-evaluations with her experiences and her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. As the editor of Woolf's book *Moment of Beings*, Jeanne Schulkind underlines in the introduction she wrote for the second edition that, "the memoirs, whose undeniable intrinsic merit enables them to stand richly on their own, cannot but deepen the experience of reading the fiction by rooting it more firmly in the context of Virginia Woolf's life."⁴⁵ Thus, there is no better way to start introducing Virginia Woolf than using her own description of herself, as she stated in her book *Moments of Being*,

Who was I then? Adeline Virginia Stephen, the second daughter of Leslie and Julia Prinsep Stephen, born on 25th January 1882, descended from a great many people, some famous, others obscure; born into a large connection, born not of rich parents, but of well-to-do parents, born into a very communicative, literate, letter writing, visiting, articulate, late nineteenth century world. (. . .) I do not know how far I differ from other people. That is another memoir writer's difficulty. Yet to describe oneself truly one must have some standard of comparison; was I clever, stupid, good looking, ugly, passionate, cold?⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Boston: Mariner Books), 24.

⁴⁶ Ibid.: 65.

Only this passage prevails that Woolf was always surrounded by questions when it came to exploring her identity and self.

Virginia Woolf, one of the most influential writers of the English language and literature in the Victorian era and one of the pioneers of the feminist movement, questioned the existence of women in society in general in her works, questioned femininity and women at the level of the concept of gender, and thought countless times about the male-dominated society structure with feeling the pain of discrimination against women in her whole soul. Woolf, who was critical of the England of the period, tried to challenge the era and the flow by emphasizing social problems such as the conditions in which women and men were educated, the deprivation of the freedom of women writers to produce literary works freely, and the impact of sexist approaches on society. She openly and boldly opposed the patriarchal order of England and the generalized norms and perceptions prevailing in the country, with both her subconscious and conscious ideas. In each of her novels and memoirs, she underlined the dramatic consequences of women being treated as second-class citizens in society, how they felt trapped, and how they suppressed their selves while living following the rules of an established order. This was because she was also one of those women, and she had problems understanding the structured and gendered system women lived in back then, as they still are living today.

Many bitter, hard, and unbearable truths made Woolf question her life, whether living or not is worth it, or what kind of an experienced death could be throughout her life. The most prominent of these was the siege of a male-dominated world that constantly threatened and trapped women and the multiplicity and height of the enormous visible and invisible walls that prevent a woman from clinging to life, especially to art. However, as stated by McCracken,

Throughout her fiction, Virginia Woolf raises the question of identity again and again: how does one represent the self, assuming that such a core identity exists? (. . .) Yet in order to understand a writer so much concerned, as Woolf was, with her sense of “being” and how that being

connects with others, we should also consider how Woolf represent her changing sense of her identity as a woman and a writer in her creation and re-creation of experience, especially personal experience.⁴⁷

To paint a picture about Woolf's life's most important facts then, it is known that Virginia Woolf was born in London in 1882, and was the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, a well-known Victorian writer. Thus, she came from a family interested in literature. His mother and father were known to have been married to other people before, and they both had children from their former marriages. However, besides the stepsisters and brothers, it is known that Virginia's mother, Julia Duckworth, and Leslie Stephen had five more children together, called Vanessa, Julian, Thoby, Virginia, and Adrian, in age order. As Woolf also underlines in "A Sketch of The Past", "Owing partly to the fact that I was never at school, never competed in any way with children of my own age, I have never been able to compare my gifts and defects with other people's"⁴⁸, it could be understood that Woolf was not sent to school and did not receive a traditional education. Even though the boys were to receive a proper college education, women were seen at a secondary level, and therefore, girls were not that fortunate back then. Moreover, some severe complications in their family life are linked to incest sexual abuse, as Woolf was molested by her stepbrother Gerald Duckworth, and points out in her memoir, *Moments of Being*,

Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto [a ledge], and as I sat there, he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes, going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it – what is the word for so dumb and mixed feeling?⁴⁹

⁴⁷ LuAnn McCracken, "The synthesis of my being: Autobiography and the Reproduction of Identity in Virginia Woolf", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 9, no. 1 (1990): 59.

⁴⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Boston: Mariner Books), 65.

⁴⁹ Ibid: 69.

It should be added here that the sexual abuse Woolf experienced had been underestimated and even been thought of as a fantasy Woolf created by many critics and biographers of her. Preferring to believe Woolf and her own memoir, I definitely believe that the abuse she experienced was real. Even though vivid descriptions and an apparent disturbance emerge to the reader in Woolf's memoir, it is a fact that some have chosen to believe that this sexual child abuse was an imaginary incident Woolf created in her mind. Back at the time, and sadly still, people insisted on believing that sexual abuse within a family would directly damage the role of the men, thus in many incest sexual abuse cases, it is the man or the boy who is believed in instead of the woman or the girl who had been sexually abused. As Herman states on Freud's drawback about his argument, where he claimed that at the origin of hysteria there was a childhood sexual trauma,

Freud was never comfortable with this discovery, because of what it implied about the behaviour of respectable family men. If his patients' reports were true, incest was not a rare abuse, confined to the poor and the mentally defective, but was endemic to the patriarchal family.⁵⁰

As could be understood, it was another patriarchal structure problem Woolf faced when very young, and the molestation she received from her stepbrothers surely affected her crisis of identity and how she felt displeased and disturbed with her body and looked at herself throughout her life. The fact that this sexual abuse was experienced by her other female relatives, especially her sister Vanessa, as well as according to what Woolf reveals in her memoirs, points out the fact that the family was not very attentive to this situation and preferred it to be silenced over time. On top of the sexual abuse she experienced at a very young age, another major event that, without a doubt, left an enormous impact on Woolf's life was her mother's death when she was at the age of 13. As stated by Bennett Smith,

The family doctor was called in to treat Virginia's nervousness, excitability, and depression after her mother's death. (. . .) Considerations of medicine, not mourning, decree that Virginia is to rest her mind and

⁵⁰ Judith Lewis Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 9.

exercise her body. Presumably, a simple life does not include existential angst, depression, or feelings of despair.⁵¹

Virginia Woolf, as it could be understood from the quote above, started to experience breakdowns and a righteous depression where she needed a hand to help when her mother died. When her father's death followed the sexual abuse and she lost her mother at the age of 22, things got even worse, and she had some serious resentments about her relationship with her father. After her father's death, it is known that Virginia and her siblings moved to Bloomsbury and started a new life for themselves from scratch. According to Urgan, one of the biographers of Woolf,

Although Virginia was approaching thirty, she had never had a love interest in any man, nor did she want to. In 1909, when Lytton Strachey, from the Bloomsbury group, the intellectual group named after the neighbourhood they lived in, proposed to marry her, she immediately accepted this proposal, knowing that the man was gay and therefore would not lay a hand on her.⁵²

However, Strachey and Virginia's marriage deal ended when the two decided mutually that it was a better decision to stay as good friends. Soon after it, in 1912, with the help of Strachey's letter to Leonard Woolf, which underlined that he was the man that should marry Virginia, Virginia Stephen became Virginia Woolf. Again, according to Urgan,

It was not a real marriage, that is, the mutual love between a man and a woman, including sexuality, but a beautiful friendship that lasted until the end of their life. Because, as Vita Sackville-West, a woman writer who later had a great love relationship with her, said, Virginia Woolf disliked the quality of masculinity and she never concealed it from her husband, who loved her with a deep passion."⁵³

⁵¹ Susan Bennett Smith, "Reinventing Grief Work: Virginia Woolf's Feminist Representations of Mourning in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no. 4 (1995): 312.

⁵² Mina Urgan, *Virginia Woolf*, translated by me (Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1995), 17.

⁵³ *Ibid*: 18.

The sexual abuse Woolf experienced in her childhood or the oppression she felt through her father might be the reasons why Woolf had always disliked and even found it disgusting to be with a man physically. However, there might be other reasons lying behind her discomfort about sexuality with men, considering that she did not feel this with her central romantic relationship with a woman, Vita Sackville-West. The relationship between Vita and Virginia will be discussed in detail in the following sections to shed some light on her identity crisis. It is important to note that even though Leonard and Virginia Woolf never managed to be in a standardly accepted marriage that included sexuality, Woolf felt an incredible love towards Leonard, and they lived a marriage in which they shared stronger and other emotions that were beyond their physical pleasures until her death. Woolf had written nine successful and highly appreciated novels, named *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919), *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), *The Waves* (1931), *The Years* (1937), and *Between the Acts* (1941), alongside many short stories, and essays until she took her own life on 28 March 1941, at the age of 59. There had been several suicide attempts of Woolf, but the one in 1941 was a more prepared and determined one, in which she left a last writing piece, a suicide note, to her husband, Leonard Woolf. There are many ideas put forward and discussed about the reason behind Woolf's suicide, but the only exact thing we know is that she filled her pockets with stones and drowned herself.

Indeed, the deaths Virginia Woolf saw at very young ages and the sexual abuse she experienced must have left severe impacts on her characteristic, soul, mind, and heart. And there are other life experiences she went through that need to be analysed in-depth to be able to try to understand Woolf. However, as stated at the beginning of this section, this thesis's aim is not to provide a full biography and to dig deeper into Woolf's life in detail. Instead, the aim is to point out some of the significant events in Woolf's life that had been connected to her suicide or her having mental illnesses(es) like bipolar disorder due to her traumatic upbringing. Bearing massive respect to all of the other researchers that took the case of Woolf from a different perspective, I will argue that in addition to all the traumatic experiences that were

evidently crucial in her identity development, there was another important factor that pushed Woolf to suicide several times and ended with her being successful in one of them: a melancholy, both in Freudian and Butlerian terms.

The next section of this thesis will give a very brief summary of Virginia Woolf's semi-autobiographical novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, and her protagonist Clarissa Dalloway will be analysed as Woolf's double and as the direct reflection of herself. Moreover, because *Mrs. Dalloway* can be read as one of Woolf's novels where she boldly revealed her criticisms and disillusionment about the structure she lived in, herself, and her identity alongside how the novel includes death motifs and traces alongside massive signals of the feeling of an unexplainable loss that could be linked to melancholy, and a gender melancholy in addition to her suicide. The aim from this point forward is to link what Clarissa expresses as a character in *Mrs. Dalloway* to Virginia Woolf's own experiences and thoughts. Focusing on the passages where Clarissa is described in the novel and Woolf's diary entries and essays, Virginia Woolf and Clarissa Dalloway will be analysed in the context of a possible Freudian and Butlerian melancholy.

3.2. VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS. DALLOWAY*

Before diving into an analysis, it is necessary to have some knowledge and insight about the characters alongside Woolf's writing technique in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Firstly, there are other novels by Woolf, especially *The Waves* or *Orlando: A Biography*, that could have been used for this thesis's focus of connecting gender melancholy to Woolf and explaining this with one of her novels side by side with her personal experiences. However, even though all of Woolf's novels can be analysed and viewed as autobiographical or semi-autobiographical, *Mrs. Dalloway* differs from the others. As stated by Janessari Ladani and Tork Ladani,

Woolf's psychological realism and her disavowing of the formal and novelistic concerns of the Victorian era materialize in *Mrs. Dalloway*, a fragmentary account of characters and life situations in terms of sporadic

and split beings and moments. This novel is famous for being (auto)biographically modelled after Woolf's own personality rather than those of her family members.⁵⁴

None of the sentences Woolf's constructed in her novels can be considered random or haphazard. All of them are parts of a whole, even though it does not make the reader feel like they have a meaning as a whole at first glance. For me, *Mrs. Dalloway* has always been the novel where she depicts and expresses her dichotomous self, her in-betweenness, and her personal, sexual, and social ideas about life through her characters in the best way.

As all the other summaries one can read on *Mrs. Dalloway* would underline, the novel begins on a June morning in London and ends on the evening of the same day, in the same place. Thus, it only depicts what happens in the course of a single day; there is no year crossing, significant events, big thoughts, or a definite plot that shows progress in time. Instead, the readers get to see the day of various characters in approximately 200 pages, and even though it may sound like it would be an easier reading when compared to other colossal novels, the flow of a single day in *Mrs. Dalloway* actually contains criticism of many social issues, problems, and systems that needs focused attention to understand.

Woolf gives her characters' thoughts with the stream-of-consciousness technique and uses external events as connection points while passing from one character's view to another in *Mrs. Dalloway*. As Baldick defines it, "the continuous flow of sense-perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and memories in the human mind; or a literary method of representing such a blending of mental processes in fictional characters, usually in an unpunctuated or disjointed form of interior monologue."⁵⁵ Therefore, Woolf blazes the moments in her stories and offers a new dimension of time by representing fragments of her character's thoughts and experiences but

⁵⁴ Zahra Janessari Ladani and Safoura Tork Ladani, "The Autobiographical Novels of Sidoine-Gabrielle Colette and Virginia Woolf: A Comparative Study", *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 56, (2015): 149.

⁵⁵ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, (Oxford University Press, 2001): 244.

doing this by making sure they all serve as the whole in her novels. Thinking that novel is not a form of writing but an emotion or emotions that the writer feels, Woolf mirrored her ups and downs, criticisms, ideas, thoughts, and character in the most naked way but also with a great obscurity style and rich underlying meanings to her readers. As Woolf explains the technique she wants to use in *Mrs. Dalloway* in her diary entry which she wrote during the years she was in the progress of writing it,

I should say a good deal about *Mrs. Dalloway* and my discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters. (. . .) The idea is that the caves shall connect, and each comes to daylight at the present moment.⁵⁶

Through these tunnels or caves that Woolf digs into his characters with the stream of consciousness technique, her own inner experiences meet the readers as an expression of their stream of consciousness.

As mentioned earlier, *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place on one day in mid-June 1923 in London. However, with the stream-of-consciousness technique, Woolf expands the time spanning eighteen years by navigating the characters' minds and the space where the events take place by visiting various places such as India, Bourton, London, and France. Also, using the technique of starting from the middle of the story, she builds the narrative around the main event with a third-person narrative, flashbacks, interior monologue, and other time-spanning tools. Dalloway traps his two main protagonists, Clarissa Dalloway, and Septimus Smith, in a single day in two parallel plots. Since the main interest of the novel is Clarissa's consciousness throughout the novel, the careful beginning and ending of the novel with her preserves the structural integrity of the novel. The whole stream-of-consciousness adventure begins and ends in the middle, flowing back and forth in time, when

⁵⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Events Recorded from 1918-1941*, (Musaicum Books, 2017), 75. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/book/366687859/Virginia-Woolf-A-Writer-s-Diary-Events-Recorded-from-1918-1941>

Clarissa, an upper-class housewife, gets out of her house to buy flowers for her party preparations in a single day. Through one day of Clarissa's life, when she is making preparations for the party she will be hosting that night, we get to enter into the mind of Clarissa and several characters. Some of these characters physically encounter Clarissa, i.e., *Mrs. Dalloway*, but with some, she even never speaks a word. Portraying the perfect housewife to the external world, we get to understand throughout her thoughts clearly that there is a side of Clarissa Dalloway in which she questions the woman and the person she is. Clarissa raises big and engaging questions about existence while also looking like a vivacious and fulfilled woman to the outside, which makes the reader question whether she was, or she is successful in fighting her demons or not. However, considering the self-doubts she reflects repetitively, it becomes evident that she has a mask that hides her soul and mind under the surface.

During *Mrs. Dalloway's* flower shopping, which is the opening scene, Septimus Smith also enters the novel, who is the second protagonist, and the double of Clarissa, however, these two characters do not know each other, and they never even speak a word. They only share similar feelings and thoughts throughout the novel, which urges the reader to connect the dots between them especially in the final. Woolf stated in her first diary entry about *Mrs. Dalloway*, on October 14th, 1922, that, "*Mrs. Dalloway* has branched into a book; and I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side—something like that."⁵⁷ Septimus mirrors the world seen by the insane, and Clarissa mirrors the world seen by the sane; the two merge into one personality as the novel unfolds, while we, as the readers, wander around their thoughts, experiences, and memories continuously. The climax is at the end of the novel, where Septimus takes his own life. This leaves Clarissa with deep thoughts and an essential closure about how she sees death when she finds out that a man has committed suicide. There are other important characters and events that one can write about, and some commentators did a whole analysis, trying to figure out what they pointed out as an

⁵⁷ Ibid.: 67.

underlying message in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Some of these characters include Richard Dalloway, Peter Walsh, Hugh Whitbread, Lucrezia Smith, Elizabeth Dalloway, Doris Kilman, Sir William Bradshaw, Dr. Holmes, and Lady Bruton. *Mrs. Dalloway* can also be read through various topics, and indeed, it can shed light on many issues of London back then, like the post-war period, the difference between classes, and how men limited women, therefore the society, etc. But besides the other characters and events, especially Sally Seton and partly Septimus, in addition to Clarissa Dalloway, will be discussed in detail in the next section of this thesis.

It is important to note here that in the next section of this thesis, the scope of analysis will be limited to analysing Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Smith, and Sally Seton with the aim of connecting them to the gender melancholy of Virginia Woolf.

Clarissa's expressions, thoughts, and the way the other characters in the novel define her are directly parallel to Woolf, her ideology, doubts, ups and downs, and identity crisis which shows connections to Freud's melancholia definition. And moreover, Clarissa's interest and feelings towards Sally Seton underline Woolf's possible gender melancholy with reference to her own relationship with Vita Sackville-West. On the other hand, Septimus Warren Smith, as the double of Clarissa Dalloway, reflects Woolf's side that is inclined to insanity and death and portrays her own thoughts and conclusions about death with essential references to her own suicide which took place years later *Mrs. Dalloway* was published.

3.3 VIRGINIA WOOLF'S FREUDIAN MELANCHOLY'S REFLECTION THROUGH CLARISSA DALLOWAY

It has been mentioned before that there are two main characters in the novel. The first of these, and in fact, the character with whom we are most intertwined throughout the novel, is Clarissa Dalloway, an upper-class housewife in her fifties. The other is Septimus Smith Warren, a middle-class young man in his thirties who is a victim of war. Considering that a prominent feature of the novel is to underline

the effects of the first world war on society, Septimus Smith Warren has generally been evaluated in this context. On the other hand, Clarissa emphasizes that high-class people were much less affected by this situation in the post-war period while shedding light on a completely different social issue, the limitations of the concept of women, and the place of women in society.

The nervous breakdowns and suicide attempts of Woolf were always known, and because of this, after she took her own life, her death became the primary issue for critics and writers who held discussions about her life and work. As stated by Bazin,

based upon experiences during her periods of both real or threatened "madness," Virginia Woolf was familiar with both terror and ecstasy. She had at least four major breakdowns (1895, 1904, 1912-15, and 1941), made two suicide attempts (1904 and 1913), and committed suicide in 1941. Contributing causes for Virginia Woolf's psychological problems were numerous.⁵⁸

Woolf's major breakdowns and suicide attempts had been connected to various mental health diseases and reasons concerning Woolf's childhood and adulthood experiences. And Septimus, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, especially because he is the character who took his own life, had been read as the double and the alter ego of Clarissa Dalloway and was linked to Virginia Woolf directly because of the suicide and death instincts he has throughout the novel. However, how Woolf reflected her hidden dichotomy and in-betweenness in *Mrs. Dalloway* through the character Clarissa only hasn't been thoroughly discussed. Therefore, after reading the novel with paying particular attention to the concept of melancholia according to Freud and Butler, in this section, I argue that Clarissa Dalloway, even without her double Septimus, reflects and portrays the melancholy and the gender melancholy Woolf struggled with, which resulted in her successful suicide attempt at the age of 52.

⁵⁸ Nancy Topping Basis, "Postmortem Diagnoses of Virginia Woolf's 'Madness': The Precarious Quest for Truth", in *Dionysus in Literature: Essays on Literary Madness*, ed. Branimir M. Rieger (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), 136.

Thus, this section will focus on the book quotes that describe who Clarissa Dalloway is and in what ways she directly reflects Woolf and the first traces of her melancholy.

While the passage of time, aging, and remembering the memories are handled with fine detail in the novel, the perception of "self" stands at the centre of the relationship structures. The most obvious expression of the past, which can no longer return, is connected with the main character's name. The identification of Clarissa as Ms. Dalloway and not Clarissa puts an essential emphasis on the loss of self. Thus, it is shown that her real self belongs to the past now, and what she had become is something irreversible. Clarissa makes some choices in her life and gets married according to her social position. In line with this choice, individual identity has been replaced by social identity, and an essential self, represented by personal identity, has been abandoned. Although Clarissa does not accept it directly, the feelings close to regretting caused by her choices become visible through her memories of that period and the contradictions between what she expresses and what remains between the lines. Our first introduction to Clarissa takes place in the first sentence of the novel, "*Mrs. Dalloway* said she would buy the flowers herself."⁵⁹ This sentence summarizes the lost-self emphasis of the novel. *Mrs. Dalloway*, who wants the party she will throw in the evening to be perfect, will buy the flowers, which are delicate details "for herself." Just like the success of the party, flowers are one of the details that ensure her success in being the woman that acts according to the expectations and, thus, serves as the key to the character's external "self" definition. Clarissa is mainly the character that reflects Woolf's criticism of women's role in society, gender performativity, and heterosexualized and patriarchal structure. Since the novel allows us to see Clarissa's internal experiences on such a deep level, we figure out the high society women's internal introspections in a dominated, restricted, and patriarchal idealism of the female image. Although Clarissa is depicted as an entirely feminine and mannered English lady, her internal experience becomes androgynous, indescribable, and blurred as she continuously

⁵⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 36.

deals with existential questions that point out to both her gender and identity crisis. *Mrs. Dalloway* and Woolf's feminism had been read with a significant emphasis on her criticism of the world's gendered structure and how women are being forced to act in line with their gender's expectations a million times. And surely, it is true that Woolf was raising her voice for all women before any theories had emerged about gender. However, I believe that Woolf also directly mirrored her own doubts, thoughts, and entrapped feeling about her identity and gender through the repetitive death motifs and Clarissa Dalloway, which sheds light on the focus of this thesis: exploring Woolf's melancholy with the help of her semi-autobiographical novel.

The party that is in focus and which all the readers get ready for throughout the novel is a very important event for *Mrs. Dalloway* because it is actually an effort to cover up the uneasiness created by her many worries, regrets, and questions about the past, present, and future. Although she tries not to think about those worries and the feeling of incompleteness, just as Woolf did by focusing on writing, the restlessness in question covers Clarissa's self and memory, and the dynamics of daily details are never enough for her to get rid of this continuous uneasiness.

In the very first pages, where the reader gets a sense of Clarissa's character through her memories and wandering thoughts, it becomes evident that there is something lost in Clarissa that pushes her to question herself and her choices repetitively.

But often now this body she wore, this body with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all. 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 anymore; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway.⁶⁰

Between these lines, Clarissa underlines that by marrying Richard Dalloway, she became a woman that is nothing like what she had imagined for herself. The emphasis on “now this body she wore,” on the other hand, highlights that she had

⁶⁰ Ibid.: 45.

married and given birth to a child and lives this life in the role of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the perfect hostess, and the housewife to meet the expectations of the gender perception in society. Moreover, she sees herself as nothing, as lost and as unknown, as she, herself, does not know who she really is. Similar to what Clarissa had been described, in *Moments of Being*, Virginia Woolf stated that,

one's life is not confined to one's body and what one says or does; one is living all the time in relation to certain background rods or conceptions. Mine is that there is a pattern hid behind the cotton wool. And this conception affects me every day.⁶¹

The cotton wool Woolf refers to several times in the essays she wrote has been assigned different meanings. However, to me, the cotton wool symbolizes the unchangeable reality of existence, the repetitive, unavoidable structure of the world: A world that makes a great division between the roles of the male and female and the dispositions of feminine and masculine. I read Woolf's "pattern hid behind the cotton wool" as a reference to her identity and gender crisis where she felt she couldn't express or live herself.

On the other hand, I believe that the background rods or conceptions underline the idealized heterosexual and patriarchal structure in this sense. When compared with the quote in the novel that describes how Clarissa feels about her "self," the thought of not having a child and not being married in another version she imagined, some similarities between Clarissa and Woolf arise. Virginia Woolf never had a child and so differed from Clarissa in this context; however, she got married to Leonard Woolf in in a pattern very similar to that which was described between Clarissa and Richard's marriage. As stated in the *Mrs. Dalloway*, "for in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in and day out in the same house, which Richard gave her, and she him."⁶² As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter (pg. 42-3), Woolf never thought about marriage and never felt any romantic interest in any man, even after her marriage to Leonard

⁶¹ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Boston: Mariner Books), 73.

⁶² Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 41.

Woolf. Similarly, to what Clarissa and Richard had, Virginia and Leonard's marriage was a sudden decision most likely made with the thought of obeying the structure of the world, the background rods, or conceptions where women must marry a man to be seen as "normal." Woolf dearly loved Leonard and his companionship in her own way, just as Clarissa did and described her husband as having an "an adorable, divine simplicity,"⁶³ but both these marriages were not built on the basis of pure love and affection, rather they were logical decisions that turned out to bring advantages. Yet, both Clarissa's and Virginia's marriages couldn't change the emptiness, in-betweenness, and nothingness they felt about their selves, identities, and genders. For instance, Clarissa describes a kind of hatred she bears inside her, which points directly to her identity crisis, which could be read as a reflection of the unexplainable feeling Woolf felt during her breakdowns that concerned her about the "inner-self" she had. While Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway explains the bursting emotions she felt out of nowhere with these words:

It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self-love! this hatred!⁶⁴

Virginia Woolf, in her diary entry on August 12th, 1933, describes what she felt after a breakdown and points out to a similar exhaustion to Clarissa with these words:

it strikes me—what are these sudden fits of complete exhaustion? I come in here to write: can't even finish a sentence; and am pulled under; now is

⁶³ Ibid.: 167.

⁶⁴ Ibid.: 46.

this some odd effort; the subconscious pulling me down into her? I've been reading Faber on Newman; compared his account of a nervous breakdown, the refusal of some part of the mechanism; is that what happens to me? (. . .) No. I think the effort to live in two spheres: the novel; and life; is a strain. (. . .) to have to behave with circumspection and decision to strangers wrenches me into another region, hence the collapse.⁶⁵

Although Clarissa Dalloway's way of expressing herself is described implicitly in a blur, it is evident that she feels helpless in an immense feeling of hatred towards herself and cannot make sense of this situation. In the part where it is stated, "since her illness," a reference is being made to the disease, which is not clearly explained in the novel, but that is linked to a heart-related condition. However, considering that each writer conveys their own experiences and that *Mrs. Dalloway*, especially, is the novel that Woolf focused on and reflected on herself the most, I think the emphasis on illness underlines the breakdowns and melancholy that Woolf constantly struggled with and couldn't make sense of. Similarly, again, "a monster grubbing at the roots, this hatred" underlined in the novel about Clarissa's feelings can be linked and read with how Woolf explained her situation after a breakdown. I believe that Woolf explained her feelings and thoughts of "sudden fits of complete exhaustion, and am pulled under, now this some odd effort" in a more intrepid way in *Mrs. Dalloway* by placing that feeling of hatred to self through Clarissa, and therefore the "illness" of Clarissa that is unexplainable there, references to the identity crisis and melancholy of Woolf. As stated by Çetinkaya et al.,

Masking her inner personality with illusional features that are supposed to be socially desirable causes frictions in her real self. Therefore, Clarissa merges disparate elements of the self in disillusionment. Her socially

⁶⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Events Recorded from 1918-1941*, (Musaicum Books, 2017), 243. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/book/366687859/Virginia-Woolf-A-Writer-s-Diary-Events-Recorded-from-1918-1941>

invented illusionary mask, the body, conceals her real self, soft interior until the protagonist reaches her self-enlightenment.⁶⁶

In my opinion, Woolf created a multi-layered personality for Clarissa on purpose to reflect her own dichotomies through her. Even though Virginia Woolf had a good life and always was a woman who could stand tall, she also masked her inner personality with illusional features that were supposed to be socially desirable, which indeed caused friction in her real self. As she wrote, “to have to behave with circumspection and decision to strangers wrenches me into another region, hence the collapse”⁶⁷, in her diary entry, Woolf underlined that she had to mask a part of herself that caused her to collapse every time.

So, the question is, could what Woolf hid be the loss she could never identify, thus mourn? In other words, could it be that she identified with the lost object, i.e., her oppressed, hidden, and fragmented self and suffered melancholy?

Returning to Freud's initial ideas about melancholia, I chose to read *Mrs. Dalloway* and Clarissa Dalloway primarily through the aspect of the melancholy she displayed as a character. Even though Butler's reading of Freud's melancholia and her theory of gender melancholy is extremely important to evaluate Woolf's and Clarissa Dalloway's melancholy, more examples from Clarissa Dalloway's expressions, and some passages from Woolf's diary entries & essays that highlight the traces of melancholy will be analysed in line with Freud's definition of melancholy, first. Then, believing that Clarissa was a direct reflection of Virginia Woolf and that Woolf herself suffered melancholy and reflected this through Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts and expressions, I focused on reading Freud's "lost object," "loss" or the "object" as the unconsciously oppressed, hidden, fragmented, internal, and thus the lost self of the person. The above quotes from Clarissa Dalloway and the diary entries of Woolf prove that they feel like there is an unexplainable loss they're

⁶⁶ Eda Burcu Çetinkaya, Atalay Gündüz and Mahinur Akşehir Uygur, “Mrs. Dalloway Revised: The Sense of Change and Disillusionment”, Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi 38 (2017): 127.

⁶⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Events Recorded from 1918-1941*, (Musaicum Books, 2017), 243. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/book/366687859/Virginia-Woolf-A-Writer-s-Diary-Events-Recorded-from-1918-1941>

dealing with, there is an impoverishment of their ego, and that this loss is the inner self they are forced to mask.

According to Freud, the melancholic experiences a loss but does not know what is lost, while in mourning, it is obvious what is lost. When the self is inhibited in mourning, and this inhibition is in consciousness, the self feels sadness and anger, but soon these feelings disappear as mourning ends as a process. In melancholia, on the other hand, much of the sadness and anger remains trapped within the self because they remain unconscious. As stated by Freud, this would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradiction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious.”⁶⁸ Freud also explains another point that is different in melancholia when compared to mourning, “The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of its ego on a grand scale.”⁶⁹ As discussed in the first chapter, Freud argued that in melancholia, the subject who/which insists on not being dissociated with the loss or the lost object does not realize or cannot explain the roots and the reason behind the emergence of the lost object. And this, for Freud is because an identification is established between the self and the lost object. Freud's definition of "the shadow of the object fell on the self"⁷⁰ suggest that the object whose shadow is cast on the self is not an object that had come to an existence either in the inner or the outer world of the person in melancholy. In other words, the object has a shadow that makes itself felt and noticeable, but the object itself couldn't have been put in place in the person's inner sphere or the public sphere. The ego begins to be evaluated by a special factor as if it were an object, or rather an abandoned object. In this way, an object loss becomes a loss of self, and the conflict between the self and the loved object becomes a rift between the self and

⁶⁸ Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 245.

⁶⁹ Ibid.: 246.

⁷⁰ Ibid.: 249.

the self-formed by the identification. Observing that one part of the patient's ego takes a critical and judgmental attitude towards another part of the ego that is altered by identification makes this rift understandable since the object loss becomes an ego loss. Looking back at one of the essays of Woolf, *Essays on The Self*, one can see how she mentions a split in the self and how Woolf started to evaluate the loss that became a loss of self, causing friction and a conflict between the self and the selves formed by the identification with the loss. Woolf states:

But relinquish, I said (it is well known how in circumstances like these the self splits up and one self is eager and dissatisfied and the other stern and philosophical), relinquish these impossible aspirations. (. . .) While these two selves then held a colloquy about the wise course to adopt in the presence of beauty, I (a third party now declared itself) said to myself, how happy they were to enjoy so simple an occupation. (. . .) Then suddenly a fourth self (a self which lies in ambush, apparently dormant, and jumps upon one unawares. Its remarks are often entirely disconnected what has been happening but must be attended to because of their very abruptness) said: 'Look at that.' It was a light; brilliant, freakish; inexplicable. For a second I was unable to name it. 'A star'; and for that second it held its odd flicker of unexpectedness and danced and beamed. 'I take your meaning,' I said. 'You, erratic and impulsive self that you are, feel that the light over the downs there emerging, dangles from the future.'⁷¹

Referring to death, when underlining the brilliant, freakish, and inexplicable light that she is unable to name, Virginia Woolf splits herself not just in two but four by identifying with the lost fragments of herself separately and takes them as abandoned and lost objects which becomes an ego-loss in her. Moreover, when she describes her "selves," especially the fourth one, which she defines as a self that lies in ambush, I believe she underlines the direct connection between her curious thoughts about death and the fourth self she humiliates and undermines. Returning

⁷¹ Virginia Woolf, "Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car" in *Essays on The Self: Selected Essays of Virginia Woolf*, (Notting Hill Editions, 2016), 132-4. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/read/361248410/Essays-on-the-Self-Selected-Essays-of-Virginia-Woolf>

to Freud once again, one can conclude from his definitions of melancholia that if object-oriented love, as in narcissistic identification, is an inalienable love despite being relinquished, then a hatred that mistreats, humiliates, inflicts pain on this object, and finds sadistic satisfaction from it, begins to operate. The self-tormenting attitude, which becomes -almost-pleasant in melancholia, means satisfaction with the subject's tendencies towards sadism and hatred, which have returned to its own self. Thus, self-accusations and undermining ideas and thoughts are directed to the "I" rather than the object. Accordingly, considering the psychological functioning of melancholia, while a loss of the object is perceived in mourning, in melancholia, there is a loss of the self for the subject. What is empty and meaningless is the self rather than life. Therefore, the melancholic subject sits in a position where it thinks that it deserves and even expects/desires to be punished with the devaluations of the self. As Freud states,

the patient represents its ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; it reapproaches itself, vilifies itself and expects to be the cast out. (. . .) When in its heightened self-criticism it describes itself as petty, egoistic, dishonest, lacking in independence, one whose sole aim has been to hide the weaknesses of his own nature.⁷²

It can be clearly seen in *Mrs. Dalloway* that in some parts where Clarissa's feelings and herself are described, Woolf used a tone that reflects both hers and Clarissa's self-undermining and self-accusing description of the self. Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts about herself and about living are transferred to us with these two quotes, in *Mrs. Dalloway*:

She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs

⁷² Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 245.

of knowledge Fräulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing.⁷³

and,

How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! (. . .) That was her self – pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman.⁷⁴

Depending on Clarissa Dalloway's feelings of loneliness, how she thinks living even one day is very dangerous, and how she accuses herself of claiming that she knows nothing. She is nothing out of the ordinary; it can be detected that the shadow of the object has fallen upon the ego. The object loss had becomes an ego loss in Clarissa Dalloway, causing her to make self-accusations and display an impoverishment of her ego. As I read the object as the hidden, fragmented, and oppressed self of Clarissa, it can be concluded that Clarissa Dalloway here is reflecting feeling of entrapment she has, and because she is not able to name what is lost in her due to the identification with that loss in the melancholy state she's in, not life, but her "self" becomes empty and meaningless. Freud suggested "melancholia borrows some of its features from mourning and the others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism."⁷⁵ In narcissistic object selection, the person chooses either someone who is like itself or someone as it wants to be or an object that was like a part of it before. The shadow of the object on the self is mutilation in this respect. Because the self and object relationship, which the self dominates, has been severed from the control of the self and in a humiliating way. The detached object leaves a crippled self in its place,

⁷³ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 41.

⁷⁴ Ibid.: 74.

⁷⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 250.

and sometimes, even living becomes meaningless when this mutilation takes place in the form of a crucial state because the ego is dependent on the object. The object remains in its incorporated and undigested state at the initial stage of the self-object relationship. The melancholic patient cannot mourn, or it cannot face the loss of the object because its loss will be not only the object but also a part of itself. Therefore, in melancholia, the object to be avenged is not outside but incorporated within the self. Thus, according to my reading of the "object" as the oppressed, hidden, and fragmented inner self of Virginia Woolf and Clarissa Dalloway, it can be concluded that while both woman's aggression was directed at the hidden, oppressed, and fragmented identity thus, their inner selves, the real target was the external selves they were pushed to perform. They both had to display a fragmented self to the outside world that couldn't be separated from the object in their melancholy due to the object being dependent on the real, inner self they're forced to hide. Self-accusation, humiliation and the expectations of being cast-out and punished by others as the symptoms of melancholy are apparent in Woolf's own life as well. Mina Urgan, one of the biographers of Virginia Woolf, underlines the traces of her melancholy when she exemplifies how Woolf assessed herself and her experiences of breakdowns in two different passages. Urgan states that, "because she is very conscious of her flaws and deficiencies, she often defines herself as a despicable person that deserves to be despised by others"⁷⁶ and underlines that,

according to Leonard Woolf's autobiography, Virginia Woolf sometimes thought that her illness was caused by a crime she committed, that she was being punished and felt that she should be punished for this crime, of which she did not know exactly what it was.⁷⁷

After assessing the most prominent symptoms of melancholy according to Freud's definitions and how they fit Clarissa Dalloway's character as the reflection of Woolf and Woolf's own descriptions and expressions, there is a need for returning to the lost object Woolf, and Clarissa had: the fragmented, hidden and oppressed inner

⁷⁶ Mina Urgan, *Virginia Woolf*, translated by me (Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1995), 40.

⁷⁷ Ibid.: 34.

selves of them. Indeed, Septimus' death in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Clarissa's enlightenment about that death also reveals a lot about Woolf, her suicide, and Clarissa regarding their melancholy. However, firstly, in the next section, Clarissa Dalloway, again, hand in hand with Virginia Woolf, will be analysed in the context of Butler's reading of melancholy: the gender melancholy.

3.4. VIRGINIA WOOLF'S BUTLERIAN MELANCHOLY'S REFLECTION THROUGH CLARISSA DALLOWAY

Even in the previous section where Virginia Woolf, and her double she created in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa, were analysed in terms of Freudian melancholy, it was clear that both Woolf and the way she reflected her own self through Clarissa showed apparent conflict with the concept of identity and that they always carried a massive loss, an unexplainable void, and absence inside them. In this section, the focus will be solely on Clarissa Dalloway's sexual disposition, sexual expressions, and her relationship with Sally Seton, and how similar Virginia Woolf's iconic romantic relationship with Vita Sackville-West and her mindset was with Clarissa's will be analysed to understand how Woolf was affected by gender melancholy.

The general way of thinking, which has been going on for centuries and which we have trouble getting over even today, argues that a sexual or romantic relationship can only take place based on a single bond between a man and a woman. Butler's aim in her theory of gender melancholy, which was detailly discussed and analysed in chapter two of this thesis, was to prevail over the heterosexualized construction of gender, the forbidden homosexual desires, and attachments and to discuss their effect on an individual's identity and character construction that leads to a gender melancholy. Masculinity and femininity are based on a heteronormative basis in which it is imposed on all individuals that heterosexuality is the normal and the only accepted desire and disposition, according to Butler. As a result of this imposition, individuals are being taught that having a sexual orientation other than the pairing

of men/women is forbidden and abnormal. Thus, Butler believes that gender, a social construction taught to us with certain restrictions we are expected to obey, is melancholy itself. Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, states that,

as regards the sexually mature individual, the choice of an object is restricted to the opposite sex, and most extra-genital satisfactions are forbidden as perversions. The requirement, demonstrated in these prohibitions, that there shall be a single kind of sexual life for everyone, disregards the dissimilarities, whether innate or acquired, in the sexual constitution of human beings; it cuts off a fair number of them from sexual enjoyment, and so becomes the source of serious injustice.⁷⁸

Being entirely on the same page with Freud in his above statement, Butler argues that the forbidden instincts reveal the social, thus the constructed side of the self, because they have a decisive aspect in the formation of the self. As Butler states,

in the case of a prohibited heterosexual union, it is the object which is denied, but not the modality of desire, so that the desire is deflected from that object onto other objects of the opposite sex. But in the case of a prohibited homosexual union, it is clear that both the desire and the object require renunciation and so become subject to the internalizing strategies of melancholia.⁷⁹

Butler is concerned with the internalization strategy of melancholy, as it offers an impeccable understanding of how, if there is such a thing as gender, it is constructed. Therefore, when we consider gender identity as a melancholic construct, it makes sense to consider 'incorporation' as a way to arrive at gender identification. Butler argues that this culturally constructed heterosexual melancholy creates acceptable and unacceptable gender identities as a definite

⁷⁸ Sigmund Freud. "Civilization and Its Discontents," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents and Other Works, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1930), 104.

⁷⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 75.

script that everyone must abide by, and this causes a loss that can never be mourned or realized: a gender melancholy. With her emphasis on pointing out the construction of gender, the dominant heterosexual matrix, and homosexuality in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf reflected the gender melancholy that is apparent in her by using two different characters. In my opinion, the whole book, which is accepted as a semi-autobiographic novel of Woolf's, the characters Clarissa and Septimus and their thoughts about death, life, and being oneself, alongside Woolf's experiences that are parallel with them, and the suicide letter she wrote as her final piece of writing is a highly possible example of gender melancholy and the consequences it brought. Clarissa Dalloway, who had been analysed by many as the character that reacts to the patriarchal structure throughout the novel and a woman that struggles with the structured gender roles while performing those scripted gender roles, Woolf also reflected her criticisms and thoughts about sexual dispositions and gender through Clarissa.

The prohibition on homosexuality, especially back when Virginia Woolf lived, was so strict and harsh that she found the solution to expressing her sexual disposition, this disavowed and unexplainable loss she felt throughout her writings. Clarissa's questions on identity and how lonely and lost she was depicted in the novel can be read as the evident results of repressing her actual sexual disposition and the way she feels forced to comply with the accepted social norms and values. In this case, while Clarissa tries to cover the loss of her identity and self and the massive feeling of the void by arranging luxurious parties, she is indeed trying to create an identity for herself. Similarly, Virginia Woolf, unable to fully live or express her sexual disposition, tries to get rid of the void feeling and the torture it leaves on her in the form of a gender melancholy by writing about it. Woolf, in "A Sketch of The Past," states that,

I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only

by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together.⁸⁰

Even though Virginia Woolf had put an emphasis on and wrote about her underlying and oppressed sexual disposition in many of her novels, and this may have taken away the pain for some time, her “lost” and “hidden” self didn’t completely lose its power to hurt her. As Urgan states,

Virginia Woolf’s sexual orientation was in favour of women. She didn’t like men in any way, not just sexually. According to her nephew Quentin Bell, her aunt thought that men despised women and distrusted them, even if they didn’t do it on purpose. (. . .) Since lesbianism was taboo, especially in those years, Virginia Woolf could not tell the truth and openly express her feelings.⁸¹

Thus, the self-accusations Woolf directed to herself, as analysed in the previous section, and the denied, therefore, incorporated loss she had can be read as sexual repression, thus a gender melancholy. Virginia Woolf fell in love with several women throughout her life, but her biggest love story was with Vita Sackville-West. As stated before, since Woolf’s marriage to Leonard was more like a lifelong and loving companionship, Leonard who knew the affairs of Virginia, didn’t react in a negative way to them. Therefore, Vita and Virginia’s love was known by him, and the love letters they wrote to each other (the first one being sent during the year Woolf started to write *Mrs. Dalloway*) were published by Leonard Woolf after Virginia Woolf’s death. Returning to *Mrs. Dalloway*, to understand the gender melancholy of Woolf that was reflected openly through Clarissa, firstly, what Clarissa revealed about Sally Seton, her former romantic interest and good old friend, needs to be analysed. As Virginia Woolf stated in her diary entry dated 1924, while she was in the process of writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, “to be friendly with women, what a pleasure – the relationship so secret and private compared with relations

⁸⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Boston: Mariner Books), 72.

⁸¹ Mina Urgan, *Virginia Woolf*, translated by me (Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1995), 28-9.

with men. Why not write about it? Truthfully?”⁸², it is essential to note here that in this section, Clarissa’s expressions, experiences, and thoughts about Sally Seton and, therefore, homosexuality, although limited, will be taken as the primary reference that possibly signals Virginia Woolf’s gender melancholy as she externalized her own situation and views through her writings.

Remembering that Clarissa always underlined an unexplainable hatred towards herself, a void that cannot be defined or understood, that she made self-accusations and vilified herself until the very ending, taking a deeper look at what that void could be in her that made her feel incomplete is necessary. While dealing with her identity crisis and judging and criticizing her “self,” it is stated that Clarissa,

could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women altogether. For that she could dimly perceive. She resented it, had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt, sent by Nature (who is invariably wise); yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident – like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment, but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation... For that moment she had seen an illumination.⁸³

“Something central which permeated” in the above quote, actually hints to what was that void, that unexplainable loss Clarissa felt all along while trying to meet the society’s standards and be the perfect hostess. As Butler states,

as a set of sanctions and taboos, the ego ideal regulates and determines masculine and feminine identification. Because identifications substitute

⁸² Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Events Recorded from 1918-1941*, (Musaicum Books, 2017), 85.

⁸³ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 68.

for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss, gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition. This prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire.

Even though Clarissa knows that she feels something towards women, she first struggles to explain her attraction. She cannot name it properly and prefers to describe it as “a feeling that men felt towards women.” The prohibition over homosexuality and the ongoing law of the heterosexual desire that is followed continuously, even by Clarissa herself, causes her to feel the loss, the possibility of being attracted to a woman, as something lacking that is coming from the center, which is permeated. Shortly after, the readers get introduced to Sally Seton, the main reason behind Clarissa admits she yields to the charm of women, as Clarissa asks herself, “But this question of love, this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; (. . .) Had not that, after all, been love?”⁸⁴ The described feeling of Clarissa, in which she underlines that she thinks what is lacking in her is coming and spreading from the center with a sense of prohibition, can be read as Clarissa’s, thus Virginia Woolf’s gender identification that is based on successful implementation of the taboo placed against homosexuality. As Butler states,

If feminine and masculine dispositions are the result of the effective internalization of the homosexual taboo, and if the melancholic answer to the loss of the same-sexed object is to incorporate and, indeed, to become that object through the construction of the ego ideal, then gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity.⁸⁵

On the other hand, the relationship with Sally Seton she refers to underlines that even though she got married, acted, and behaved according to the heterosexually constructed system, she knew how it felt like to be romantically interested in a woman, just like Virginia Woolf. Moreover, Clarissa’s thoughts on her feelings

⁸⁴ Ibid.: 69.

⁸⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 81.

towards Sally Seton, in a very similar fashion to Woolf where she described her attraction to women as the relationship so secret and private compared with relations with men,⁸⁶ is described with these words:

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally's.⁸⁷

Here again, an emphasis is being put on the heterosexualized desires in the constructed and gendered system, as Butler underlines in her gender melancholy theory. As discussed more detailly in chapter two, Butler argues that,

if the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand the force of this accomplishment as mandating the abandonment of homosexual attachments or, perhaps more trenchantly, preempting the possibility of homosexual attachment, a foreclosure of possibility which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss.⁸⁸

Clarissa, thus Woolf, expresses feeling "protective" when it comes to assessing the love towards women because deep down, she was also taught that homosexuality is a taboo and something disgraceful, so she knows that something is bound to separate them one way or another because what they were living at the first place was something considered to be unlivable. Virginia Woolf was in the beginning of a romantic relationship with Vita Sackville-West when she was working on *Mrs.*

⁸⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Events Recorded from 1918-1941*, (Musaicum Books, 2017), 85.

⁸⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 71.

⁸⁸ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 135.

Dalloway. The parallelism between what Virginia Woolf wrote in her diaries about the concept of homosexuality and Clarissa's feelings and approach toward her interest in Sally should be taken into account. It can be considered that since when she started to form a romantic relationship with Sackville-West, she was in the process of writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, she reflected her own feelings for Sackville-West while creating the relationship between Clarissa and Sally. At this point, especially one passage from *Mrs. Dalloway*, where Clarissa recalls a memory she had with Sally Seton and how she describes and conveys her thoughts about the essence of the feeling she had towards her, remains to be critical. The reason behind this passage's importance lies in the fact that its revelation of how similarly Woolf defined homosexuality when compared to how Judith Butler, years later, defined the forbidden structure of homosexual desire and attachments, which she explained as the primary reason behind gender melancholy. In the passage, it is stated that

then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it – a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up, and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!⁸⁹

Firstly focusing on the first part of this passage which ends with the sentence “there she was alone with Sally,”⁹⁰ where Clarissa’s first kiss with Sally is described as the “most exquisite moment of her whole life” by Woolf, linking this relationship to her relationship with Vita Sackville-West and her actual sexual disposition in general, it can be concluded that Virginia Woolf felt the most alive when she had the chance to live out her actual self. The letters between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West provide details that can be analyzed in this context. In one of the letters Sackville-West sent to Woolf states: “Please try with all you might not to let

⁸⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 72-3.

⁹⁰ Ibid.: 72.

anything happen. I will be responsible for you after you have arrived—only please arrive. Bring your work, I won't interrupt. I so want you to be happy here.”⁹¹ And Virginia Woolf replies to her letter with: “Oh I'm so sick of teeing dining, reading, writing and everything, except seeing— well it is you; I admit. Yes, it will be nice—yes, it will: And shall you be very kind to me?”.⁹² I believe that Woolf's emphasis on stating that everything but being with Vita is meaningless and boring can be read in line with Clarissa's description of having the “most exquisite moment of her whole life” when she shared a kiss with Sally. Virginia Woolf had a chance to reflect on her real “self” and feelings when Vita's presence in her life was vital. Moreover, she likely lived the most exquisite moments of her whole life when she was with her and was not hiding her “self,” just as Clarissa underlines. By focusing on how intensely Woolf reflected her feelings toward Vita, both in her letter and through the creation of Clarissa's feelings toward Sally, it can be interpreted that Woolf always struggled with expressing and living the considerable passion and interest she had towards women outwardly in a system where she also felt the oppression of obeying the heterosexual matrix and the patriarchal structure of the society. Even though she had the chance to be herself in specific periods, it sounds and feels like she also dealt with a conflict where she knew she was having the “most exquisite moment of her whole life, passing a stone urn with flowers in it”⁹³ while feeling “a presentiment of something that was bound to part them”⁹⁴ when she felt love for women. Butler exemplifies this situation in account of a man and masculinity, her thoughts will be written by changing the “he” with a “she”, to meet the context of this thesis:

Homosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions and these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments, thereby forcing the loss of those attachments. (. . .) Precisely because what is repudiated and hence lost is preserved as a repudiated identification, this desire will

⁹¹ Vita Sackville-West, *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1984), 116.

⁹² Ibid.: 116.

⁹³ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 72.

⁹⁴ Ibid.: 71.

attempt to overcome an identification which can never be complete. Indeed, she will not identify with him, and she will not desire another woman. That refusal to desire, that sacrifice of desire under the force of prohibition, will incorporate homosexuality as an identification with femininity. But this femininity will be haunted by the love it cannot grieve.⁹⁵

Then, the second part of that same passage in Mrs. Dalloway, which stated that,

she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it – a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up, and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!”⁹⁶

The present that is wrapped up and "told" just to keep it, not to look at it, can be read as Woolf's foreclosed identity that had been forcefully taken away in heterosexual culture. What Butler tried to explain throughout her gender melancholy theory is the fact that in this gendered structure where heterosexuality operates as the culturally dominant form, even our ego is gendered, and the strict prohibition upon homosexuality brings a foreclosure of loss which then turns back into the ego itself as the super-ego resulting for the individual to turn against his/herself considering that the sexual disposition they had been imposed does not fit the person they are, and they experience gender melancholy. Clarissa Dalloway, not being able to explore her foreclosed loss and thus her foreclosed true sexual desire fully, describes her attraction and love towards a woman as a present that is strictly wrapped up and with the rule of not trying to understand what it is. Moreover, she metaphorically underlines the heterosexualized culture package and the forbidden homosexual attachments individuals must lose that come with that package. The ambiguity of Virginia Woolf's and Clarissa's identities and the loss

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 136-7.

⁹⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 73.

they could not explain and could not make sense of were discussed in detail on the basis of Freud's melancholy in the previous section. Virginia Woolf's distress becomes more apparent when we add Butler's theory of gender melancholia to the previous chapter, in which homosexual attachments are banned and thus become a loss that can never be experienced or even mourned. For instance, DeSalvo, one of Woolf's biographers commented about one of Vita Sackville-West's novel characters, "Evelyn Jarrold, the central character, may be a portrait of (. . .) Woolf's continuing inability to give full acknowledgement to her own lesbianism."⁹⁷ The fact that Woolf openly felt her own sexual orientation in her relationship with Vita, just like Clarissa did in her relationship with Sally, could have sharpened the inexplicable gap inside her, causing her to identify with that emptiness and loss that she could not live externally, or even mourn. Then as Butler explains it,

the prohibition on homosexuality preempts the process of grief and prompts a melancholic identification which effectively turns homosexual desire back upon itself. This turning back upon itself is precisely the action of self-beratement and guilt.⁹⁸

Self-blame, the feeling of deep and inexplicable emptiness, self-hatred, self-recrimination, and humiliation, evident in Clarissa and thus Woolf, can be the signal which emphasizes a melancholic identification in which their homosexual desire turned back upon themselves and into the ego. According to Freud, melancholy is the process in which the individual cannot move away from the object to which it is attached, cannot direct their love to another object, and therefore is drawn into itself and identifies with the lost object. The loss of the desired and loved object creates an act of identification that aims to contain that object within the structure of the self. In Butler's reading, this identification includes both prohibition and desire, as well as the loss that cannot be lamented. The fact that the norms that restrict and produce desire operate in a psychic structure and result in denial of loss

⁹⁷ Louise A. DeSalvo, "Lighting the Cave: The Relationship Between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf," *Signs* 8, no.2 (1982): 207.

⁹⁸ Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 142.

causes a decrease in the individual's sense of self. For this reason, Butler draws attention to the role played by the individual's loss, which one cannot grieve, in the formation of its subjectivity. The melancholy that haunts the individual can be understood as a result of considering the psychic and social fields in relation to each other. The denial of the socially forbidden, ungrievable loss prevents acceptance of the loss and prevents the healing process from starting. This rejection causes the individual to harm itself to blame itself, and due to the internalization of the loss, it causes the loss they had to reside in their 'selves'. At this point, melancholy emerges because of the exclusion of some forms of love as a situation that grounds subjectivity for Butler.

This thesis' main focus has been on understanding the "lost object" and the "loss" alongside the anger towards it, which rebounds upon the ego as a super-ego both in Butler's and Freud's reading on melancholia, as an identity which never had a chance to come out, or be spoken about. Therefore, for everyone, but especially for people who feel like there is an emptiness, a hole inside them because of the sexual dispositions they took on in the strict heterosexual matrix, this anger, hate, and loss of the "object" symbolizes the person they never had a chance to become, speak about, or mourn as a loss. Woolf had been directly stigmatized with mental illnesses, or a depression that female authors "generally" experienced back in the days she lived and in the aftermath of the 1914-18 war. With paying respect to all the mental illnesses and psychological analysis made on Woolf by other writers, I believe that her most profound struggle and suffering was with the real identity she couldn't live or accept to its fullest, understand completely, or at least mourn. Thus, if Butler's theory of gender melancholy is understood as the process where heterosexuality forces the loss of homosexual attachments from the very start and that it becomes a loss that cannot be grieved, I believe that Woolf melancholically identified with the barred object and her homosexual desire turned back upon herself. This thesis suggests that with the homosexual desire turning back upon her ego and self, Woolf felt a continuous ambiguity when it comes to defining and understanding herself. Moreover, this thesis believes that the way Woolf reflected her own dichotomies, sense of guilt, self-accusations, and thoughts about

homosexuality through Clarissa underlined the gender melancholy she suffered from.

3.5. A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S SUICIDE IN THE LIGHT OF GENDER MELANCHOLY

In this last section, considering that this thesis aimed to connect melancholy and gender melancholy to Woolf's life and her suicide with the help of her character Clarissa, firstly, Clarissa's reaction to the death of Septimus Warren Smith will be pointed out to get a broader understanding about Woolf's own thoughts and approach to death. And secondly, the suicide letter of Woolf will be briefly analysed in the context of the primary conditions of melancholy explained in the previous sections by Freud and Butler.

As underlined before, Septimus Warren Smith is a strong character in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which serves as the double of Clarissa Dalloway. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is clear that there is an intense desire, an instinct for death, which symbolizes Woolf's derived death instinct in her life. And it makes perfect sense that considering Clarissa Dalloway's analysis in the previous sections, Clarissa's, therefore, Woolf's gender melancholy can be the reason behind that dark cloud that surrounds the novel's pages in its entirety. However, what is engrossing is that the inevitable death that takes place at the end of the book is not something the protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, experiences. It is instead Septimus Warren Smith. Septimus and Clarissa have no connection in the story, but as the novel unfolds, they grow closer to each other, and death binds them. As Julia Briggs states in her book *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*:

When Woolf described how she came to write *Mrs. Dalloway*, six years later, she explains that in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her double, had no existence; and that *Mrs. Dalloway* was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of her party (. . .) and

later she commented that 'the character Septimus in Mrs. Dalloway was invented to complete the character of Mrs. Dalloway.'⁹⁹

Solely focusing on what Virginia Woolf revealed about Clarissa in the above quote, it needs to be underlined here that instead of Septimus's side, story, expressions, and similarities to Woolf, the impact Septimus's death left on Clarissa Dalloway will be analyzed to understand Woolf's own suicide. As stated by Urgan, "Woolf had Septimus Warren Smith commit suicide at the end of the novel instead of Clarissa. Thus, this young man became Clarissa's alter ego, the other side of her personality." In this context, Clarissa's reaction to her alter ego, the other side of her personality, and Septimus's suicide can reveal a lot about Woolf's own thoughts and approach to death, as Clarissa had been analyzed as the double of Virginia Woolf herself in this thesis. There are two critical passages in *Mrs. Dalloway* in which the reader is allowed to get inside the mind of Clarissa, where she reveals her reactions to Septimus's death. In the first one, she underlines that she believes that Septimus had protected the precious essence of living by taking his own life, where she destroyed and filled her life with continuous lies and not acting in line with her true self.

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 center which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.¹⁰⁰

This passage becomes more meaningful when one of Virginia Woolf's diary entry is read, where she stated,

Oh, and I thought, as I was dressing, how interesting it would be to describe the approach of age and the gradual coming of death. As people describe love. To note every symptom of failure: but why the failure? (. .

⁹⁹ Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 141.

¹⁰⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 240.

.) to detect every one of the gradual stages towards death, which is a tremendous experience and not as unconscious, at least in its approaches, as birth is.¹⁰¹

Woolf glorifies death and defines it as a tremendous experience that should be described in detail. Her curiosity about death and the way she sees it does not actually make her afraid of dying. Thus, I believe that Clarissa's enlightenment about death after Septimus and the way she describes death as a defiance and an attempt to communicate can be directly interpreted to understand why Woolf herself thought death was a tremendous experience.

In the second passage, which reveals another reaction of Clarissa, it becomes evident that Clarissa believed she was supposed to die and that she blamed herself because of the young man's death she never knew.

She must have perished. She had escaped. But that young man had killed himself. Somehow it was her disaster, her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear, here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness and she forced to stand here in the evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable.¹⁰²

Clarissa's thoughts above underline that she felt a strong connection with a man she never knew because he successfully embraced death, and she was not. The fact that she is forced to be present at a party in her fancy dress despite all the darkness she held inside makes her think that she acted like a coward and kept on hiding the feeling of the void by conforming to society's expectations about her gender continuously. It can be considered that Woolf always had mixed feelings about death, which, most of the time, had been a concept that made her curious. Johnson states, "The original intention to have Clarissa kill herself 'in the pattern of Woolf's own intermittent despair' was rejected in favor of a 'dark double' who would take

¹⁰¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Events Recorded from 1918-1941*, (Musaicum Books, 2017), 361.

¹⁰² Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 241.

that act upon himself.”¹⁰³ I believe that Woolf needed Septimus as the dark double to kill himself instead of Clarissa killing herself because she wanted to reflect how trapped she felt between the choice of living and dying. This thought could be strengthened by one of the diary entries of Woolf, in which she clearly states that, “I am suspended between life and death in an unfamiliar way”¹⁰⁴ in 1922, while writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. I believe that while writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf explored both sides of her. The one trying to hold on to living, and the one continuously surrounded by thoughts of death. In my opinion, she was not ready to sketch a scenario where the final act was suicide for the character in which she reflected her own experiences and actual but hidden and repressed self between the lines the most. Yet, since she was dealing with an emptiness and a void inside her that pushed her to self-beratement and accusations, Septimus was needed to reflect her challenging mind and the urge for death that was coming from deep within her. Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* may not have committed suicide sticking to the original plan, but

the young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him... And the words came to her, fear no more the heat of the sun... 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,¹⁰⁵

she had found a way to embrace death and identify with Septimus, so much so that she felt happy for him as he did what she couldn't do. Before writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, I believe that Woolf was not ready to analyze and dig deeper into the concept of death, even though her curiosity over the dying experience was at the top throughout her life, based on her diaries. In my opinion, Woolf reached a more precise conclusion about what death meant for her after finishing *Mrs. Dalloway*. And she reached a better understanding of where death stands in her life by placing Clarissa at the center as herself and giving a role to Septimus as Clarissa's alter ego to show

¹⁰³ Manly Johnson, “Mrs. Dalloway,” in *Virginia Woolf*, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), 63.

¹⁰⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Events Recorded from 1918-1941*, (Musaicum Books, 2017), 58.

¹⁰⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 241.

her what death could be like. After assessing how Woolf could have evaluated death based on what she revealed to her readers in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf's suicide letter can be better analyzed in the context of a gender melancholy.

Dearest,

I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate. So, I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I don't think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I can't even write this properly. I can't read. What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that – everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer.

I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.

V.¹⁰⁶

This is Virginia Woolf's last written piece; her suicide notes that she left for her husband, Leonard Woolf before she committed suicide by filling her pockets with stones and drowning herself. Just as self-beratement and accusations, which are the primary conditions of melancholy for Freud and Butler's reading of Freud, were apparently visible even in Clarissa's reaction to the death, they are also harshly visible in Woolf's suicide note. Butler argues that

if the object lost its externality when it became a psychic ideal, it now loses its ideality as the ego turns against conscience, thus decentering itself. The judgments of conscience are exchanged for the verdict of reality, and this

¹⁰⁶ Femi Oyeboade, "Dearest, I Feel Certain I Am Going Mad Again: The Suicide Note of Virginia Woolf," *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 16, no.4 (2010): 280.

verdict poses a dilemma for the melancholic, namely, whether to follow the lost object into death or to seize the opportunity to live.¹⁰⁷

Virginia Woolf chose to follow the lost object into death in this context. Accepting the lost object in this quote as the prohibition on the homosexual desire and attachments, the unliveable passion and unlivable loss that had directly foreclosed the possibility of homosexuality in the case of Virginia Woolf, it can be interpreted that Woolf's repressed and lost "self" had turned back into the ego of homosexual libido, and her "self," day by day, lost its ideality and meaning. On the other hand, as Freud states in "Mourning and Melancholia",

the analysis of melancholia shows that the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object- if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world.¹⁰⁸

There is a strong sense of hopelessness in every line of Woolf's suicide note, and it sounds certain that what she has been dealing with so far has reached to a point where she can't find a way out. She holds herself responsible for everything that goes wrong. She portrays harsh self-accusations and self-berates as she emphasizes Leonard being incredibly patient with her, that everybody knows this, and implies that she is a massive burden by stating that she can't go on spoiling Leonard's life any longer. Thus, Woolf's letter sounds like she was in the situation described by Freud. She directed the hostility she felt toward the lost object against herself. At this point, as Butler underlines,

to make of melancholia a simple "refusal" to grieve its losses conjures a subject who might already be something without its losses, that is, one who voluntarily extends and retracts his or her will. Yet the subject who might

¹⁰⁷ Judith Butler, "Psychic Inceptions: Melancholy, Ambivalence, Rage", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 192.

¹⁰⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 252.

grieve is implicated in a loss of autonomy that is mandated by linguistic and social life; it can never produce itself autonomously. From the start, this ego is other than itself; what melancholia shows is that only by absorbing the other as oneself does one become something at all.¹⁰⁹

This thesis suggested that Woolf experienced melancholy both in Freudian and Butlerian terms. Thus, I believe that the prohibition of homosexuality led to a melancholic identification where the prohibited homosexuality and desire turned back into the self in Virginia Woolf, according to Butler's reading, and this resulted in life-long torture since there was an unfulfillable ideal. Moreover, aggression that resulted from the unfulfillability of that ideal, in other words, the lost object, dragged Woolf to treat herself judgmentally and self-berate. Woolf's fragmented, oppressed, and hidden self and identity, which she couldn't live outwardly and turn into an ideal that can never be reached, was one of the significant struggles of Woolf that had a strong connection with her suicide, according to what she conveyed through her diaries, essays and suicide note alongside her double Clarissa Dalloway. Just as Butler states, in melancholy, the individual can only become something that can be considered as something valuable and meaningful if only they can absorb the "other" as oneself. In this case, even though Virginia Woolf had the chance of being romantically and erotically involved with women, especially Vita Sackville-West, for the most prolonged period, as Sackville-West also implied, Woolf had never given full acknowledgment of her own homosexuality. When the lost object, her homosexual desire, and true sexual disposition, had been foreclosed and therefore lost the possibility of being expressed externally, Woolf reflected the rage, hatred, emptiness, and void she felt because of this loss to her ego and started to harm her character, soul, mind, and heart.

¹⁰⁹ Judith Butler, "Psychic Inceptions: Melancholy, Ambivalence, Rage", in *The Psychic Life of Power*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 195-6.

CONCLUSION

Having a bachelor's degree in Comparative Literature while studying Cultural Studies for a master's degree, I always enjoyed gathering different principles together and drawing connections between them. When the time came to decide on my thesis topic, I thought that analyzing two disciplines, sociology & psychology, with literature would provide a fruitful discussion. Therefore, I decided to focus on one of my favourite authors, Virginia Woolf, as her life and suicide always indulged a strong interest in me. The "Melancholy and Modernity" lecture I took from Mr. Keskin raised an urge to research what similarities there could be between Virginia Woolf's life and a melancholy state. Thus, this thesis intends to discuss if Virginia Woolf, one of the most famous writers in the modern period who insistently wrote about gender issues, sexuality, insanity, and identity crisis and took her own life at the age of 52, could have experienced what Butler called "gender melancholy."

At the beginning of this thesis, in the introduction, I provided a background history of melancholy and explained the essential explanations that had been made about it, starting from the time back to Ancient Greece. Then, I emphasized the importance of understanding Freud's melancholia theory for the context of this thesis since Judith Butler's gender melancholy theory, which is at the center of this thesis, was built upon his theory.

In the first chapter, I provided a brief but straightforward analysis of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" article and paid attention to the difference between mourning and melancholia and the primary conditions of melancholy. The main emphasis in the first chapter was on understanding how Freud explained the effects of the "lost object" in a melancholy state. Therefore, I highlighted the impact of melancholic identification with the lost object that, according to Freud, leads the individual to identify with that loss in a paradoxical relation where one undermines and starts on self-beratement since that identification becomes the primary force in the constitution of one's character. As De Boer, Bondevik, and Solbraekke state,

this person comes to be mainly characterised by that loss of and want for that object. 'The shadow of the object,' Freud poetically writes, 'falls upon the (self), and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were (the lost) object'. In this sense, the melancholic person has incorporated the lost object into her/his/its sense of self. Consequently, melancholy comes to be lived as a rather paradoxical identity. After all, incorporating and identifying with a lost object signifies selfhood as a loss of self as a non-object and implies a loss of present selfhood, as the melancholic's main characterisation—the longed-for object—is already lost.¹¹⁰

After discussing Freud's melancholia theory, I explained Judith Butler's gender melancholy theory in depth in the second chapter. Firstly, a brief yet informative summary of Butler's general views on gender, sex, and the gendered structure individuals live in, with an emphasis on her performativity theory and the concept of the heterosexual matrix, was provided. Then I detailly analyzed her gender melancholy theory which she explained in two different books, *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Gender Trouble*. Adding upon Freud's thoughts on melancholia, Butler, in her gender melancholy theory, believed that gender itself was melancholy and argued that the lost object is directly connected to the forbidden structure of homosexual attachments since everyone is forced to fit in a heterosexualized and gendered construction where they never get to understand, absorb, or mourn the loss of their foreclosed identities. As McIvor states,

this experience of loss cannot be experienced; it insists at the unconscious level and haunts the subject formed as a result of its occurrence: "melancholy designates a failure to grieve in which loss is simply internalized and, in that sense, refused." The implication is that all identity is troubled at its origin, haunted by an incompleteness or incoherence that can never be fully acknowledged.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Marjolein Lotte de Boer, Hilde Bondevik and Kari Nyheim Solbraekke, "Beyond Pathology: Women's Lived Experiences of Melancholy and Mourning in Infertility Treatment", *Medical Humanities* 46 (2020): 215.

¹¹¹ David W. McIvor, "Bringing Ourselves to Grief: Judith Butler and the Politics of Mourning", *Political Theory* 40 (2012): 413.

Lives that are valued by being squeezed into generally accepted and imposed norms come into existence on the condition that something is rendered worthless and written to the subject's record as lost. In other words, the situation called subjectivation in a gendered structure in which we are born emerges as a result of norms and matches that we cannot choose. In this case, while trying to gain a place in the social order, which is defined by accepting the roles and personality determined by the norms and characterized as normal, we become forcibly separated from our "self," which is considered abnormal outside the norm. According to Butler, gender actually carries within itself what it suppresses and ignores by displaying a denialist attitude. In other words, when it comes to gender, only male-female identity is considered acceptable, and mentioning more than one gender category is prohibited. However, each excluded gender category underlines the existence of identification with these previously forbidden categories. In the current gendered and heterosexual culture, the radical rejection of any other gender orientation underscores the early losses incurred in establishing the concept of gender.

In this context, the lost object emphasized by Freud and the loss and denial in Butler's reading continues to exist within the constructed gender, leading to a melancholic attribute to this loss. The loss, which is kept inside or identified with denial, pushes the subjects to question the adjectives they have taken and to be constantly tested against the loss with a void that they cannot make sense of or assimilate. This loss constantly harasses the person and the ego of the person as if they are inexhaustible possibilities of destruction and re-articulation. Since Freud's initial views on melancholy and Butler's commentary on it with a whole new theory hold great importance for understanding what could be the loss that causes a melancholic identification, after assessing both theories, I evaluated the lost object as the hidden, fragmented, and oppressed self of individuals which has the potential to destroy the character, and identity of a person from the very bottom.

Thus, in the third chapter, I related both Freud's melancholia theory and Butler's gender melancholy theory to the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* by focusing only on one character: Clarissa Dalloway. All of Virginia Woolf's novels include a reflection of Woolf's own experiences and thoughts about different concepts in life. However, since *Mrs. Dalloway* had been seen as a semi-autobiographical novel in which Woolf reflected her character and identity the most, this thesis had chosen to keep its focus on the protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, only.

In the third chapter, a brief background about Virginia Woolf was provided alongside a brief summary of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which focused on explaining in which context the novel was going to be analysed in the following sections. Therefore, neither a complete biography of Woolf nor a full summary of *Mrs. Dalloway* was provided. This thesis' primary focus was on trying to build a connection between Virginia Woolf and melancholy, both in Freudian and Butlerian terms, and *Mrs. Dalloway* was only used in the context of drawing similarities between Clarissa Dalloway and Virginia Woolf's own life experiences and thoughts. Thus, firstly a detailed analysis that explains what similarities can be detected in Virginia Woolf's essays, diaries, and her character Clarissa Dalloway's expressions in the context of Freudian melancholy was provided. And then, another detailed analysis aimed at connecting Virginia Woolf to a Butlerian gender melancholy was explored.

Finally, in the light of Virginia Woolf's specific diary entries and essays that this thesis found a direct connection with the character she created, Clarissa Dalloway; this thesis suggests that Virginia Woolf had experienced a gender melancholy that made her feel an unexplainable void and emptiness inside her due to the fact that she never had the chance to acknowledge her genuine sexual disposition fully.

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