Mrs. Dalloway: Consciousness, "Social Homeostasis," and Marxism

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Abstract The nurture/nature dualism inherent in Marxist theory would be modified and updated in this paper by linking it to the Antonio Damasio's notion of social homeostasis to clarify Septimus' suicide and Clarissa's will to live, despite their similar characteristics, in *Mrs. Dalloway.* The issues of consciousness, self, and "social homeostasis" proposed by Antonio Damasio would be joined to Marxist class distinction critique to update this Marxist theory in order to analyze *Mrs. Dalloway*. In this way of adjusting and updating, Damasio's notion of basic homeostasis, core and extended consciousness would be introduced because social homeostasis is provided by extended consciousness to expand the function of basic homeostasis (well-being and survival) into the realm of society. In the end, the revitalized and updated Marxist's cultural critique (invigorated by assimilating the neuroscientific notion of social homeostasis into it) would be utilized to depict how in *Mrs. Dalloway* social homeostasis, in the unhealthy culture with exclusiveness of power to a particular class, contributes to the survival and well-being of dominant class, to which Clarissa belongs, and deprives Septimus of his freedom and of gaining optimal life situation.

Key words *Mrs. Dalloway*; Antonio Damasio; Consciousness; Social Homeostasis; Marxism

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Mrs. Dalloway is a novel about "ordinary mind[s] on an ordinary day" (Woolf, *Selected Essays* 9). In 1922, before writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf in her diaries declared: "I am beginning to learn the mechanism of my own brain" (qtd. in Lehrer 172), and "psychology should be done very realistically" (qtd. in Lehrer 187). Lehrer interprets the latter statement as: "She wanted this book [*Mrs. Dalloway*] to capture the mind in its actual state, to express the tumultuous process at the center of our existence. For too long, Woolf believed, fiction had indulged in a simplified view of consciousness. She was determined to make things complicated" (187). Studying the critics' view of consciousness in Woolf's era and at present would lead us to two sets of questions: first, what were the dominant ideas about consciousness in her era? What was a simplified view of consciousness that she tried to denounce? Is the full understanding of consciousness possible? Does it, even, exist at her time? Second, is her idea about consciousness in line with the dominant ideas of her time? Based on more modern debates, what is consciousness? and what does it mean to be a conscious being? What is the function of consciousness? Is it connected to the physiology of human being? Is it related to the body? Does it interact with the external world? Generally, is Woolf's idea in harmony with the ideas proposed in her time about consciousness or it is much like the more modern debates such as Damasio's?

"No" was the answer of the behaviorists to the last question mentioned in the first set of questions. Woolf's contemporary, John B. Watson in his book *Behaviorism* contended: "Behaviorism claims that 'consciousness' is neither a definable nor a usable concept; that it is merely another word for the 'soul' of more ancient times" (3). Their motto could be formulated into observing and defining; therefore, commit it then to the flames everything that could not be observed directly: "He[the behaviorist] dropped from his scientific vocabulary all subjective terms such as sensation, perception, image, desire, purpose, and even thinking and emotion as they were subjectively defined" (Watson 6) to make psychology an objective, scientific field. In other words, behaviorists refuted the

notion of consciousness because they believed that consciousness is too subjective and metaphysical to be observed and verified. This is the simplified view of consciousness Woolf denounces. So, does consciousness not truly exist? What is Woolf's view of consciousness, then?

A transdisciplinary approach, with the participation of science, is the panacea: "biocultural criticism and theory strengthen the aims and practices of literary studies by combining scientific psychology and evolutionary studies with literary criticism, history, and other areas of the humanities and sciences" (Easterlin 5). This article is based on a new transdisciplinary and neuroscientific approach to literature with the aim of bridging the gap between science, specifically neuroscience, and literature. Such a neuroscientific approach to literature is the outcome of enormous studies in the emerging field of cognitive science in recent decades which inevitably found its way to the humanist fields. According to Sowon S. Park:

> Literary studies are not unaffected by the "cognitive turn": significant emerging areas spurred on by the recent growth in consciousness studies are neuro-literary criticism and "evo" (evolutionary) literary criticism, whose messianic tones were captured in the 2002 special issue of Poetics Today. Entitled "Literature and the Cognitive Revolution," it pronounced that "evo" and "neuro" approaches will "revolutionize the study of literature by overthrowing the rule of poststructuralism." (108)

This neuroscientific approach never degrades literature in favor of science; nevertheless, it shows the genius of the writer and the flexibility of literature as an inclusive art which mirrors and contains all aspects of life. This approach also could mark the potentiality of literature as a prophetic art because in many cases it anticipated neuroscientific findings. According to Birge, neurofiction is being read in scientific realm for three reasons: "Improving education on cognitive disorders (including education of doctors, patients, and the public), improving narrative or analytic skills, and heightening empathy in caregivers" (95).

The modern debate of consciousness was started by Descartes. His ideas modernized the mind-body dualism. His dualism was influenced by Plato's idea which was based on "an immortal soul consisting of parts concerned with the emotions, will, the appetites and reasoning, interacting with our bodies" (Bennett 200). Plato called mind "the reasoning part of the soul, involving thinking" (198). Descartes pruned Plato's ideas: "He held that perception as well as emotion, nutrition, growth and reproduction are neither parts of the soul as Plato would have

it, nor functions which constitute the soul as Aristotle suggested, but essentially physiological functions of the body" (200). After that pruning, Descartes introduced the notion of consciousness:

> What Descartes did then was to assimilate thought and reasoning, defined by Plato as properties of the mind, into the concept of consciousness and then expand this to include sensations and will-power as immediately experienced. Consciousness was now immortal, identified with the person, and this consciousness received sensations or acted on the world through a body that was an elaborate physiological mechanism. (Bennett 200)

Therefore, Descartes redefined the notion of mind to include "everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it" (qtd. in Bennett 200) and called it consciousness. Consequently, mind was considered as a distinct independent substance characterized by thought which was different from the other spatially extended substance, the matter. While dualism denotes that there are two kinds of substances in the world, monism "holds that there is one. . .. Within monism, there is a further distinction between views that construe the single existing stuff as material and views that construe it as immaterial; the former are *materialist* views, the latter *idealist*" (Kriegel 38).

A classic materialist view of consciousness was proposed by Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709-51): "He proposed that conscious and voluntary processes result simply from more complex mechanisms than involuntary and instinctive processes" (Frith and Rees 10). This functionalist view contends that physical complexity of an organism is responsible for its consciousness. Is this emergenist theory true? Is consciousness a side effect of physiology definable in physical terms?

In direct opposition to functionalists and eliminative materialists (such as behaviorists), Thomas Nagel in his famous essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" argues that consciousness exists but it is not likely, at least in this era, to know what consciousness is like — it is "unanalyzable, indeed ineffable" (Nelkin 124). Nagel argues: "The fact that an organism has conscious experience *at all* means, basically, that there is something it is like to *be* that organism" (436). This statement highlights "the subjective character of experience" (Nagel 437). While behaviorists believed that subjectivity is a hindrance to objectivity of science, Nagel considers the phenomenal consciousness (the subjective character of experience) as the major constituent part of consciousness. Furthering Nagel argument has led to mysterianism: "Consciousness is a genuine mystery, not merely a *prima facie*

mystery that we may one day demystify" (Kriegel 36). Anyway, why does he believe that consciousness is ineffable?

According to David Chalmers "the hard problem of consciousness is the problem of *experience*" (226) — or phenomenal consciousness, or "mental states that are inherently conscious" (Tye 23). It is a hard problem because it resists to be explained by the methods of "computational or neural mechanisms" (Chalmers 225). As a reaction against functionalists' arguments, Chalmers contends: "What makes the hard problem hard and almost unique is that it goes *beyond* problems about the performance of functions"; in other words, "even when we have explained the performance of all the cognitive and behavioral functions in the vicinity of experience — perceptual discrimination, categorization, internal access, verbal report — there may still remain a further unanswered question: *Why is the performance of these functions accompanied by experience?*" (228).

These philosophers and their contradictory ideas illuminate how consciousness is difficult to be grasped and defined. This is the reason that a host of different philosophical and scientific theories are suggested to explain it, but still consciousness has remained elusive because of, in part, its hard problem. Maybe a transdisciplinary research (where neuroscience and philosophy ally themselves with literature, in which there is a rich load of characters' subjective experiences) can help both neuroscience and philosophy to define what consciousness is. The result of that endeavor, in return, can be utilized in literary criticism to arrive at a full analysis of a character in a story.

So far, different views towards consciousness were studied; these views were popular and dominant at Woolf's time but Woolf was ahead of her time and her view towards consciousness is very much like more modern critics' views such as Dmasio's. Woolf's new form results in "a series of experimental novels that challenged the way we both see and depict reality" (Priest 290). Woolf claims: "I have a very clear notion of which parts of my brain think" (qtd. in Waugh 28). By discussing that the mind is the product of the brain or, in words of Damasio, "mental states and brain states are essentially equivalent" (*Self Comes to Mind* 246), Woolf, with a different argument, abolishes the distinction between the mind and matter. Therefore, she encourages writers to loosen and break the chain of convention because she "felt that the novel had reached a moment of crisis, its generic conventions out of date and irrelevant for the expression of the character and conditions of a new age" (Parsons 15). This is how literary criticism feels like today.

Woolf's complicated ideas about consciousness in her novels anticipated

the theories of recent neuroscientists, such as Antonio Damasio. Is mind and consciousness ineffable for Damasio? Does he believe in body and mind dualism? In the realm of philosophy, Damasio is aligned with Spinoza than Descartes. Spinoza's aspect dualism abolishes the problem of the interaction between physical and nonphysical entities: For Spinoza "mind and body would spring in parallel from the same substance, fully and mutually mimicking each other in their different manifestations. In a strict sense, the mind did not cause the body and the body did not cause the mind" (Damasio, *Spinoza* 209). Therefore, the mind is the work of an ensemble organism interacting with the environment. To put it another way, "body, brain, and mind are manifestations of a single organism" (195). Next sections of this paper investigate how Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, in addition to anticipating and contributing to the modern discussion of consciousness, is better clarified by neuroscientific theories concerning consciousness.

Ann-Marie Priest in her article "Virginia Woolf's Brain: Mysticism, Literature and Neuroscience" opines how Woolf's access to her right-brain perception, which is the seat of unity and interconnectedness of all life, caused her mystical and experimental writings (and her treatment of time, memory, consciousness, and self); therefore, "A sense of impatience with the limitations of the egoic self is evident in all Woolf's later novels [including *Mrs Dalloway*]" (302). She applies her thesis to Mrs Ramsay's behavior in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse.*

Mrs. Dalloway and the Body

Damasio contends that the importance of the body in emotions, feelings, and consciousness is unquestionable. In contrast to common thinking, "the mind exists for the body, is engaged in telling the story of the body's multifarious events, and uses that story to optimize the life of the organism" (Damasio, *Spinoza* 206). The mind is dependent upon the body because "the body and the surrounding environment interact with each other, and the changes caused *in the body* by that interaction are mapped in the brain" (Damasio, *Self* 63) to be utilized "as *content* into the mind process" (62). This notion leads to the idea that any mental activity — such as feelings, self, consciousness — is based on the mapping of the body in the brain. In sum, "mind is probably not conceivable without some sort of *embodiment*" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error* 234).

Woolf has a similar notion of this interaction between the body and the mind when, in her essay "On Being Ill," she discusses; it is what Woolf believes about the relation between literature and consciousness:

> Literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear. …On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February. The creature within can only gaze through the pane — smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant. (*Selected Essays* 101)

This fact that the body initiates the feelings and, consequently, the thoughts is illustrated in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The significance of this depiction lies in its extensive practicality in literature especially in modernist texts in which the role of the mind is heedlessly enshrined at the cost of forgetting the importance of the outer world, the role of the body, consciousness, and neurons for the formation of the mind and memory. McIntire in her book, *Modernism, Memory and Desire: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf*, argues: "For Eliot and Woolf memory is always already invested and intertwined with writing sexuality, the body, and desire" (2).

Mrs. Dalloway begins when Clarissa hears "a little squeak of the hinges" (Woolf 35) as Rumpelmayer's men preparing the house for the forthcoming party. This sound stimulates Clarissa's physical sensation to remind her of Bourton when she was 18. In this passage, Park argues, "Woolf presents physical sensations as vehicle for knowledge, undercutting the presumed opposition between reason and emotion" (113). This notion of the body as a medium for gaining knowledge is further investigated when Clarissa feels a revelation:

> It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. (Woolf 56)

This passage depicts arriving at knowing, or revelation, in terms of physical sensations: It shows how body, by providing emotions and feelings, initiates the creation of knowledge and how knowing without feeling is impossible. About this extract, Park argues: "What may seem like contradictory cognitive processes —

thinking and feeling — in the conceptual scenography of the 'two cultures' are reshaped into a continuum of 'feeling of knowing' in Woolf" (113).

Damasio's main thesis in his book *Descartes' Error* is that "certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality" (xiii). Why should emotion and feeling play a part in reasoning? In other words, why "*reduction in emotion may constitute an equally important source of irrational behavior*" (53)? Damasio asserts that several brain systems are responsible for shaping reason which are located in both high and low regions of the brain: "The lower levels in the neural edifice of reason are the same ones that regulate the processing of emotions and feelings, along with the body functions necessary for an organism's survival"; consequently, "these lower levels maintain direct and mutual relationships with virtually every bodily organ, thus placing the body directly within the chain of operations that generate the highest reaches of reasoning, decision making, and, by extension, social behavior and creativity" (xiii).

As discussed, emotions and feelings are necessary for reasoning and decision making. Septimus who "could not feel" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 96) is, thus, unable to think reasonably. Therefore, he finds the world "without meaning" (98); the way Septimus considers the world meaningless can be better explained through Damasio's "somatic-marker" hypothesis. Damasio, very much like Woolf, emphasizes the direct influence of body on reasoning. Woolf, through the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, shows this influence and Damasio explicitly theorizes the idea. By somatic-marker Damasio means: "When the bad outcome connected with a given response option comes into mind, however fleetingly, you experience an unpleasant gut feeling. Because the feeling is about the body," Damasio uses "the technical term *somatic* state ('soma' is Greek for body); and because it 'marks' an image," he calls "it a *marker*" (*Descartes' Error* 173).

To clarify the issue, the notion of value needs to be explored. Not surprisingly, Damasio considers a biological root for value-giving mechanism. He believes that "biological value moves up or down a scale relative to the life-effectiveness of the physical state. In a way, biological value is a surrogate of physiological efficiency" (*Self* 34). How does the value principle operate? This urge to optimal physical state "operates via reward and punishment devices as well as by drives and motivations, which are part and parcel of the emotion family" (75). In other words, the value-giving mechanism has both biological and environmental roots. In the biological root, value "comes from the original set of dispositions that orients our life regulation" (49). The cultural cause of value acts upon the biological root through the process of reward and punishment. In this level, value comes "from the

valuations that all images we have gradually acquired in our experience have been accorded, based on the original set of value dispositions during our past history" (49). The mechanism of value is the backbone of our behavior; for instance, brains "would signal the coming of goods with the release of a molecule, such as dopamine or oxytocin; or the coming of threats with cortisol-releasing hormone or prolactin. The release would in turn optimize the behavior required to obtain or avoid the delivery of the stimulus" (38). To conclude, the value principal manifests itself in our everyday life in the form of feelings of pleasure and pain: "*Optimal ranges express themselves in the conscious mind as pleasurable feelings; dangerous ranges, as not-so-pleasant or even painful feelings*" (39).

Therefore, emotions and feelings expand the repertoire of basic value by attaching it to different stimuli through the reward and punishment (in general, learning) mechanisms: "As a result of powerful learning mechanisms such as conditioning, emotions of all shades eventually help connect homeostatic regulation and survival 'values' to numerous events and objects in our autobiographical experience" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 66). Very much like what Damasio proposes, Septimus who cannot feel anymore is not capable of attaching values to different phenomena; therefore, he finds life meaningless: "Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose?" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 43). He is unable to produce feelings of pleasure and pain, which act as markers in giving value to a phenomenon or an image, in optimal or dangerous situations for survival. Consequently, this defect (as it was argued, the mechanism of value-giving corresponds to survival by ensuring optimal physical state) puts his survival in danger and finally leads to his suicide. In sum, the processes of value-giving, rational thinking, and decision-making — a good decision should enhance survival and its quality in a proper amount of time (Damasio, *Descartes' Error* 169) — are defected in Septimus because of his inability to feel, which decreases his chances of survival and leads to his suicide.

To put it another way, "the somatic marker hypothesis offers a mechanism for how brains would execute a value-based selection of images and how that selection would translate in edited continuities of images. In other words, the principle for the selection of images was connected to life-management needs" (Damasio, *Self* 123). In contrast to the simplified view of consciousness which was dominant in Woolf's time, Damasio believes that body, neurons, feelings and emotions have curtail roles in shaping one's consciousness. Woolf, very much like Damasio and in contrast to the dominant idea of her time, depicts how body plays its important role in the fate of the characters. In a world which is changing constantly, this mechanism

of attaching values to different phenomena through emotions and feelings is compulsory. As a result of his inability to feel, the images shaped in Septimus' mind are not value-based to contribute to life management needs; therefore, he is unable to adjust his needs to his changing world. Thus, Septimus loses his attachment to the world:

> Septimus, who believes his reason to be intact, but cannot feel, is a relic, staring back, on the edge of a lost world, whose spectacular rituals, written in the sky (the crowds stare up at the sky-writing plane) cease to mean. . . .The conventional beauty of the world shimmers distantly behind glass, while a new and sublime power strings the nerves of his body over rocks in a desert, ravelling them through the universe, promising a new and terrible beauty, a message only for him. (Waugh 35)

At the end of the novel when Clarissa — whose gift is "knowing people almost by instinct" (Woolf 39) — hears about Septimus' suicide, she feels "that she knows him, not through various facts but through her bodily responses to those facts" (Park 114). The bodily response is Clarissa's major characteristic. For example, she reacts to Septimus' death as follows: "Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window" (Woolf 168). How is it possible for Clarissa to feel that she knows Septimus without any previous encounters? A neuroscientific argument will shed light on this issue.

There is a biological explanation for empathy: "The brain can simulate certain emotional body states internally, as happens in the process of turning the emotion sympathy into a feeling of empathy" (Damasio, *Spinoza* 115). Mirror neurons play a crucial role in empathy. They allow "us to understand the actions of others by placing ourselves in a comparable body state" (Damasio, *Self* 72). Thus, Clarissa — who has "odd affinities . . . with people" that she has "never spoken to" (Woolf 145) — when is being told about that horrible accident in which Septimus died feels for a moment a sudden pain that reflects the pain Septimus suffered. Woolf aims for:

> Exchanging the traditional representation of a character's social development for the expression of his or her individual psychological being, the external description of scene for the internal revelation of consciousness, and chronological narrative and dramatic plot for the flux of momentary thoughts and impressions that constitute mental life. (Parsons 53).

Through this feeling of empathy Clarissa discovers that she feels "somehow very like him" (170) not for a moment but for her lifetime; it may be curious that why does not she commit suicide like Septimus (or what has stopped her from committing suicide)? The upcoming sections endeavor to answer this question through the notions of self, consciousness, and social homeostasis and their relation to Marxism.

Mrs. Dalloway and Consciousness

Conscious is interrelated with self and knowing because "a sense of self was needed to make the signals that constitute the feeling of emotion known to the organism having the emotion" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 8). Thus, consciousness "is the unified mental pattern that brings together the object [which triggers an emotion] and the self" (12). Simply, but not thoroughly, "consciousness is *a state of mind in which there is knowledge of one's own existence and of the existence of surroundings*" (Damasio, *Self* 110).

Damasio presupposes several facts in investigating consciousness. The first fact denotes that the process of consciousness is traceable to different regions and systems of the brain (*The Feeling* 18). The main conclusion to be drawn from this fact is that consciousness is related to biology, not belonging to spiritual or cogitum realm, which was the simplified and superficial view towards consciousness in Woolf's time; though Woolf did not follow their notions and her ideas are very much like Damasio's. This physical origin of consciousness is reflected in a passage in *Mrs. Dalloway* where nerves are compared to fiddle-strings waited to be fiddled to constitute consciousness: "She had some queer power of fiddling on one's nerves, turning one's nerves to fiddle-strings, yes" (Woolf 77).

The second fact is that wakefulness and low-level attention are not the same as consciousness. Wakefulness is different from consciousness because "in the wakeful state the brain and mind are 'on,' and images of the organism's interior as well as the organism's environment are being formed" while "consciousness may be absent" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 112). Low-level attention too can operate — it "can be driven to stimuli that conform to the basic needs of the organism" (112) — when consciousness is absent. For instance, while Septimus is awake and has low attention, his consciousness is impaired. In different occasions, he is not conscious of himself and his surroundings: Dr. Bradshaw claims that Septimus calls himself Christ (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 106). Therefore, consciousness could not be

diminished into its constituent parts such as wakefulness and low level attention.

The third fact is that "consciousness and emotion are *not* separable" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 18). Emotion, in return, is related to the body; thus, "experiences of bodily feelings are a deep and vital part of consciousness from a first-person, introspective perspective" (Damasio, *Self* 117). If consciousness is related to the body, then consciousness is a feeling: "Because the image of knowing originates in neural structures fundamentally associated with the representation of body states, the image of knowing is a feeling" (Parvizi and Damasio 139). In the beginning of *Mrs. Dalloway*, as discussed earlier, it is the sound of hinges that triggers Clarissa's physical sensations to provoke her consciousness.

The next fact argues that consciousness is a private, first-person phenomenon: "The conscious state of mind is experienced in the exclusive, first-person perspective of each of our organisms, never observable by anyone else. The experience is owned by each of our organisms and by no other" (Damasio, *Self* 110). Woolf acknowledges this fact in her essay "On Being Ill": "We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others" (*Selected Essays* 104). Woolf turns this notion into a technique in her writings to make known the thoughts of one character through the observation of another one; conversely, this method, more than anything else, illuminates the mentality of the observer rather than the one who is being observed. For example, in *Mrs. Dalloway,* Milly Brush wonders about Richard's reaction to the arrival of Peter Walsh and guesses that Richard "would go back directly after lunch and find Clarissa; that he would tell her, in so many words, that he loved her. Yes, he would say that" (Woolf 112). In contrast to what Milly thinks, when Richard comes back home, he does not tell Clarissa that he loves her. This difficulty of reaching to somebody's consciousness finds it voice in Sally's thought:

> She knew nothing about them, only jumped to conclusions, as one does, for what can one know even of the people one lives with every day? She asked. Are we not all prisoners? She had read a wonderful play about a man who scratched on the wall of his cell, and she had felt that was true of life — one scratched on the wall. Despairing of human relationships (people were so difficult). (Woolf 175)

The last "fact is that consciousness is not a monolith" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 23); it means that Damasio categorizes different kinds of consciousness.

Mrs. Dalloway and Core Consciousness

In order to understand core consciousness, first we should take a look at "protoself": "A coherent collection of neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of the organism in its many dimensions" (Parvizi and Damasio 138). Damasio believes that when protoself is affected by images of an object, the process of core consciousness begins: Core consciousness is "the imaged relationship of the interaction between an object and the changed organism state it causes" (Parvizi and Damasio 135); this imaged relationship leads to knowledge: "Consciousness is knowledge, knowledge consciousness" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 32). Core self, which acts upon the protoself, is "the protagonist of core consciousness"; it is "the sort of self on which our current knowing is centered" (Parvizi and Damasio 138). Thus, core self is "the transient protagonist of consciousness, generated for any object that provokes the core-consciousness mechanism. Because of the permanent availability of provoking objects, it is continuously generated and thus appears continuous in time" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 220).

Woolf has a modern idea of self; very much like Damasio, Woolf delineates self as an active ingredient of *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the following passage, Clarissa's protoself is changed by the images of the glass, dressing-table, bottles, and finally the image of herself in the glass. This change of protoself is accompanied by knowledge, "the knowledge that your protoself has been changed by an object that has just become salient in the mind" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 214). Finally, this process of knowing leads to a sense of self as the protagonist in that act of experiencing the glass, dressing table, bottles, and her image in the glass:

> Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there — the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. (Woolf 59)

Therefore, Clarissa knows it is she that is seeing all those things; in other words, the process of knowing all those things needs a character to see, to "drew the parts together" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 60); it needs "one centre, one diamond" (60); it needs a self; it needs Clarissa. Lehrer believes that it is the self that helps Clarissa to continue her life: "Unlike Septimus, Clarissa compensates for her fragmentary

being. . ..Mrs. Dalloway *does* draw herself together. She makes herself real" (177). Nonetheless, this paper shares a different point of view from Lehrer in what saves Clarissa and what leads to Septimus' suicide (it would be argued in the upcoming sections).

Core consciousness has other characteristics. For example, it "provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment — now — and about one place — here. The scope of core consciousness is the here and now" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 19); in addition, the process of learning, memory, language, reasoning, and creativity is not within the range of core consciousness (153-54). This one-moment-aboutness of core consciousness can be found in Woolf's style: Images of people and things haunt the characters' minds in a specific moment when no concern for the future and no torture of the past exist. There is only the perception of here and now which leads to the characters' flash of happiness. For example, in a passage it is noted that "what she [Clarissa] loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab" (Woolf 39); or, Clarissa on her way to buy flowers sees, core consciousnessly, different things and feels the joy of the moment:

> In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (Woolf 36)

This kind of perception and the pleasure of it are prevalent in *Mrs. Dalloway*. This special knowledge provided by core consciousness, free of the anxiety of the future and the torture of bringing the past into the here and now, corresponds to the notion of seize the day. However, the prominent characters in this novel feel dissatisfied with life. What are their problems? The answer to this question would clarify the same ontological problems occurring in the literary texts especially in the modernist novels — for the befuddled characters — which are mostly concerned with the psyche, memory, and consciousness of the characters.

Mrs. Dalloway and Extended Consciousness

While "core consciousness is a simple biological phenomenon, and its mental aspect is comparably simple; it operates in stable fashion across the lifetime of the organism; and it is not dependent on conventional memory, working memory, reasoning, or language"; "extended consciousness is a complex biological

phenomenon and is mentally layered across levels of information; it evolves during the lifetime of the organism; it depends on memory; and it is enhanced by language" (Damasio and Meyer 6). In addition, while core consciousness "provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment, now, and about one place, here" (6); extended consciousness "places that person at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 19). Furthermore, core consciousness "is put in place by the genome with a little help from the early environment"; "extended consciousness is also laid out by the genome, but culture can significantly influence its development in each individual" (251).

An example clears the difference between core consciousness and extended consciousness. When you have a feeling of pain for a short moment, it is core consciousness which provides this knowledge. However, extended consciousness attaches this feeling of pain to your past experiences and your anticipated future:

> Rather than just accessing the fact that you have pain, you can also survey the facts concerning where the pain is (the elbow), what caused it (tennis), when you last had it before (three years ago, or was it four?), who has also had it recently (Aunt Maggie), the doctor she went to (Dr. May, or was it Dr. Nichols?), the fact that you will not be able to play with Jack tomorrow. (Damasio, *The Feeling* 247)

Autobiographical self is the protagonist of extended consciousness: "The autobiographical self is based on autobiographical memory which is constituted by implicit memories of multiple instances of individual experience of the past and of the anticipated future" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 217). How does the mechanism of extended consciousness work? Autobiographical memories "can be reactivated as a neural pattern and made explicit as images whenever needed. Each reactivated memory operates as a "something-to-be-known" and generates its own pulse of core consciousness. The result is the autobiographical self of which we are conscious" (217).

All these discussions lead to the conclusion that the humans' problems are, partly, ontological due to extended consciousness: "The drama of the human condition comes solely from consciousness. Of course, consciousness and its revelations allow us to create a better life for self and others, but the price we pay for that better life is high" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 398). What are the high prices that we pay for extended consciousness? "It is not just the price of risk and danger

and pain. It is the price of *knowing* risk, danger, and pain. Worse even: it is the price of knowing what pleasure is and *knowing* when it is missing or unattainable" (398). It may be argued, why should we assume that "consciousness and memory . . . result in the human drama and confer upon that drama a tragic status, then and now" (Damasio, *Spinoza* 271) while extended consciousness can also fetch moments of happiness from the past and turn happiness to bliss? We have six primary or universal emotions: "Fear, anger, sadness, happiness, disgust, and surprise" (Damasio, *Self* 85). Among these emotions, only happiness is pleasurable to feel — at least four of these emotions (fear, anger, sadness, and disgust) are painful to feel. Therefore, the range of painful feelings is more than pleasurable feelings in constituting our consciousness (of course, these varied emotions and their feelings have evolutionary reasons to contribute to survival).

This tragic characteristic of extended consciousness is fairly transferred and intensified by Woolf's specific style of writing that she claims she has discovered: "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" (qtd. in Nalbantian 83). It is by remembering the past (for example, rejecting Peter's proposal, remembering sally's kiss), anticipating the future (Ms. Kliman's dominance over Elizabeth, age, death, and the ruination of her party), and connecting them to the present as "being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more" (Woolf 40) that she feels her devastating feelings: "She always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (39). However, what does lead to Septimus' suicide? In other words, if Clarissa, like Septimus, feels those ontological anxieties due to consciousness, why does not she commit suicide?

Marxism and "Social Homeostasis"

Extended consciousness leads to a notion that Damasio calls "social homeostasis." Basic homeostasis, or "the life regulation system" (Damasio, "Human Values" 48), "refers to the coordinated and largely automated physiological reactions required to maintain steady internal states in a living organism" (Damasio, *The Feeling* 46). These unconscious, automated processes of life regulation include metabolic regulation, basic reflexes, immune responses, pain and pleasure behaviors, drives and motivations, and emotions-proper (Damasio, *Spinoza* 32). We are born with these devices "to solve *automatically,* no proper reasoning required, the basic problems of life" (30).

Damasio also contends that extended consciousness "armed with complex selves and supported by strong capabilities of memory, reasoning, and language,

created the instruments of culture and opened the way for new means of homeostasis at the level of societies and culture"; therefore, "homeostasis was extended into the sociocultural space" ("Brain and Consciousness" 54). Damasio looks at culture in a survival-oriented perspective. He believes that "social conventions and ethical rules may be seen in part as extensions of the basic homeostatic arrangements at the level of society and culture" because "the outcome of applying the rules is the same as the outcome of basic homeostatic devices such as metabolic regulation or appetites: a balance of life to ensure survival and well-being" (*Spinoza* 168-69). In other words, it is consciousness, especially extended consciousness, that "enabled humans to repeat the leitmotif of life regulation by means of a collection of cultural instruments — economic exchange, religious beliefs, social conventions and ethical rules, laws, arts, science, technology" (Damasio, *Self* 41-2). In sum, sociocultural homeostasis controls and optimizes the workings of basic homeostasis because both "aim at a goal compatible with . . . survival *and* a state of well-being" (Damasio and Damasio 4). This section assimilates the neuroscientific notion of social homeostasis (with its root in biology) into the notion of hegemony or discourse to update and amend Marxist cultural theory, to save it from nature/nurture dualism, in order to explain Clarissa's will to live and Septimus' act of killing himself.

Septimus

Septimus is the victim of an earlier dominant discourse which resulted in his participation in the war. After being shell-shocked, his symbolic insanity — rejection of dominant hegemony — rises because he is enlightened: "Who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 51). Although he knows that he would suffer, "suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer" (Woolf 51), he is eager to announce his message of change to prime minister and the Cabinet: "Trees are alive; next, there is no crime; next, love, universal love" (Woolf 82). Authorities attribute this questioning of their power to Septimus' madness that is going to be treated by Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw, two figures who are representatives of the rules and power of dominant class that eliminate any resistance to their dominance: "Laden with Holmes and Bradshaw, men who never weighed less than eleven stone six . . . men who made ten thousand a year . . . judges they were; who mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted" (142).

Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw

Dr. Holmes starts his treatment by belittling Septimus' uprising to make it seem unimportant and to divert attention from the oppressive nature of rules to the issue

of health: Septimus "had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 48). Dr. Holmes encourages Rezia "to make her husband . . . take an interest in things outside himself" (48). This taking-an-interest-in-outside-things treatment implies a process of conformity, a plan for conversion. This conformist prescription is controlled constantly: "Dr. Holmes came quite regularly every day" (101). This is the reason that Septimus feels that his freedom is violated: "Holmes was on him" (101). Dr. Holmes' taking-an-interest-in-outside-things verdict fails because wherever Septimus looks, he sees the devastating nature of dominant hegemony — "he had only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear" (83) — such as how his friend, Evans, died in the war; how he suffers from shell shock, to the extent that he cannot feel anymore; how his freedom is violated; and how he is going to be deprived of communicating with others while "communication is health; communication is happiness" (101). To escape from this oppression, he takes shelter in dreams to draw attention to how a society should be and starts writing them as an announcement: "Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known" (50).

As Dr. Holmes' method of conforming Septimus is not fruitful, Sir William Bradshaw enters the scene. Sir William's method of converting is more systematic: "He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 108). Sir William believes that the "unsocial impulses" are "bred more than anything by the lack of good blood"; therefore, they should hold "in control" (108). In sum, he counsels "submission," uphold "authority," and points "out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion" (108).

Septimus is diagnosed as "not having a sense of proportion" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 104). Thus, Sir William prescribes "rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed. There was a delightful home down in the country where . . . [Septimus] would be perfectly looked after" (104). In order not to contaminate the minds of other people, Sir William's verdict is that Septimus has to be quarantined until his conversion is accomplished. This policy of quarantine, as well as money making by quarantine, is what the narrator condemns: "Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion" (106).

Finally, it is the arrival of Dr. Holmes — whose physical power symbolizes his oppressive nature, "Holmes was a powerfully built man" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 142) — in Septimus' house by "putting her[Rezia] aside," "like a little hen" (142),

that makes Septimus jump out of the window against his will: "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot" (143). Septimus does not want to kill himself because this is what the rulers demand, to get rid of him: "The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes?" (101). After he finds that his freedom is going to be violated and his message is going to be silenced by being quarantined, he delivers his last message publicly by throwing himself out of the window — as Clarissa denotes, "death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate" (169) — to draw attention to the brutality of oppressive rulers and rules which led to his death.

Clarissa

Clarissa has the support of dominant rulers to eliminate harmful social-life situations that afflict Septimus. In other words, Clarissa compensates for her dissatisfaction with life through social homeostasis. Her dissatisfaction with life is due to two specific points in her life: The idyllic, pastoral past in Bourton and her present situation as a powerful class of society in London, the wife of Mr. Dalloway. Bourton is the symbol of a utopian society: Free from societal hegemony and ethical rules where Sally Kisses Clarissa and runs nakedly through the house. This happy pastoral life is about to end for Clarissa by Richard's proposal and their subsequent move to London, capital of imperialism. Sally is the free spirit (representative of freedom from hegemony) who warns Peter to save Clarissa from marrying Richard "who would 'stifle her soul' . . . make a mere hostess of her, encourage her worldliness" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 88). Interestingly, Sally's prediction comes true when Clarissa's choice of bonding with hegemony and dominant class (Richard, the conservative politician, as its symbol) dissatisfies her; Clarissa's bond with dominant class splits her identity and results in her alienation: She feels "invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (40).

Clarissa's conformity leads to self-alienation, "death of her soul" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 76). In other words, Clarissa sacrifices her identity — "with a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard" (89) — in order to be a part of the ruling class. In return, she compensates for her alienation through social homeostasis which is governed by the dominant class to serve their benefits. To put it another way, the cultural homeostasis that resulted in different cultural systems such as religion, customs and traditions, laws, etc., is governed by the dominant class, in which Clarissa is a part with her marriage to Richard. Therefore, she is entitled to

use the benefits of social homeostasis designed for continuation of life and power of the dominant class. For example, although she is low-minded — "could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense: and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know" (123) — she is respected; unlike Septimus, Clarissa is not considered mad to be quarantined.

Even Clarissa's party, where the prime minister attends, represents the fact that she is a part of the rulers of the society; therefore, she has the laws and rulers on her side: This issue gives her hope and strength to advance through life without being oppressed the way Septimus is oppressed. In addition, the party represents, in miniature, the society in which Clarissa lives; a society with class divisions where the servants prepare and the upper-classes use. In a passage in the novel when Clarissa enters her house, the sight of Lucy her maid, the whistling of the cook, and the sound of typing machine make her feel "blessed and purified" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 54), consequently she thanks Richard for providing this condition: "Must one repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it — of the gay sounds, of the green lights, of the cook even whistling" (54).

The arrival of Peter — who was a part of the idyllic, light-hearted, discourse-less life in Bourton — in Clarissa's house brings back and intensifies the contrast between the past and the present: "A person associated with the past brings back the past with him. . . .Nonetheless, the sudden and unexpected sight of her former lover, Peter Walsh, provokes real visual associated memories of the countryside place which circumscribed that past" (Nalbantian 84). In a passage of the novel, through a symbolic fight with Peter, Clarissa tries not to yield to this threat of splitting her mind between the present and the past, which she has already solved by her conformity to rules and conventions of upper class to take advantage of their power:

> What an extraordinary habit that was, Clarissa thought; always playing with a knife. Always making one feel, too, frivolous; empty-minded; a mere silly chatterbox; as he used. But I too, she thought, and, taking up her needle, summoned, like a Queen . . . summoned to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her husband; Elizabeth; her self. (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 64-5)

In order to defeat Peter (or her yearning for the past represented by Peter who is like a chatterbox always singing in her ears of past happiness), Clarissa counts on Richard, the symbol of dominant rulers; Elizabeth, the symbol of her deep bond

with dominant class; and her converted, conformed self.

Finally, the transient moment of epiphany for Clarissa is triggered when she hears about Septimus' suicide. Consequently, she discovers the oppressive effect of her class on others. Then she, first, blames Dr. Bradshaw (he is "capable of some indescribable outrage — forcing your soul" [Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 169]) and, subsequently, herself for Septimus' death: "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 her evening dress" (169).

After this self-criticism, Clarissa yearns for Bourton: "And once she had walked on the terrace at Bourton" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 169). However, as mentioned, this moment of enlightenment is transitory because the lures of belonging to the dominant class and benefiting from its advantages are too powerful to be ignored: Clarissa "would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming" (169).

Conclusion

Optimal life condition is the principal aim of both Marxism and consciousness. Marxism investigates socioeconomic relations to find the roots of harmful life conditions in order to abolish them. This is where one of the flaws of Marxism lies. Marxists believe that our experiences are solely shaped by socioeconomic systems: This way of arguing leads to nurture/nature dualism. This reductionism inherent in Marxist theory is modified and updated in this article by linking it to the notion of social homeostasis theorized by Antonio Damasio. Social homeostasis, rules and conventions of society, is the result of the biological phenomenon of consciousness — these rules are the "extensions of the basic homeostatic arrangements at the level of society and culture" (Damasio, *Spinoza* 168). Therefore, sociocultural homeostasis optimizes the workings of basic homeostasis to ensure survival in a wider zone, society, and to improve the quality of life: These social conventions and rules provide the "additional layers of control [which] shape instinctual behavior so that it can be adapted flexibly to a complex and rapidly changing environment and ensure survival for the individual and for others" (Damasio, *Descartes' Error* 124).

Only if the culture is healthy are the benefits of social homeostasis provided for all people living in that society. Thus, this article endeavored to modify Marxist's cultural critique by substituting the notion of hegemony or discourse for neuroscientific notion of social homeostasis to describe how an unhealthy culture with exclusiveness of power to a particular class deprived Septimus of his

freedom and of gaining optimal life situation. In other words, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, while Clarissa is supported by social laws and rulers, Septimus is not only excluded from society but also deprived of his freedom, his basic desire, by those similar laws. This relativity of social laws is more emphasized when Clarissa has some of the symptoms of madness, but her sense of proportion, unlike Septimus, is not considered lost. To conclude, Clarissa takes advantage of social conventions and rules while they lead to Septimus' death; in other words, social homeostasis reduces Clarissa's and dominant rulers' pains for the price of contributing to Septimus' pain.

Thus, the collaboration between science and literature is needed because of the following advantages. First, this collaboration contributes to literature by updating or amending the stale, invalid, indeterminate theories and methodologies of literary criticism that led to a crisis by producing, even if producing, defunct knowledge, which does not match or correspond to existing knowledge in other scientific and, even, humanistic fields. Therefore, a transdisciplinary neuroscientific approach assimilates valid scientific theories into itself to analyze a work of art without contradicting the valid principles of other fields of knowledge. Second, this collaboration is beneficial to neuroscience as well: Neuroscience can use "literature as a laboratory for the workings of the mind" (Nalbantian 1) because literature provides the subjective experience of the objective facts of neuroscience. A collaboration between literary study and science is indispensable for having valid theories and methodologies in literary criticism. Thus, the neuroscientific approach will refresh the humanist fields and can contribute to close the divide between the literary and scientific cultures, so that it may open new vistas for future researches and ideas.

*all italics are original

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