

"GOD IS DEAD... NOW THERE DANCETH A GOD IN ME."

BRINGING MODERNIST DARKNESS TO LIGHT
THROUGH THE APOLLONIAN AND
DIONYSIAN DICHOTOMY

by

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ABSTRACT

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Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy can be seen at work in the texts of canonical modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf, Hermann Hesse, Albert Camus, Rainer Maria Rilke, William B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, and it is in the balance of these two Greek deities that modernist literary characters affirm life, thus reversing the typically negative interpretations of modernist literature.

My aim is to show how the primordial, divergent elements of the Apollonian and Dionysian reveal themselves across the field of modernist literature and synthesize to create moments of truth, mental equilibrium, and life-affirmation amongst its characters. I also discuss the tribulations characters face if they fail to embrace a balance of Apollo and Dionysus.

Through faith in the Greek dichotomy: the individual, Apollonian-self in conjunction with the Dionysian community, and by accepting their single, earth-bound existence, modernist characters affirm life – whether blissful or bitter.

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CHAPTER 1

APOLLO AND DIONYSUS: ENLIVENING THE FRACTURED MODERNIST SELF

“We have invented happiness...”

-- “Zarathustra’s Prologue 1,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Modernist literature embodies a predominantly adverse sensibility, one built largely by philosophies of hopelessness, disorder and futility. For decades, the word “modernism” has been associated with despondent existentialism and nihilism, which has shaped modernist literary characters as suffering souls with no hope of achieving a whole sense of self or significance. Charles I. Glicksberg writes of the literary “modern hero” that “all he can be sure of... is that he is alienated, bound to the wheel of time, headed for the destiny of death. He cleaves to his negations; he can embrace no certitudes, no existential faith born of subjective immediacy. He is an absence, a self stripped of ontological truth. He cannot say ‘I’ with any measure of spontaneous conviction” (xi). This definition of the modern individual is essential to modernist authors, philosophers and critics, and has been so from the late nineteenth century to the present day.

Accordingly, the predominant discourse of modernist literature has often been a negative one, telling of a “selfhood haunted by the ghost of some lost-self” (Brown 2) and an amoral, godless world that leaves its inhabitants cursed and aimless. I believe that interpreting and accepting modernist literature as negative is not only inaccurate, but destructive and futile, and I attempt to overturn the view of modernist pessimism and meaninglessness by showing that self-realization and life-affirmation can be recognized in canonical modernist literature. I bring out not only the positive, but even the blissful, in several modernist texts by utilizing Friedrich Nietzsche’s conviction that “God is dead” along with his concept of the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy. These two Nietzschean notions, though created by one of the most recognized figures of nihilism, work together to give birth to life-affirmation and significance. By accepting the idea that “God is dead,” modernist literary characters are given the opportunity to cultivate and

balance their Apollonian and Dionysian instincts themselves, creating moments of personal and positive meaning.

The classic era of English literary modernism was between 1914 and 1924, and it was during this time that many writers “left behind the phantasies of fairyland and embraced the problems of radical self-deception and self-conflict” (Brown 74), particularly due to the devastating realities of the war years. It became clear that the predominant notion of the Western man as the romantic, “egoic” hero was fraudulent, and thus men were emasculated by their loss of self-image and purpose while women were even further removed from being able to claim an identity of their own. Marshall Berman states in his book, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, that modernism “shatters” the public into “a multitude of fragments” (17), that modernism has no “capacity to organize and give meaning to people’s lives” (17), and that “people... probably experienced modernity as a radical threat to all their history and traditions” (16). However, Berman also addresses that despite its “great absence and emptiness of values,” modernism offers “a remarkable abundance of possibilities” (21) to humankind. He goes on to discuss Nietzsche and Karl Marx as visionary nineteenth-century modernists, philosophers who had the right ideas about modernism:

Our nineteenth century thinkers were simultaneously enthusiasts and enemies of modern life, wrestling inexhaustibly with its ambiguities and contradictions; their self-ironies and inner tensions were a primary source of their creative power. Their twentieth century successors have lurched far more toward rigid polarities and flat totalizations. Modernity is either embraced with a blind and uncritical enthusiasm, or else condemned with a neo-Olympian remoteness and contempt; in either case, it is conceived as a closed monolith... (24)

Berman’s point, a point I hope to contribute to as a twenty-first century thinker, is that both the positive and negative aspects of modern life must be accepted before one can know self-worth or affirmation, and that modernist texts will not lend any affirmative meaning if interpreted as either black or white.

Some may claim that the modernist hero suffers through “typically modernist moment[s] of uncertainty and fracture” (Cole 491) and that s/he is spattered upon the ground of experience, ever attempting to reassemble the pieces. Some write that modernism is a “realization that something [has]

been irreversibly lost" (Wohl 517), that people are born by chance into a fearful, chaotic world, live the monotony of an isolated life without the comfort of a divine guardian, and then die a lonely and meaningless death. Essentially, each of these definitions of a modernist character is entirely valid, but also specifically negative. Because the modernist individual has "inherently fragmentary (or multiple)" (Brown 182) selves, there are multiple and surprisingly positive ways to see them. Texts by canonical modernist authors such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Albert Camus embody characters with dispersed selves who have been criticized as being incapable of locating any point of truth or self-understanding, but I offer a method through which we can see the characters achieve meaning and life-affirmation as they simultaneously experience adversity.

I claim that these moments of life-affirmation are achieved under certain conditions in modernist texts, those conditions being lack of belief in a god in conjunction with balanced Apollonian/Dionysian characteristics. To anchor my convictions, I use close readings of canonical modernist pieces: segments from Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922), Camus's *The Stranger* (1942) and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), as well as somewhat less studied modernist works: lyrical poetry by Rainer Maria Rilke and Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922). By using different styles of texts from both centrally canonical and slightly lesser known writers, I further demonstrate that my approach to interpreting modernist literature is successful throughout the field as a whole.

I cannot begin to analyze each work of literature before I introduce the two Nietzschean theories that serve as the basis on which I interpret them. I first discuss Nietzsche's assertion that "God is dead," for lack of belief in the divine helps to disintegrate the strict polarities that inhibit one from creating personal, individual truths. Subsequently, I review Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy as it symbolizes how opposing human instincts, in moments of balance, create receptive minds and dynamic life-affirmation.

"He said to his heart: 'Could it be possible! This old saint in the forest hath not yet heard of it, that God is dead!'"

-- "Zarathustra's Prologue 1," *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Nietzsche first and famously proclaimed that “God is dead” in his 1882 book *The Gay Science*, explaining in section 125 that “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.” He repeated it again in his novel *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which was completed in 1885. Nietzsche’s bold statement was not meant to imply that he himself believed in a god and then stopped; it manifested Nietzsche’s idea that the actions of western culture did not reflect the morals it preached, and therefore the god who served as the origin of said morals must have been killed by that culture. As “God” only exists in the minds of believers, he can only die there as well. Furthermore, Nietzsche repeatedly wrote that God’s death, in the minds of believing individuals, could potentially destroy society by leading it into permanent nihilism.

In his discourse on the death of God, Nietzsche refers to the Christian God, as he felt the dominant western religion was the most destructive belief system for individuals and culture as a whole. However, Nietzsche was adamant in stating that “every society possesses a system of values, uniquely its own, which is held together by an overarching myth” and that “in the absence of this original premise, [a culture’s] value system would lose its coherence; human experience and perception would lose their unity and shape, and would present themselves as chaos” (Foster 84). Thus, his thoughts on Christianity can apply to any religion, particularly patriarchal religions that have formed the basis for the moral beliefs of several cultures.

Critics of modernism tend to agree that a world without God signifies a world without meaning and objective morals: a nihilistic world. With nihilism, there is no pre-determined fate for human beings, no cosmic order and no absolute value system; a world of utter chaos. This is, of course, what Nietzsche feared and sought to find a solution for in many of his works, most notably the *Will to Power*. Is there a moral system to be found that is rooted more deeply in humanity than any religious moral order? Through my reading of modernist texts, I aim to prove my contention that indeed, a worthy system of values are innate to human beings, and that in fact, religious morality sparks more negativity than positivity. As my analysis attempts to exhibit, the death of god is an essential part of the process that enables the modern individual to access a truly affirmative set of beliefs.

To Nietzsche, belief in God meant the belief in good, evil, sin, and supernatural occurrences such as virgin birth and resurrection. He writes in his “Attempt at Self-Criticism” in *The Birth of Tragedy* that

“Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life’s nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in ‘another’ or ‘better’ life” (23). Nietzsche argued that these “elements of Christian myth collaborate in a radical devaluation of man’s life in this world” and that “this attitude of negation... must be interpreted psychologically as the expression of an underlying hatred of life, [and] as an inability to accept life on the terms that it presents itself to human perceptions” (Foster 94). Because many religions attest the actuality of an afterlife, a second and immortal existence, it can be deduced that believers of said faiths wait and long for this second life during their first. Nietzsche interprets hope in an afterlife as a negation of life; he writes that “the Christian wants to be rid of himself” (qtd. in Foster 94). When ultimate meaning dwells in the afterlife, what substantial motivation is there to seek significance in the first? The believer waits to be shown what is true and divine which denotes dissatisfaction with life, negation of the present, and a lack of will to create one’s own purpose.

Nietzsche recognized his contemporary world as one enduring a cultural crisis due to a lack of belief in a unified morality. Berman writes that Nietzsche “[rejoiced] in the modern destruction of traditional structures; but...knew the human costs of this progress, and knew that modernity would have a long way to go before its wounds could be healed” (25). But these wounds, the feelings of emptiness and chaos, do not have to signify apocalyptic disaster or universal meaninglessness. Instead, they can “clear the ground for the spread of a new culture based on more profound and inclusive principles” (Foster 87) than ever before. It is my contention that modernist literary figures possess and express profound principles – without belief in a god.

“One must have chaos within oneself, to give birth to a dancing star”

-- “Zarathustra’s Prologue 5,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

As noted above, I contend that a healthy mindset capable of affirming life is produced through the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy. This dichotomy was first introduced in one of Nietzsche’s earliest works, *The Birth of Tragedy: or Hellenism and Pessimism* (1872), which serves as my primary source for understanding its function. Although Nietzsche later wrote that he disagreed with much of what he theorized in *The Birth of Tragedy*, I am using the text for its insightful and energizing depiction of the

Apollonian and Dionysian instincts. This early essay is the origin of the dichotomy. It explains most clearly how the dichotomy works, its importance, and the consequences of unbalanced Apollonian/Dionysian characteristics.

Nietzsche's philosophy on the dichotomy has been widely accepted by critics, psychoanalysts and authors and applied to describe the natural occurrence of polarities and how they combine to create manifestations of positive equilibrium. Nietzsche's famous dichotomy has been used to illuminate works by authors ranging from Edith Wharton to Aldous Huxley, to analyze music and art, and to describe sociopolitical occurrences. I hope to add to the critical conversation sparked by the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy by revealing its affirmative function in several central modernist texts.

Dualities are prominent in Nietzsche's work, and he once wrote, "I am a *doppelgänger*, I have a second 'face' in addition to the first" (*Ecce Homo* I, 3). He implies that human beings are constructed of two opposing forces, and as much as this leads to confusion and identity crises in individuals, ultimately the duality is positive. To Nietzsche, the chief example of balanced dualities is the harmonized Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy present in Greek tragedies. Nietzsche felt that the aim of the tragedian was "to heighten one's feeling of life. His work is valuable because it epitomizes a state of mind that extends far beyond art, one in which humanity manages to affirm itself in the presence of everything that seeks to negate it" (Foster 81). Nietzsche believed that the Greeks valued and lived life in a unique manner, celebrating both joy and sorrow, which resulted in life-affirmation. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes, "Greeks and the music of tragedy? Greeks and the art form of pessimism? The best turned out, most beautiful, most envied type of humanity to date, those most apt to seduce us to life, the Greeks – how now?" (17). How did the Greeks come to glorify all of life's affairs, whether grand or grim? The key to Greek tragedy and to the Greek way of life exists in the Apollonian and Dionysian forces: Apollo, the God of light and truth, and Dionysus, the God of ecstasy and madness, represent an assemblage of instinctual characteristics, art forms and desires that must be equally embodied in order to obtain appreciation of life.

These characteristics of the Apollonian and Dionysian are amplified in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche says of Apollo:

This joyous necessity of the dream experience has been embodied by the Greeks in their Apollo: Apollo, the god of the plastic energies, is at the same time the soothsaying god. He, who (as the etymology of the name indicates) is the “shining one,” the deity of light, is also ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy...we might call Apollo himself the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*, through whose gestures and eyes all the joy and wisdom of “illusion,” together with its beauty, speak to us. (35-36)

Of Dionysus, Nietzsche writes:

[the] collapse of the *principium individuationis* [Apollo’s concern with the “individual,” apart from the world at large], we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian ,which is brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication... Either under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, these Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness. (36)

Apollo is associated with words like “dream”, “plastic”, “light”, “beautiful”, “illusion”, “fantasy” and “image”. The Apollonian represents dreams and the illusion of perfection, which is beautifully exemplified through the arts of sculpture and painting. Greek sculptures, as with neoclassical paintings, are created with control and impeccable skill, and are distinct, exquisite and idealistic. Accordingly, Apollo is concerned with truth, restraint, perfection and beauty. In conjunction with beauty and order, individuality is vital to the Apollonian instinct. The Apollonian force rules human beings in their wish to define a personal self distinct from others, and idolizes the self as unique and independent from the cosmos.

On the other end of the instinctive spectrum is Dionysus, he who represents a state of intoxication and immersion within the world. The intoxication Nietzsche refers to is not just a consequence of Dionysus’s celebrated accessory, wine, but the residuum of being in tune with one’s primitive nature. Repeatedly, Nietzsche discussed the Dionysian instinct as the more natural, sexual and intense. Words such as “collapse”, “intimate”, “narcotic”, “primitive”, “penetrate” and “intensity” describe the Dionysian, which does not hunt for or try to create immaculate illusions of reality. Instead, it takes pleasure in the

most basic experiences of humankind, whether they are positive and peaceful or violent and tragic. The art form paired with Dionysus is music, for it is uninhibited, intangible and the instigator of unbridled emotion and dance.

Although these instincts are contradictory, the dichotomy represented by them is crucial. Both the Apollonian and Dionysian instincts must be harnessed in balance within an individual so that the greatest possible dynamism, life-affirmation and self-realization can be realized. Imbalance is destructive, for “if one pole asserts itself to the full exclusion of the other so that it is unable to contribute its force to the larger whole, the situation of polar nullities arises... [and] a dissolution of energy [ensues]” (Foster 48). A collapse of affirmative energy caused by disproportionate negative energy leads to a life-negating disposition for modernist characters. As I examine the modernist texts that enlighten the impetus of the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy, I will further explore its nuances and its psychological and biological origins.

In my survey of modernist literature, I have found manifestations of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy and the effects of equilibrium or imbalance, as well as the consequences of the texts’ anti-religiosity. I first present these notions in poetry. I begin with Eliot’s fragmented and perturbing “The Waste Land,” move to Rilke’s “The Panther,” where the dichotomy is beautifully simple, and end with Yeats’s symbolic and allusive work, “The Second Coming.” After this overview of modernist poetry, where the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy is perhaps most evident, I analyze modernist novels. The canonical *The Stranger* and the lesser known *Siddhartha* house characters that move between the forces of Apollo and Dionysus, and *Mrs. Dalloway*, a famed piece of modernist literature, features two protagonists; one who exemplifies the life negation of an imbalanced self and one who affirms life through moments of mental and emotional equilibrium. Through my exploration of modernist literature, I aspire to illuminate the importance of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy to the modernist individual in conjunction with the acceptance of God’s death. In moments of realized and balanced instincts, faith in God’s absence, and belief in self divinity and self-made purpose, literary characters affirm and celebrate the exuberance and tragedy of life.

CHAPTER 2

THE HYACINTH GIRL, THE PANTHER, AND THE ROUGH BEAST: MODERNIST VOICES

LOOKING INTO THE HEART OF LIGHT

“Why so soft, so submissive and yielding? Why is there so much negation and abnegation in your hearts?”

-- “Old and New Tables,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Since T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* is recurrently referred to as the most important poem of modernism and the exemplary piece of the modernist sensibility, I will begin here with it. *The Waste Land* can be described as a “parody and paraphrase, verbal reproduction, and oblique reference to images and themes, [all] part of a web of implications in which no individual threads can be plucked out” (Thormahlen 67-68). Despite the heavy load of notes that Eliot published alongside his poem, there is no accepted interpretation of the text. It is saturated with symbolism, allegory, satire, history, and shifting perspectives, all of which are paradoxically related as well as unrelated to each other, and wrapped into a beautifully ambiguous and resonant poem. There is no single narrator, narrative or theme, but an amalgamation of voices and ideas from the past and present, mingled with prophecies.

To introduce how the Apollonian and Dionysian elements work within modernist literature to create life-affirmative meaning, I will focus primarily on the first part of *The Waste Land*, “The Burial of the Dead.” Here we meet the first narrator whose voice is “always recurring... [and] sets up the consciousness and mood that underlie the whole [piece]” (Gish 46). In the first few lines of the poem “we encounter a personal, meditative voice commenting on the most fundamental sign of life and hope – the rebirth of vegetation in spring” (Gish 45). *The Waste Land* opens:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

This opening is somewhat reminiscent of the spring-time poetry of Shakespeare or Chaucer, except it exhibits a blatantly negative aura. Here, the idea of spring is not celebrated, it is mourned. Bleak adjectives such as “cruellest”, “dead” and “dull” are contrasted with blithe words like “April”, “lilacs”, “desire” and “spring.” These paradoxes create an obscure idea of spring; a spring that invokes both life and death. Images of “dead land” and “dull roots” are embedded in the same stanza with energetic adjectives that allude to fertility like “breeding”, “mixing” and “stirring.”

It is not just the opening of *The Waste Land* that exemplifies dichotomies, but the entire text, and it is in the language – the words themselves – that the Apollonian and Dionysian begin to emerge. As in the first stanza, phrases can be found throughout the poem that exhibit binaries: “Winter kept us warm” (line 5), “life with dried tubers” (line 7), “branches grow / out of stony rubbish” (lines 19-20), “The corpse you planted” (line 71). These lines support the notion of life sprouting forth from death. Each of these paradoxical phrases can be illuminated using the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy. Although “The Burial of the Dead” could be broken down into the simple oppositions of life and death, one cannot simply assign just “life” to Apollo and just “death” to Dionysus. It is the combination of celebrating life *and* death that Nietzsche admired in the Greeks, and though this was achieved through acquiring a combination of Apollonian and Dionysian elements, each deity and its element remains uniquely complex on its own. *The Waste Land* exhibits these complex combinations. Words like “breeding” and “desire” allude to Dionysus and his association with fertility and sexual power, while images of spring rain, lilacs and a snow-covered earth resonate of Apollo’s beauty, clarity and restraint. There is no single reading of the poem, for neither a classic, romantic spring setting nor a dark, barren world is evoked. The coming of spring is described in a way that elicits both the elegance and sequence (Apollo) *and* the chaos and fecundity (Dionysus) of the changing seasons. Recognized together, it is a nod to the cycle of life leading to death, as well as to death which springs forth life.

A close reading of one particular episode in “Burial of the Dead” will further emphasize the Apollonian and Dionysian at work in the poem. Lines 35-42 read:

‘You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;

‘They called me the hyacinth girl.

-Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,

Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

Oed' und leer das Meer. [Desolate and Empty the Sea]

This occasion, set up early in the poem, has an “aura of profound significance” and is, critics tend to agree, “the only moment of deep intimacy and communication in the poem” (Gish 51). One critic writes that “the hyacinth garden episode depicts a moment of decision between engaging in life or holding back... the narrator cannot choose life [and his] memory of shared feelings ends in evasion and loss, a refusal of life” (Gish 52-53).

There is certainly a feeling of evasion and loss in this scene, but I cannot say that the narrator “refuses life.” Using the type of negative interpretation I aim to turn around, Cyrena Pondrom writes that “the utter impotence and failure described in the Hyacinth girl scene is a symbolic negation of the speaker’s self” (429). Just because the hyacinth girl cannot speak and communication between her and the narrator is limited does not mean interpretations of the scene must strictly be negative. Clare Kinney writes that “the reader may invest...the inexpressible with whatever significance he [desires] on the experiences in and beyond the hyacinth garden which could not be visualized or articulated” (283). Using this sort of reading, the hyacinth scene serves as a moment where affirmative meaning can be ascribed only because meaning is not already articulated for the reader.

With Greek tragedy in mind, I read the hyacinth scene as an allusion to the story of Apollo and Hyacinthus. Hyacinthus, dearly loved by Apollo, accompanied the God of Light on hunts and during sporting events. During a game of discus throwing, Hyacinthus was struck in the head by Apollo and died. Out of remorse and devotion, Apollo turned him into a flower; the hyacinth. The hyacinth girl in *The Wasteland* is in a state between human-life and death: “I was neither / Living nor dead,” and I attest it is because she, like Hyacinthus, metamorphosed from one form of life into another; a human being into a flower. This helps to explain her failing eyesight, lack of knowledge, and of course, her name.

The water imagery in the scene (“your hair wet” and “*Oed' und leer das Meer*”) may be connected to a later portion of the poem, where a tarot card reader tells the narrator to “Fear death by water” (line

55). That prophetic statement could in turn be traced back to the hyacinth scene, where the hyacinth girl drowned and was carried out of water (“Your arms full, and your hair wet”). Yet, she is unable to speak, not because death ended her absolutely, but because she changed into another life-form. The narrator may not be able to communicate with the hyacinth girl after he pulls her from the water, but he still holds life in his arms.

The hyacinth scene ends with the line “*Oed' und leer das Meer*” from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, a tragedy which Nietzsche revered, for he believed Wagner had the skills of a classical Greek tragedian. The Apollonian and Dionysian elements that Nietzsche admired in the works of Wagner also perform in *The Waste Land*’s hyacinth scene. Apollo is referenced through the allusion to the Greek story about him and Hyacinthus and the line “Looking into the heart of light” (41), which certainly evokes Apollo, the God of Light. Dionysus exists in the scene as well, for to be between the living and dead is to be in transition, and Dionysus is a God of change, a shape-shifter who “undergoes a process of transformation” (Foster 62) to move between life-forms. Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness” (36). This describes the hyacinth girl, who does not know whether she is alive or dead, cannot see, and knows nothing, which exhibits the Dionysian characteristics of obscurity, uncertainty and the loss of a well-defined sense of self.

These Apollonian and Dionysian elements unite to create a moment of significance for both the hyacinth girl and the narrator through his telling of the story. The scene ends with a vision of the God of Light, who is also the God of *Truth*. I contend that in a moment of being in-between two states – both life and death and Apollo and Dionysus, the hyacinth girl and the narrator experience a facet of cosmically-oriented truth despite the apparent loss of their individual selves. The hyacinth girl may seem hopeless with her failing eyes and lack of knowledge, but she embraces the positive experience of looking into the heart of light. The scene is representative of *The Waste Land* as a whole so far as it invokes the affirmative notion that life leads not only to death, but back to life again.

Of course, an analysis of one section of *The Waste Land* does not do justice to the entirety of the poem, but I aim to illuminate how the Apollonian and Dionysian exist in the work. There is no widely accepted interpretation of *The Waste Land*, but for nearly a century “discussion [has] centered on the

question of whether [a] Quester achieves salvation for the waste land and on the reasons for his respective failure and success.” It seems as though there are “three ‘schools’” of thought on the poem, “those who detect no progression, others who feel that Eliot at least holds out some hope for the waste land and a third category whose members argue that the conclusion of the poem is definitely propitious” (Thormahlen 71). Each of these is focused on the outcome of the poem, the meaning derived in the end. Although some critics find hope in *The Waste Land*, this general focus on conclusions (and even implying that something is conclusive) is problematic for a positive, life-affirming reading of the text. To dwell on the conclusion or outcome of a text can be compared to Christianity’s focus on an afterlife, which tends to neglect the value of the process of living itself.

As previously stated, one of Nietzsche’s chief concerns with Christianity is the Christian’s “desire to rid of himself.” For the saved Christian, ultimate truth and happiness is obtained in another life, a life after death. A Christian reading of *The Waste Land* might deduce from the poem’s biblical allusions and spiritual sentiment that despite the waste land’s “heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief / And the dry stone no sound of water...” (lines 22-24), a better and eternal life awaits in heaven. Reading *The Waste Land* in this way prompts one to accept the ambiguity and pain of the world through faith in the comfort of an afterlife, and by doing so, one inevitably denies present, earthly *life*.

A nihilistic reading of the text that “detects no progression” and assures futility is equally destructive to the idea of affirming life. *The Waste Land* is indeed a “heap of broken images,” a collage of different times, places and allusions. Pieces from *Tristan und Isolde* sit amongst bible verses and references to *Dante’s Inferno* and contemporary, popular pub songs. Although *The Waste Land* is a short text stuffed with seemingly unrelated bits, its chaos does not have to imply meaninglessness and denial of life. In fact, as discussed in the hyacinth scene, its inconclusive nature signifies an opportunity for individual meaning and life affirmation.

The Waste Land is ultimately, although guardedly, positive about life, a balancing act of the Apollonian and Dionysian, and a refutation of predestined fate in the most abstract and incoherent form. The poem’s “constant temporal changes and the varying indicators of the historical perspective have virtually dissolved time as a concept [so that] all that remains is a collection of simultaneously significant

moments” (Thormahlen 99). I will continue to discuss the significance of “the moment” in modernist works, especially when I look to Virginia Woolf, but here I want to stress the idea that the utterly tangled and fragmented *Waste Land* must be read as a series of moments. When there is no narrative to be found, no character to follow and no theme to revolve around, one is simply left with moments. In some of these moments, there is joy: “In the mountains, there you feel free” (line 17); there are threats: “I will show you fear in a handful of dust” (line 30); there is sadness: “*Oed’und leer das Meer*” (line 42); and there is anxiety: “One must be so careful these days” (line 59). The last line of the final segment of *The Waste Land* reads, “Shantih, Shantih, Shantih,” the ending of the Upanishads, which means “the Peace which passeth understanding.” Amongst the fear and angst there are moments of calm and hope, and this last line could signify that despite its incomprehensibility, there is an affirmative peace which settles amongst the central and social debris in *The Waste Land*: a peace that passes our understanding.

“A riddle is it still unto me, this dream; the meaning is hidden in it and engaged...”

— “The Soothsayer,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

I turn now to Rainer Maria Rilke to discuss his poem “The Panther: Jardin Des Plantes, Paris” (1902). “The Panther” has been analyzed time and time again, as it is considered the “most famous poem” (Paine 159) of Rilke’s anthology *New Poems*. I intend to offer a new reading of the poem which shows that it embodies the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy in a way much different from “The Burial of the Dead.” “The Panther” is short and coherent, written in the third person and follows a linear timeline. Rilke utilizes Apollonian/Dionysian elements in a more simple and structured fashion than does Eliot. In the version of “The Panther” translated by C.F. MacIntyre, I read the first stanza as Apollonian, the second as Dionysian, and the third as a combination of both which generates a moment of affirmative truth.

The first stanza reads:

His sight from ever gazing through bars
has grown so blunt that it sees nothing more.
It seems to him that thousands of bars are
before him, and behind them nothing merely.

The text initially reads as Apollonian, for the image created is clearly composed. Readers know from the title “The Panther” and the subtitle “Jardin des Plantes, Paris” that the poem is about a caged panther in a botanical garden (it was common for gardens to exhibit animals in the early twentieth century). Not only is this poem comprehensible, but the imagery evoked is of a distinct Apollonian trait: “that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions” (Nietzsche 35). Literally, a panther is restrained from the outside world, imprisoned behind bars, and the reader knows that he has been brought in from the wild. It is poignant and painful to envision the panther who must know nothing but his cage. The panther, “turning in circles on tensed loins, reveals form as energy held in reserve” (Calhoun 143). Barred in his pen, the panther signifies the Apollonian idea of restraining primitive instincts, and furthermore, in Apollonian fashion, “paints” a clear picture for readers.

Other Apollonian traits present in “The Panther” are representation and individuation. “Nietzsche conceives of Apollo as the instinct of representation, as an... instinct whose effect is to distance people from their world” (Foster 63). Although Nietzsche is referring to human instincts, the notion is hauntingly applicable to “The Panther.” After all, a zoo is but a representation of wild nature, one that is re-formed, organized and restrained. In another sculpture-like representation of reality, the panther is “distanced from his world” and lives an exhibition of life instead of a natural one. Furthermore, the cage distances and organizes spectators’ interaction with him. From a socio-political perspective, as John Foster claims, “Apollonian politics degenerates into the imperial idea and the authoritarian state” (52), and the panther’s cage is a symbol of this authority and imperialism: capturing and taming a wild-outsider.

The second stanza of “The Panther” shifts into a rather Dionysian state:

The easy motion of his supple stride,
which turns about the very smallest circle,
is like a dance of strength about a center
in which a mighty will stands stupefied.

Although the panther is still under Apollonian restraint, Dionysian elements begin to appear. Active words like “motion,” “stride,” “turns,” and “dance” give a sense of mobility and change, such that the static, solemn cage of the panther is disturbed. Key characteristics of the Dionysian are music and dance. Nietzsche explains in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “in song and dance man expresses himself ... he has

forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way towards flying into the air, dancing. His very gestures express enchantment” (37). The panther’s movements are indeed enchanting. The image of a powerful and passionate movement is created, “a dance of strength,” a primitive action that tells of an instinctual longing. It is not the instinctual, Apollonian desire to be separate and individual, but the Dionysian desire to be reunited with nature that plagues the panther. His inherent wildness is “stupefied” by his constructed environment as the Apollonian strives to constrain the Dionysian. *Because* the wild panther is limited by his Apollonian prison, he is disconcerted, which merges him further into Dionysus’s realm of bewilderment.

The final stanza reveals the outcome of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy:

Only sometimes when the pupil’s film
soundlessly opens... then one image fills
and glides through the quiet tension of the limbs
into the heart and ceases and is still.

The ending of the poem describes an instance of significance and affirmation for the panther, though it occurs “only sometimes,” or in moments. We do not know what the panther sees or feels that causes his heart to be still, but we might guess it to be an image of freedom, of what his life ought to have been, naturally. This is not a positive text with an uplifting outcome – quite the opposite – but it is nonetheless a poem that uses the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy to affirm life. Apollo and Dionysus work within and against the panther, ultimately balancing to create a fleeting moment of significance. Jutta Ittner claims that the “image of the outside world [that] moves through the panther’s still, yet tense, body...arrives at the heart where it becomes one with the animal’s being” (29), and then asks: “is this an evocation of paradise or of death?” (29). Even if the panther does not experience an instance of *paradise*, I assert that the poem embraces *life*. Like the hyacinth girl, the panther may not have knowledge, for he only exists in his pen, a structured and authoritative world. But his instincts know and ache for freedom – for *life*, and he has glimpses of the heart of light. Without both his Dionysian wildness and his Apollonian cage, his moments of realization – the moments that open his eyes, move through his limbs and cease in his heart, could never happen.

As I have demonstrated with “The Panther,” Rilke’s work often and elegantly embodies the elements of both deities. A critic writes that “Rilke’s poetry and prose abound in detailed descriptions of sensual and physical experiences that are elevated to a conceptual or spiritual dimension” (Castelvedere 135). Not only is this statement accurate, it alludes to Apollo and Dionysus, for we can recognize “sensual” and “spiritual” as Dionysian elements (passionate instincts, the desire to return to the cosmos/nature), and “physical” and “conceptual” as Apollonian (the physical body and the analytical mind). As a poet who “became increasingly anti-Christian” (Paine 160), Rilke’s work replaced faith in God with faith in the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy. Jeffery Paine clearly describes this turn: “[Rilke was] determined to rediscover the relevant experiences... without using any kind of bible. Exploration of the joy, love, and suffering that once were directed toward the divinity now took the place of divinity” (160). What is Greek tragedy if not an investigation and appreciation of both the joys and sufferings of life? The presence of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy in Rilke’s work allows both joy and sorrow to surface and be treasured.

“Behold, we know what thou teachest: that all things eternally return, and ourselves with them...”

— “The Convalescent,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

After investigating two exceedingly different poems that exhibit the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy, I will end my analysis of canonical modernist poetry with one of the touchstones of modernist literature, a work that elucidates the dichotomy not just through words alone, but in a substantially symbolic manner: William Butler Yeats’s “The Second Coming” (1920) immediately alludes to the biblical prophecy of Jesus Christ’s return to earth in the title, and continues with further Christian allegories. Upon a first reading, “The Second Coming” might convey the impression that its symbolism is strictly Christian or that the poem accepts religious myth as historical truth. Many believers lump the birth of Christ and biblical prophesies into the timeline of historical events and so dutifully await his return, for “a religion is an authoritative statement or revelation about the origin, nature and destiny of man [and] those who accept it apprehend it to be true” (Allt 627). However, Yeats’s Christian symbolism ought not to imply that he was a Christian awaiting the apocalypse, especially since many of his allusions reference many more

than just the Christian myth. As modernist works are particularly open to interpretation, I offer my own from a Nietzschean perspective.

The poem begins:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

A strikingly Dionysian mood is conveyed from the outset. The poem is “compressed into images with an intensity... and with a deliberately provocative Nietzschean element of paradox” (Harrison 365). There is a loss of communication, a collapsing “center”, and chaos – all elements of the tumultuous Dionysus. In this environment, the “best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity” (lines 7-8). The phrase “passionate intensity” radiates the Dionysian disposition.

The second line reads: “the falcon cannot hear the falconer,” and this “separation of man and bird offers a striking image of social and cultural disintegration, not from a simple loss of communication... but from...the disruption of the order and cohesion, the homogeneity of... society” (Harrison 367). In other words, the poem alludes to the idea that there once was a structured culture that had an “idealistic, Apollonian approach to life” (Sybylla 312), which has been (or is) falling apart. Now, “The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned” (lines 5-6). The poem’s unsettling images and references to the apocalypse suggest turmoil and chaos – classic Dionysian traits.

In the biblical account of Jesus’s return to earth, the apocalypse occurs until ultimately all believers ascend to Heaven while the rest descend to hell. For the good Christian, the second coming of Christ is a triumphant event, but the darkness and chaos of Yeats’s “The Second Coming” seems to describe only the suffering and fears of the damned. It is possible, though, that Yeats’s poem serves as a warning to all, damned or not. His poem is more complex than a single bible story and references gods and beasts that are much older than the Christ myth. In “The Second Coming,” the god which returns to earth is described as such:

... a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;

A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs... (lines 11-16)

With his “lion body and head of a man”, the “rough beast” that “Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born” (line 21) is some type of sphinx, which cleverly suggests both Apollo and Dionysus. All “sphinxes are representations of Horus, the Egyptian God of Light, who was reborn each day as the rising sun, the symbol of renewed life, and who was also the Egyptian sky-god who took the form of a falcon” (Harrison 371). The Christ figure here is not just a sphinx, but Horus, the ancient Egyptian god of both Light – Apollo, and of Forms (as in shape-shifters) – Dionysus. By referring to the returning Christ as a sphinx, Yeats transforms him back into the myth from which he descended. The poem may not be “an attempt to destroy an old tradition so much as an attempt to revive an even older one, to reassert a morality which Christianity had destroyed” (Harrison 381).

Ancient Greek culture, like the Egyptian, was pagan and celebrated multiple gods and goddesses, joy and pain, and life and death. Yeats’s “The Second Coming” can be read as an affirmation of these earlier societies that were eventually destroyed and lost to the development of patriarchal religions. In regards to Yeats’s poem, Critic John R. Harrison writes that:

The rough beast symbol offers contradictions or contradictory meanings that can co-exist... Yet often in Yeats, as in... Nietzsche, apparent contradictions are complementary aspects of some profound truth... Yeats’s contraries of rocking cradle and rough beast, [reflect a clash] between the contemporary, orthodox view of Christ and a Christ who ‘was still the half-brother of Dionysus,’ a figure partly grounded in myth. (379)

The “second” coming of the ancient, “rough beast” in Yeats’s poem is *mythical*, which implies that the savior of the “first coming” was, as well. The transformational, mythical beast is Christ, Horus, Apollo, and Dionysus, a mix of past and present, history and myth, fact and faith. The poem, with its Nietzschean undertones, suggests that the burgeoning of Christianity, of a faith in a divine Christ as *truth* instead of *myth*, led to the “blood dimmed tides” of the modern world for a plethora of social and political reasons. I

read Yeats's "Second Coming" as hopeful for a return to the past, when gods were mystical and spiritual instead of political and vengeful.

Apollonian and Dionysian elements are apparent in the delicate paradoxes of the text, but coexist primarily in the beast that moves towards a chance – a hope – for a life-affirming society instead of a violent, fearful one. "The Second Coming" can be read as a piece that marks the end of an era – an era in which the "first coming" of the meek and mild Christ child did not exactly bring about what the god symbolized – peace and love. Perhaps the "second coming" signifies the dawn of an era that will similarly reflect the *antithetical* traits of its savior, who this time, is a "rough" and "pitiless" beast.

CHAPTER 3

BURNT BY THE SUN: THE STRANGER INTRODUCES HIMSELF

“Verily, like the sun do I love life...”

-- “Immaculate Perception,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

For seven decades, Albert Camus’ novel *The Stranger* has been seen as a cardinal, late modernist text, one that embraces the modernist principles of meaningless and nothingness. The protagonist Meursault is a rare breed, a character who does not feel anything but physical sensations for nearly the entirety of the work. His reactions to the critical events of the novel – the death of his mother, an acquaintance’s ruse for revenge, a budding relationship with his girlfriend, a murder he commits and his being sentenced to death, are all initially experienced by the reader as shallow and prosaic as they are focalized through Meursault’s apparently indifferent consciousness. Because of this, Meursault appears to be what I will deem the “Apollonian man,” a being whose instincts are out of balance because the Apollonian within him emphatically outweighs the Dionysian. Meursault experiences life entirely on the surface level of physical sensations, rationally processing any episode without emotion, abstaining from indulgence in any passion, and speaking only what he feels is the truth about any occurrence. He does not reflect on or recognize his self, or realize the significance of life, until he sanctions the Dionysian in him to sprout and burst. This sanction, along with his atheistic views, grants Meursault the gift of life-affirmation.

Modernist critics of *The Stranger*, as with the majority of modernist literature, have not generally considered the novel to express an affirmative viewpoint. It has been read as “a negative exercise in phenomenology, a detailed description of feelings not felt, thoughts not thought [and] experiences not experienced” (Solomon 12). Often seen as an important modernist figure, many critics agree that “Meursault is Sartre’s nothingness of consciousness” (Solomon 18). Robert C. Solomon asserts that Meursault “has been deprived of *human* existence altogether... [He] is blank, he is amoral, and he is without the feelings that make most of us human” (19). Terry Otten describes him as “utterly passive”

(105); Rene Girard says he is “a stranger to the sentiments of other men, [that] love and hatred, ambition and envy, greed and jealousy are equally foreign to him” (519); Robert F. Reid-Pharr sees Meursault simply as “a character who lacks affect” (95); and Ravit Pe’er-Lamo cites him as “a man with no conscience” (559).

Not only is it broadly accepted that Meursault is a man devoid of feelings, it is generally accepted that his condition, his “amorality,” stems from his resistance to believe in God. This has been used to rationalize why Meursault murders an “Arab” for seemingly no reason. It has been argued that Meursault “has drawn [his] conclusions from a consistently atheistic position, as Sartre postulates them (existentialism),” and so naturally, critics develop questions like: “If God does not exist, what values exist without Him? How can one kick away the pedestal and hope that the statues of all the Virtues will remain hanging in mid-air? Is our life merely a matter of filling up the time between the cradle and the grave?” (Longstaffe 59-60). Sans faith in the divine, Meursault’s actions have been read as ambiguous time-fillers. He appears to the jury, prosecutor and priest in the novel, as well as to critics and readers, as deprived of human emotion, unethical and even sinister. Colin Davis writes that perhaps “Meursault kills the Arab in order to preserve the possibility of a higher order of truth and meaning” (249) since “there is a direct link between violence and the need to believe in a higher order” (Davis 252). Davis is postulating that Meursault’s behavior is but a desperate attempt at seeking God. Maria Solimini states that because Meursault has “a lack of respect for social customs, his life is a guilty one even before he kills” (372). Through these readings, Meursault appears to be the epitome of a nihilist: a lost and vacant man who sees life as meaningless and behaves gratuitously because he does not, like the rest of his society, believe in a higher power.

Although it is a popular and certainly modernist interpretation for godlessness to equal meaninglessness, this is not the only interpretation to be had of Meursault. On the other end of the spectrum, there is a Meursault who comes to recognize his want and value of life, especially without a god. Before readers can see the Meursault who recognizes his self and life as significant, they must encounter the imbalanced Meursault: the Apollonian man.

The Apollonian traits which infuse Meursault can be divided into three categories: physical sensations, order and truth. These characteristics, sometimes alone and sometimes in unison, imbue the

text of *The Stranger*. Beginning with physical sensations, Meursault is entirely preoccupied with temperature. Being a man of surfaces and acute physical awareness, the sunlight and heat of his environment are one of his chief concerns. On the first page of the novel, as Meursault makes his way to his mother's funeral, he notes that "it was a blazing hot afternoon" (4). The "the glare off the road and from the sky" (4) makes him drowsy, and during the service he is overwhelmed with the sensation of the sun: "I was surprised to see how quickly the sun was climbing up the sky... Sweat was running down my face" (11).

Meursault thinks more about the heat of the day than he does about his mother's death, and while others weep at her loss, Meursault winces from the discomfort of the light and high temperature. Several passages reveal his violent, recurring reactions to the sun and the heat. Meursault states: "the glare of the morning sun hit me in the eyes like a clenched fist" (32), "the sand was as hot as fire, and I could have sworn it was glowing red" (35), "it was like a furnace outside, with the sunlight splintering into flakes of fire on the sand and sea"(36), and "the heat was so great that it was just as bad staying where I was, under that flood of blinding light falling from the sky" (37).

It is on the beach, in the sun, that Meursault makes the impetuous decision to shoot the Arab who had previously threatened Meursault's friend, Raymond. Meursault does not reveal any contemplation, desire, or emotion as he shoots the man five times. Instead, he focused on the physical effects that the sunlight has on him:

The heat was beginning to scorch my cheeks; beads of sweat were gathering in my eyebrows...I couldn't stand it any longer, and took another step forward. I knew it was a fool thing to do; I wouldn't get out of the sun by moving on a yard or so. But I took that step, just one step, forward. And then the Arab drew his knife and held it up toward me, athwart the sunlight.

A shaft of light shot upward from the steel... my eyes were blinded; I was conscious only of the cymbals of the sun clashing on my skull, and, less distinctly, of the keen blade of light flashing up from the knife, scarring my eyelashes, and gouging into my eyeballs.

Then everything began to reel before my eyes, a fiery gust came from the sea, while the sky cracked in two, from end to end, and a great sheet of flame poured down through the rift. Every nerve in my body was a steel spring, and my grip closed on the revolver. (37-38)

These last few paragraphs of Part I of *The Stranger* are laden with lavish descriptions of the harrowing sun, signifying the restrained Dionysian that finally bursts forth from Meursault and causes him to pull the trigger. The passage is full of tumultuous Dionysian images: “sun clashing on my skull,” “gouging into my eyeballs,” “sky cracked in two,” yet Meursault only concentrates on his physical feelings – Apollonian, surface titillations. He does not present any sign of emotion during the scene, for he is fixated on the physical pain that the sunlight causes him.

If not the sunlight or heat, Meursault centers his mind and body on other physical elements. He is especially fond of swimming, of cool water running over his skin. He swims in the ocean with his girlfriend, Marie, and notes: “The water was cold and I felt all the better for it. We swam a long way out, Marie and I, side by side, and it was pleasant feeling how our movements matched, hers and mine, and how we were both in the same mood, enjoying every moment” (34). An earlier passage reads: “Marie came up and hugged me in the water, and pressed her mouth to mine. Her tongue cooled my lips, and we let the waves roll us about for a minute or two before swimming back to the beach” (24). These scenes are centered on the tangible qualities of water and Marie – the water’s pleasant temperature, the physical movement of the waves and Marie’s body, and Marie’s cold tongue. At this point, readers will not find any insight into Meursault’s emotional feelings about Marie.

As the Apollonian man, Meursault is only physically pleased by his girlfriend, through sex and his shallow attraction to her body. He makes various mentions of her aesthetic appearance, registering on more than one occasion her “very pretty dress, with red and white stripes, and leather sandals,” and how often he “couldn’t take [his] eyes off her... her firm little breasts, and her sun-tanned face [that was] like a velvety brown flower” (24). Meursault is focused on the physical and aesthetic, the shape of a woman’s body, the lubricity of water, and the sting of the sun. As shown in the passages above, Meursault describes his physical conditions in a thoroughly poetic manner with “constant insertion of sensory or pictorial details—snapshots, one might say” (Murray 228) of his surroundings. His descriptions of the

heat, light and Marie are centered on similes and clear imagery. All of these traits are Apollonian, as the Apollonian “principle entails...poetry, form [and] measure” (Rosenthal 188). It could be argued that Meursault’s vivid descriptions insinuate his submerged Dionysian, or passionate, tendencies, but Meursault holds Dionysus at bay as he maintains a barrier of passivity and order around him. His unbalanced essence is composed of routine, keeping busy, and limiting reflection.

For instance, Meursault seems to function most contentedly at his mundane office job. He describes his typical work day in a few sentences: “There was a pile of bills of lading waiting on my desk, and I had to go through them all. Before leaving for lunch I washed my hands. I always enjoyed doing this at midday” (18). Saying that he enjoys doing something at the same time every day shows readers that Meursault is most comfortable following a methodical cycle. His evenings are similarly formulaic to his days:

I went down, bought some bread and spaghetti, did my cooking, and ate my meal standing. I’d intended to smoke another cigarette at my window, but the night had turned rather chilly and I decided against it. As I was coming back, after shutting the window, I glanced at the mirror and saw reflected in it a corner of my table with my spirit lamp and some bits of bread beside it. It occurred to me that somehow I’d got through another Sunday, that Mother now was buried, and tomorrow I’d be going back to work as usual. Really, nothing in my life had changed. (17)

There is no emotion in this statement, just a list of actions and a few shallow thoughts. During the workweek and a Saturday spent with Marie, it is clear that Meursault maintains a busy, routine schedule. However, he struggles to fill up his Sundays. When he wakes up, he “remembered it was a Sunday,” and thinks “I’ve never cared for Sundays” (15). The day of rest is a day of inactivity for Meursault, a day without schedule or organization, and so the Apollonian man fights to create activity and structure. By doing so, Meursault eliminates potential moments of meditation, guarding his Dionysian instincts from manifesting themselves.

Perhaps the most notorious characteristic of Meursault, one that is both celebrated and castigated by critics and readers, is his complete honesty. He’s been described as “honest to a fault, a man who is unwilling to compromise with the system” (Stoltzfus 514), for he refuses to tell a lie, or even

exaggerate the truth, in both banal and significant social situations. As Apollo is the god of sun and light, which Meursault embodies through his extreme sensitivity to the sun, he is also the God of truth, and Meursault honors truth to the end. In every occurrence, no matter the consequences or social expectations, he speaks only with utter veracity.

Readers immediately pick up on Meursault's lack of emotional response to his mother's death. This is evident when the doorkeeper of the mortuary offers to let Meursault view his mother's body:

I told him not to trouble...

"Eh? What's that?" he exclaimed. "You don't want me to ...?"

"No," I said.

He put the screwdriver back in his pocket and stared at me. I realized then that I shouldn't have said, "No," and it made me embarrassed...

"Why not?" But he didn't sound reproachful; he simply wanted to know.

"Well, really I couldn't say," I answered. (6)

Meursault becomes aware of his abnormal responses through the reactions of others, but he continues to make them because they are honest and attuned to his immediate perceptions. During the funeral ceremony he does not cry and is in fact irritated by those who do. He enjoys the physical feeling of the ocean breeze, and thinks: "There was the promise of a very fine day. I hadn't been in the country for ages, and I caught myself thinking what an agreeable walk I could have had, if it hadn't been for Mother" (9). This thought does not necessarily imply that Meursault lacks respect or love for his mother; it is but a raw and honest thought, symbolic of the Apollonian which honors truth, but not emotion.

Meursault's honesty can come across as extreme passivity, for he outwardly appears not to care about his mother's death. Another instance of seeming passivity is later in the novel when an acquaintance, Raymond, asks him to write a letter meant to lure a woman into Raymond's home for her "punishment" (a beating). When asked if Meursault minded doing such a task, despite its immorality, Meursault simply replies: "No," and that he'd "have a shot at it" (22). He even notes, "I didn't take much trouble over it, but I wanted to satisfy Raymond, as I'd no reason not to satisfy him" (22). Meursault uses this type of basic reasoning as his logic – a hollow, dispassionate rationality that emanates from the

Apollonian idea that “rationality is supposed to involve...detachment from sensual desire or emotional orientation” (Higgins 624).

Meursault avails himself of a related detached logic when discussing the idea of marriage with his girlfriend:

Marie came that evening and asked me if I'd marry her. I said I didn't mind; if she was keen on it, we'd get married.

Then she asked me again if I loved her. I replied, much as before, that her question meant nothing or next to nothing—but I supposed I didn't.

“If that's how you feel,” she said, “why marry me?”

I explained that it had no importance really, but, if it would give her pleasure, we could get married right away. I pointed out that, anyhow, the suggestion came from her; as for me, I'd merely said, “Yes.” (29)

The human emotions of love and intense devotion do not surface within Meursault, and it is not his nature to tell even a white lie to save feelings. His fondness for Marie rests in the aesthetics of her physical body, and he will not alter his Apollonian characteristics into ones that are Dionysian and emotional.

When Meursault is later on trial for murdering the Arab, he answers all questions from his lawyer and prosecutor with the same, truthful indifference:

...I answered that, of recent years, I'd rather lost the habit of noting my feelings, and hardly knew what to answer. I could truthfully say I'd been quite fond of Mother—but really that didn't mean much. All normal people, I added as an afterthought, had more or less desired the death of those they loved, at some time or another.

... After considering for a bit he asked me if he could say that on that day [(the day Meursault murdered the Arab)] I had kept my feelings under control.

“No,” I said. “That wouldn't be true.”(41)

As an intelligent man, Meursault understands the weight that his answers in a courtroom will carry, but still it is unnatural for him to lie, or to even bend the facts. He is so “emotionally detached that he is unable to participate in the part of the social contract that requires people at times to respond

disingenuously, if not dishonestly, to spare the feelings of others, or to protect [their] own self-interest” (Day 85). Meursault has every chance to explain that the Arab had previously attacked Raymond and then wielded a knife, but when asked why he shot the man, Meursault “tried to explain that it was because of the sun” (64). Meursault had never shown interest in defending himself or Raymond, nor did he have a passionate investment in revenge. By admitting how his “physical condition at any given moment often influenced [his] feelings” (41), he speaks honestly and blames his actions on the sunlight. For this, he becomes a martyr of sorts, as he is sentenced to the guillotine for his crime and dies for Apollo’s virtues: the sun and the truth.

Meursault’s excessively Apollonian behavior swings his instincts out of balance, and so his life becomes a “dissolution of energy” (Foster 48), an unrecognizable force. Nietzsche argues that the embodiment of the Apollonian “shouldn’t go too far” or a “theoretical man who [severs] all meaningful connection with the instincts” (Foster 63) will be created. Meursault, as previously stated, seems practically inhuman: a shell of a person who cannot maintain equilibrium, one who has lost touch with his primitive, human instincts. He is so possessed by order, the sun and the truth that he literally destroys his own life by murdering the Arab for no emotional reason. One critic writes: “The implicit question is whether existence on this level, devoid of emotional...experience, can be of any value in itself” (Longstaffe 63). What does life amount to without the Dionysian? An imbalanced life is a negative life, for there can be no affirmation without elements of both Apollo and Dionysus.

Meursault’s Dionysian instincts do slowly begin to develop in the second half of the novel as he is put on trial and isolated in prison. In court he must listen to others’ reflections on his actions, and in jail he loses his daily routine and is forced to spend time alone with his thoughts. Gilbert Chaitin asserts that Meursault “becomes more and more reflective, a condition that culminates in the paroxysm of self-awareness that he attains, in and just after, his dispute with the prison chaplain” (163). While the discussion that Meursault and the priest have about God is powerful and climactic, I believe that Meursault’s self-awareness and Dionysian passions culminate even earlier. Meursault’s maturing Dionysian characteristics appear in three major categories: obscurity, primitive emotions, and communion with the cosmos. As these traits germinate within him, they begin to achieve balance with his dominant Apollonian self, which ultimately sparks life-affirmation.

Meursault, who has always been concerned with schedules and “passing the time,” is confined to a life of endless, empty moments once he is in prison. Without work, swimming, his acquaintances, or Marie, he is for once out of touch with the aesthetic, tangible and organized world. The obscurity that distinguishes the Dionysian sets in as Meursault begins to lose track of time:

... I hadn't grasped how days could be at once long and short. Long, no doubt, as periods to live through, but so distended that they ended up by overlapping on each other. In fact, I never thought of days as such; only the words “yesterday” and “tomorrow” still kept some meaning.

When, one morning, the jailer informed me I'd now been six months in jail, I believed him—but the words conveyed nothing to my mind. To me it seemed like one and the same day that had been going on since I'd been in my cell, and that I'd been doing the same thing all the time. (50-51)

Meursault has lost control over his sense of ordered and clearly delineated Apollonian reality, a classic Dionysian trait. “Words,” an Apollonian element, become meaningless to him. Where he used to have a clear (albeit indifferent and vacuous) perception of the world around him, he becomes nearly intoxicated with murky thoughts and memories, both of which he had never allowed his previously regulated mind to recognize. He makes a desperate attempt to halt his musings and regain his Apollonian-self by cataloguing objects in his prison cell, nearly creating a parody of Apollonian activity. What could be more Apollonian than a person in prison – perhaps the ultimate symbol of restraint – making organized lists of physical objects? But despite Meursault's final efforts, he eventually succumbs to his irrepressible thoughts.

The enigmatic temper of these thoughts and memories relate to the emotions that Meursault begins to feel in the second half of the novel, another human (and Dionysian) quality he had avoided. For instance, as the doorkeeper tells the jury that Meursault did not wish to view his mother's dead body, Meursault expresses guilt: “It was then I felt a sort of wave of indignation spreading through the courtroom, and for the first time I understood that I was guilty” (56). He had not disclosed this emotion before, despite having already made multiple choices that ought to leave one with a heavy conscience.

Meursault's Apollonian tendencies had built up until they burst, resulting in an act of chaos (committing murder), and ever since, the Dionysian started to lurk its way into him and his emotions began to unfold.

In jail, he finally divulges his primitive, Dionysian sexual longings: "I was plagued by the desire for a woman... I was obsessed by thoughts of this woman or that, of all the ones I'd had, all the circumstances under which I'd loved them; so much so that the cell grew crowded with their faces, ghosts of my old passions" (49). In one quick declaration, Meursault describes not only sexual lust, but *love* and *passion*, which are Dionysian characteristics. He does not possess these feelings for just Marie, or any one individual, but for a Dionysian community of many women merged together. Dionysus kindles a "loss of self-consciousness in...sexual ecstasy" (Rosenthal 190), which describes Meursault becoming engrossed in his memories of old lovers.

An overall yearning for his past starts to envelop Meursault:

And then a rush of memories went through my mind—memories of a life which was mine no longer and had once provided me with the surest, humblest pleasures: warm smells of summer, my favorite streets, the sky at evening, Marie's dresses and her laugh. The futility of what was happening here seemed to take me by the throat, I felt like vomiting... (65)

Meursault's flashback to the previous life he lived and the simple delights that solaced him make him feel sick, and this is where his life-affirmation truly shows itself. For the first time, the Dionysian and Apollonian within him work toward balance. He had once been satisfied by strictly Apollonian elements – physical feelings and tangible pleasures. But as he faces his inner thoughts he begins to understand that it is his *emotions*, his Dionysian passions, which enliven and give meaning to the objects he finds pleasure in: the sky, Marie, and his home. Meursault finally acknowledges and appreciates not just his life, but the realization that life is determined *by the one who lives it*. The prison chaplain later struggles to convince Meursault to turn his heart to God, to give up his life to the omnipotent, but Meursault resists the priest's suggestion with a wild, Dionysian fervor:

I'd taken him by the neckband of his cassock, and, in a sort of ecstasy of joy and rage, I poured out on him all the thoughts that had been simmering in my brain... none of his certainties was worth one strand of a woman's hair. Living as he did, like a corpse, he

couldn't even be sure of being alive. It might look as if my hands were empty. Actually, I was sure of myself, sure about everything, far surer than he; sure of my present life and of the death that was coming. (74)

Disgusted by the priest's empty promises of a God whom Meursault denies, he continues his speech in a frenzy, saying: "I'd passed my life in a certain way, and I might have passed it in a different way, if I'd felt like it. I'd acted thus, and I hadn't acted otherwise; I hadn't done x, whereas I had done y or z. And what did that mean?" (74-75). Here, Meursault describes life through a combination of Apollo and Dionysus. In an Apollonian fashion, he analyzes the scientific cause and effect of decision making, but at the same time he accepts the Dionysian senselessness of life; that there will always be random occurrences and infinite choices for individuals to make. Without a destiny governed by God, Meursault can justify and cherish the outcome of his life. He asks: "What difference could they make to me, the deaths of others, or a mother's love, or his God," since in the end, every living being is "condemned to die" (75)? Meursault fully realizes that life is a gift worth living, that "every man alive [is] privileged; there [is] only one class of men, the privileged class" (75). He starts as an Apollonian man, has several Dionysian outbursts, and eventually brings both to the same level. In the end, Meursault understands the definite, Apollonian restraints of life – all actions have reactions, all are destined to die – yet he honors life's Dionysian mystery and unpredictability.

In the last pages of the novel, Meursault finally contemplates his mother's death, thinking, "With death so near, Mother must have felt like someone on the brink of freedom, ready to start life all over again" (75). This idea plays on the very Nietzschean, cyclical concept of the afterlife consisting of one's reliving the same life over again. If this idea is to be accepted and celebrated, life as it is must also be accepted and celebrated; it must be affirmed. The novel closes with what I call Meursault's "communion with the cosmos," as he recognizes the connection between his life and the world that gave it to him:

And I, too, felt ready to start life all over again. It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and, gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed, so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still. (75-76)

Meursault releases his self, not to God, but to “the benign indifference of the universe,” which now feels to him like “a brother.” This same “benign indifference” existed in Meursault when he was indifferent to marrying Marie, but willing to accommodate her desires. In a similar manner, the world is indifferent to its inhabitants, yet gracious in offering each being the chance to seek after its own aspirations. Nietzsche writes in *Birth of Tragedy* that the Dionysian “shares something of his *wisdom* and proclaims the truth from the heart of the world” (65), a statement that in itself alludes to Apollo’s wisdom and truth, and is kindred to Meursault’s moment of realization. It is in this final paragraph of *The Stranger* that Meursault is at the heart of the world, like the hyacinth girl, “looking into the heart of light.” In his last moments between life and death he recognizes the satisfaction that life objectively offers to all. It is there, between life and death, and between Apollo and Dionysus, that Meursault finally introduces himself to life, is pleased to meet it, and is a stranger no more.

CHAPTER 4

BALANCE IS INBETWEEN: FINDING THE MIDDLE WAY IN SIDDHARTHA

“Now am I light, now do I fly; now do I see myself under myself. Now there danceth a God in me.”

— “Reading and Writing,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Roughly two decades before Camus wrote *The Stranger*, German author Hermann Hesse published his ninth novel, *Siddhartha*. It is a lesser known novel, but one said to be “utterly missing from [modernism’s] purview” (Sieburth 511) of foundational texts. Another critic writes that “Hesse’s... response to modernity [through his novels is]... an inherent dialectic of the discourse of European modernity” (von Stuckrad 99). Hesse’s *Siddhartha* contributes something different to the religious and spiritual perspectives of modernist literature, which commonly exists within a culture that has been dominated by Christian ideas and complications. Although it is written by a westerner, the fictional novel delicately chronicles the life and philosophy of Siddhartha Gautama, or Buddha: “the enlightened one,” man and deity of the Buddhist faith. Buddhism predates Christianity by half a millennium, and while its values and paths to redemption aren’t entirely different than those of the western faith, its spiritual components and focus on the earthly life are quite singular. In the context of my investigation of a spiritual, life-affirming modernism, *Siddhartha* adds a divergent perspective from within the major European tradition of which I focus on.

Siddhartha is written in a manner resembling that of a religious text, in a formal and omniscient tone that is quite similar to Nietzsche’s novel, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1885). German author Hugo Ball “regards *Siddhartha*’s insistence that one must know oneself and not merely follow the teaching of another as a reflection of the influence of Nietzsche’s Zarathustrian philosophy” (qtd. in Conrad 358). Whether *Siddhartha* more greatly embodies a representation of Nietzschean, western, or eastern ideas is not easily determined. Critic Robert C. Conrad writes that “while the Orient sees the book as a great Eastern work by a Western writer, many Western scholars perceive the book as typically Western with merely an Oriental façade” (358). It seems to me that the novel is a balance of the east and west, and

written for both interpretations. *Siddhartha* is not a historical account of the Buddha's life, nor does it speak for the Eastern religion, but it does radiate an eastern sensibility that is spiritual, holistic, and fixated on nature. Achieving nirvana is the ultimate goal of Siddhartha, which is comparable to the Christian concept of achieving salvation (the dominant belief of ascending to heaven). But, different from Christianity, salvation in *Siddhartha* is not separate from life. In life is where it is found, and through balance of the Apollonian and Dionysian, it is attained.

Similar to Meursault, Siddhartha experiences domination by Apollo, then Dionysus, until he ultimately achieves a combination of the two. His early life as the son of a Brahmin, as well as his and his friend Govinda's experience with the samanas, are striking representations of the Apollonian at its extreme. The life of a samana is one of regiment, restriction, control, chastity and simplicity, and the rigid disciplines eventually bring Siddhartha to the point of mental collapse, and he regresses into the opposing lifestyle of the Dionysian. Immersion in the earthly pleasures of women and money only suffice for so long, however, and Siddhartha is driven so deeply into exhaustion that he ultimately negates life.

It is at the end of the novel that Siddhartha finds a route to balance between the mental (Apollonian) and the physical (Dionysian) states. Taking a closer look at his journey will emphasize how both Apollo and Dionysus haunt Siddhartha, how they need each other to stimulate life affirmation, and how lack of belief in an omnipotent god reinforces self-significance. The Buddhist notion of "god," especially as described in *Siddhartha*, is distinct from the concept of the Christian god, and the idea of a divine being affects Siddhartha in a different way than the idea of the Christian god affects Meursault. I will illuminate these distinctions as I discuss Siddhartha's transition from the Apollonian, to Dionysian, to a balanced state.

Siddhartha is born and raised in an ordered and reverent household, and his childhood through his stay with the samanas is altogether guided by Apollonian instincts. His father is a Brahmin, a title used to indicate scholars, teachers and priests, and is the highest order of the caste system in India. Siddhartha's family holds an admirable position in society which is Apollonian in its "ceremonial washing, ritual prayer, and formalized goodness" (Conrad 360). Siddhartha is exceptionally skilled at prayer and meditation, and is expected to follow the path of his orthodox father: to become a successful and wise Brahmin. Siddhartha's spiritual commitment is described:

He already knew how to speak the Om silently, the word of words, to speak it silently into himself while inhaling, to speak it silently out of himself while exhaling, with all the concentration of his soul, the forehead surrounded by the glow of the clear-thinking spirit. He already knew to feel Atman in the depths of his being, indestructible, one with the universe. (Hesse 7)

Despite his seemingly natural ability to feel as one with the earth, and despite his family's revered societal position, Siddhartha leaves home to pursue enlightenment, following Apollo even further down the path of restraint. He rejects his father's "wealth, social position, and way of life" (Conrad 360), for the love and teachings of his family and elders "had already filled his expecting vessel... and the vessel was not full, the spirit was not content, the soul was not calm, the heart was not satisfied" (Hesse 9). He sets out with his faithful friend Govinda to take on the more devout life of the samanas: wandering monks who are spiritual zealots that renounce all worldly goods. The true samana (and true Apollonian) needs no earthly possessions because all physical aspects of life become strictly mental representations. The passage below describes Siddhartha's experience with the samanas and articulates Apollonian characteristics of both restraint and dreams:

He wore nothing more than the loincloth and the earth-coloured, unsewn cloak. He ate only once a day, and never something cooked. He fasted for fifteen days. He fasted for twenty-eight days. The flesh waned from his thighs and cheeks. Feverish dreams flickered from his enlarged eyes. (Hesse 17)

Siddhartha is under such strong restraint that literally all he is left with are his thoughts. "Feverish dreams" take over his mind as the Dionysian fights to quell his rising Apollonian characteristics. Siddhartha begins to no longer see objects as reality, but as illusions:

He saw merchants trading, princes hunting, mourners wailing for their dead, whores offering themselves, physicians trying to help the sick, priests determining the most suitable day for seeding, lovers loving, mothers nursing their children—and all of this was not worthy of one look from his eye, it all lied, it all stank, it all stank of lies, it all pretended to be meaningful and joyful and beautiful, and it all was just concealed putrefaction. (Hesse 17)

Apollo is focused on exteriors – masks of beauty and perfection. Siddhartha becomes concerned with these masks as well, but he begins to see them as nothing more than a guise. “In the Apollonian Nietzsche saw the rational clarity that comes from the sphere of the dream... [and] the clarity of sight that sees the truth behind the veil” (von Stuckrad 83). Under the influence of the Apollonian dream, Siddhartha sees a kind of truth that recognizes the routines and random activities of humans as mere shells of beauty and representations of joy – neither are authentic. Thus, in his Apollonian mind, people who live amongst Dionysian relationships and passions are not genuine, but are “putrefied” husks of human beings, mere *illusions* of beauty and life.

He claims that “the world tasted bitter [and that] life was torture” (Hesse 17) as he gives himself fully to Apollo, the god of the sun: “Silently, Siddhartha exposed himself to burning rays of the sun directly above, glowing with pain, glowing with thirst, and stood there, until he neither felt any pain nor thirst any more” (Hesse 18). Here he reaches the peak of the Apollonian: a perfectly regimented, restrained world; a world of representations and shells of human beings who have given up their natural, human instincts to thought and meditation. Within this Apollonian mode, Siddhartha develops the psyche of the classic modernist era that “neither he [his self] nor anything else is logically necessary” (Butler 118).

Even upon venturing to the town Savathi where Gotama, or the Buddha resides, and meeting the exalted one who has achieved a nirvana that shines through his smile, Siddhartha does not wish to continue on his life’s path. Nirvana, total self-awareness, and enlightenment are all unattainable to Siddhartha, for he realizes that his strictly Apollonian life is not only futile but leading him down a path towards death. He has to turn around and begin to approach the Dionysian if he is to seek balance and life affirmation. By using the Nietzschean terms *principium individuationis* and *a priori*, we can better understand how Siddhartha’s ambition switches from the Apollonian to the Dionysian. The character’s “real concern rapidly turns out to be not the onset of self-awareness as such, the fancifully-phrased *principium individuationis*, but the narrower problem of the absence of a Ziel, an *a priori* absolute purpose” (Butler 118).

Nietzsche’s *principium individuationis*, the notion of an individual separating her/his-self from the rest of the world as a unique and solitary self, is the essence of Apollo, and it also describes Siddhartha the samana. An individual missing “*a priori* absolute purpose” is one who lacks a pre-destined purpose (*a*

priori being latin for “a prior”), indeed, one who lacks a fated position and significance within the cosmos, which is a Dionysian concept.

Dionysus represents “the abyss and essential oneness of nature” and “the Dionysian divinity is...nearly akin to Spirit, which is self-sacrificial and desires union” (Force 180, 186). Siddhartha’s attempt to flee his obsession with *principium individuationis* and reestablish himself as one of the whole signifies his need to locate his “Ziel,” or prior purpose. He crosses the river to another side of life. However, his descent into the Dionysian takes him from one extreme form to the other, and his hope of affirming life is drowned in the excessively wild Dionysian. This fervid descent again activates life-negation.

Leaving his friend Govinda behind, Siddhartha travels alone and searches for earthly pleasures and contact. He “transfers attention back to himself, accepts the reality of the phenomenal world, which he has previously held to be illusory” (Butler 119), and begins to appreciate the true, physical beauty of the earth. He describes his surroundings in a fully Dionysian manner: “beautiful was the world, colourful was the world, strange and mysterious was the world!” (Hesse 43). Color and mystery clothe his environment, and he lets primitive elements take hold of his body. He lusts after a woman for the first time in an overtly Dionysian dream:

... he embraced Govinda, wrapped his arms around him, and as he was pulling him close to his chest and kissed him, it was not Govinda any more, but a woman, and a full breast popped out of the woman’s dress, at which Siddhartha lay and drank, sweetly and strongly tasted the milk from this breast. It tasted of woman and man, of sun and forest, of animal and flower, of every fruit, of every joyful desire. It intoxicated him and rendered him unconscious. (Hesse 52)

Critics often focus on the possibility of Siddhartha’s “latent homosexuality” (Butler 123), as there are several occasions in the novel where the relationship between Siddhartha and Govinda reads more like one of lovers than of friends. What I deem most important between Govinda and Siddhartha in the dream passage above is the unity that their embrace represents. The experience is an embodiment of Dionysian fusion of ordinarily separate entities. Govinda is male and becomes woman, and Siddhartha tastes male and female, sun and forest, animal and flower. Furthermore, nature envelops him until he is unconscious in Dionysian drunkenness, one with woman, one with man, one with the whole world.

Enamored by the tangible beauty of the land, people and animals around him, Siddhartha finally feels relief from the tight restraint of Apollo. There is leisure to be free, to be passionate, to dance and run and laugh as Siddhartha merges himself with the city and begins a relationship with an alluring courtesan named Kamala. He wishes to learn the art of love, to let the passion of lust move within him so that he might obtain self-awareness through immersion in physical satisfaction. He begins work with a skilled merchant so that he might gain material possessions to fill the void in his heart. Each of these acts signifies a complete turnaround in Siddhartha's character. As a samana, he was disgusted by the interactions of people, the seductive qualities of women and by working men. Siddhartha moves from strictly austere, Apollonian mental activity to thoroughly Dionysian human activity, and for a brief time, appears to be satiated.

Literally and figuratively intoxicated by his life of worldly goods, wine, women, sex and money, Siddhartha veers too close to the Dionysian pole, tipping his self dangerously out of balance. He spends his last evening as a wealthy, earthly man in a sickening Dionysian state:

Siddhartha had spent the night in his house with dancing girls and wine, had acted as if he was superior to them towards the fellow-members of his caste, though this was no longer true, had drunk much wine and gone to bed a long time after midnight, being tired and yet excited, close to weeping and despair, and had for a long time sought to sleep in vain, his heart full of misery which he thought he could not bear any longer full of a disgust which he felt penetrating his entire body like the lukewarm, repulsive taste of the wine, the just too sweet, dull music, the just too soft smile of the dancing girls, the just too sweet scent of their hair and breasts. (Hesse 8)

Dionysus, "who is a drunken, ecstatic reveler in the primal joys of life", including "spontaneity and emotion" (Force 180, 187), is alluded to in the passage above where Siddhartha's reveling has reached a tumultuous level. Words like "dancing," "girls," "wine," and "excited" contrast with the words "weeping," "misery," "disgust," and "repulsive" to invoke a spectrum of Dionysian emotion that Siddhartha endures. The exaggerated nature of this fully Dionysian scene suggests that physical pleasures do not affirm his self or life any more than the rigorous meditations of his other, Apollonian self. Again, Siddhartha negates life:

And full he was, full of the feeling of being sick of it, full of misery, full of death, there was nothing left in this world which could have attracted him, given him joy, given him comfort. Passionately he wished to know nothing about himself anymore, to have rest, to be dead. If there only was a lightning-bolt to strike him dead! If there only was a tiger to devour him! If there only was a wine, a poison which would numb his senses, bring him forgetfulness and sleep, and no awakening from that. (Hesse 91)

Phrases such as “full of”, “given him” and “if there only” are repeated in a rhythmic pattern throughout these Dionysian passages, which brings to mind Dionysus’s association with music, particularly the rhythmic, intoxicating type of music associated with Dionysiac rites. Nietzschean scholar Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal describes music as “the expression of a different world [that is] always striving, always dynamic, contradictory, formless, and discordant... [Music is] a world in which one entity ceaselessly blends with another” (193-94). As the Dionysian always strives to do, music forms a union between any and all entities. Siddhartha the merchant, the friend, the drunk, and the lover are dedicated to Dionysian communion to the point of destruction, and described as doing so in a text in which verbal rhythm is present.

Up until this time in the novel, Siddhartha’s “objective [has remained] the same: to find the sense of life as if there were a single sense to be found” (Butler 119). He tries to live in strictly an Apollonian state and despises life, then attempts a solely Dionysian state only to end up with the same, bleak resolution that life is positively negative; the classic modernist adjective: meaningless. Siddhartha walks to a river and determines to commit suicide by drowning when a single, auspicious moment saves his spirit:

With his eyes closed, he slipped towards death. Then, out of remote areas of his soul, out of past times of his now weary life, a sound stirred up. It was a word, a syllable, which he, without thinking, with a slurred voice, spoke to himself, the old word which is the beginning and the end of all prayers of the Brahmins, the holy “Om”, which roughly means “that what is perfect” or “the completion”. And in the moment when the sound of “Om” touched Siddhartha’s ear, his dormant spirit suddenly woke up and realized the foolishness of his actions. (Hesse 93)

Through Siddhartha's "ensuing attempt at suicide he enacts the symbolic death of his spirit" (Conard 363), letting the Dionysian drown him completely, and he is in a sense born again as he murmurs "Om." In Buddhist tradition, "the Self is one with Om [as it represents] the universal person who is conscious only of external objects [(the Dionysian)], [and] the universal person who is conscious only of his or her dreams [(the Apollonian)]" (Nath 494). It is in this moment that Siddhartha understands he must find balance. The passage above uses a compelling combination of both Dionysian and Apollonian words and phrases to represent this moment of his realization. Clearly defined and direct images like "eyes closed", "word", "syllable" and "old word" summon Apollo while more disordered images like "slipped towards death", "without thinking", "with a slurred voice" and "the beginning and the end" summon Dionysus. Put together, Siddhartha is inspired to say "Om", which represents the Apollonian and Dionysian combination.

Siddhartha is now determined to maintain the kind of life-affirmation possessed by the smiling Gotama Buddha and the curious, smiling ferryman whom he had seen once in passing. He thinks about years ago: "starting out from [the ferryman's] hut, my path had led me at that time into a new life, which had now grown old and is dead—my present path, my present new life, shall also take its start there!" (Hesse 105). He stays by the river, the place of his rebirth, and walks until he encounters the ferryman, Vasudeva. With him, Siddhartha begins a life of manual labor by running the ferry.

It is alongside Vasudeva that Siddhartha finally, truly experiences *life*. He studies the river, discovers he has a son, loves his son whole-heartedly (although the feeling is not reciprocated), loses his son, feels the true pain of a love lost, and returns again to studying the river. Vasudeva shows Siddhartha the path to enlightenment, and it is in the movement of the river, not through meditation or words or goods, that he attains nirvana and affirms life. The river separates the Apollonian and Dionysian sides of Siddhartha's life as he crossed it on his path between being a samana and a man of physical pleasures. The river becomes a "symbol for the dialectic nature of selfhood" (Molnar 84). It is first introduced "as divider and link between the basic dualism that pervades and comprises all of human experience, and later, when [Hesse] has Siddhartha return to its shores to stay, the river becomes the all-encompassing representation of unity within multiplicity" (Molnar 84). Siddhartha explains his realization of life affirmation through the river:

All of it together was the flow of events, was the music of life. And when Siddhartha was listening attentively to this river, this song of a thousand voices, when he neither listened to the suffering nor the laughter, when he did not tie his soul to any particular voice and submerged his self into it, but when he heard them all, perceived the whole, the oneness, then the great song of the thousand voices consisted of a single word, which was Om: the perfection. (Hesse 139)

This is another passage that effectively merges Apollonian ideas with those that are Dionysian in order to create balance. “Any particular voice” represents a singular, Apollonian idea: a solitary voice separate from others, while the notion of “submerging” one’s self into something is Dionysian in nature: an act that signifies the desire to be part of a whole. Similarly, a “great song of a thousand voices” alludes to the Dionysian traits of music and unity, and this song is composed “of a single word,” intimating the Apollonian characteristics of individuality and constraint.

The river is where the Apollonian and Dionysian meet, and it illuminates Siddhartha: “All of it together was the flow of events, was the music of life.” The “flow of events” denotes the Apollonian order of time, and the “music of life” kindles universal, Dionysian song. The river is Siddhartha’s “path to enlightenment,” to affirming life, which “requires following a Middle Way, avoiding the extremes of self-mortification [(Apollonian)] and self-indulgence [(Dionysian)]” (Swearer 86). The term “middle way” was first coined by the historical Siddhartha Gautama to describe his path to nirvana (Davis 86), and legend has it that he realized this path while meditating beside a river.

One might say that the “river does not only flow for Siddhartha; it flows within every one of us and performs the same service insofar as spirit and body constitute differentiated aspects of our existence that are, nonetheless, undifferentiated and one in the unity of the self” (Molnar 84). Siddhartha, who “pursues each of these goals in order [Apollonian then Dionysian]” and subsequently finds a balance, is “a new, Hessean Buddha” (Brown 195). In the historical account of Buddhism, the Buddha (Siddhartha Guatama), is born into a life of luxury and earthly goods, and then renounces all possessions for a life of complete meditation and restriction. (Swearer 82-85). The legend and history do not tell of a Buddha who specifically seeks a balance between the two, but the “Hessean Buddha,” a European Buddhist, is a new type of savior. He is an amalgamation of fact, history, mythology and fiction, and an amalgamation of the

Apollonian and Dionysian instincts. It is necessary for Siddhartha “to pass through this European Buddhism as a kind of catharsis if [he is]...to become capable of affirming life” (Davis 93).

Where exactly does an analogy for the Christian God, or Christianity itself, play a role in *Siddhartha*? Nietzsche often compared the two religions, typically characterizing Buddhism as an earlier, less destructive ancestor of Christianity. Bret Davis writes that:

Buddhism often serves...as a foil for Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity. “Buddhism,” Nietzsche writes, “is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity”; it is “the only genuinely positivistic religion in history,” which has no need of the “concept of God” and which speaks of the “struggle against *suffering*” rather than the “struggle against *sin*”...Whereas Christians still covertly attempt to assert themselves against the strong (and still cling to otherworldly salvation from the sorrows of this world) by projecting a “kingdom of God,” Buddhists have resigned themselves to their own impotence and seek merely to conserve their remaining strength. (91-92)

Nietzsche asserted that the Buddhist goal of nirvana was to reach a state where one no longer *desires* anything. For Nietzsche, this is not the same as the fierce, life-negation of Christians, but is “a simple nullification of life” (Davis 95). Nietzsche sees Nirvana is an aspiration towards “nothingness,” and so deemed it as “passively nihilistic” (Davis 93). According to him, “the ‘ascetic ideal’ of this [Buddhist] will to not will is a self-contradictory phenomenon of ‘life against life.’ [And] life is nothing other than the will to power” (Davis 96). Nietzsche contends that without will or desire, one is passively negating life.

However, the Nietzschean concept of a nihilistic Buddhism is not what Hesse depicts in *Siddhartha*. There is no lack of will in the character of Siddhartha, for he is continually searching and desiring. He does not desire to find a particular god or religion to give meaning to his life, but is constantly seeking his *self*. And his self, ultimately, becomes God. In traditional Buddhist belief, Buddha is a man who was enlightened and became a deity, and the same process plays out for the character Siddhartha. At the end of the text he smiles at his friend Govinda, joining the only other characters who smile in the novel: Gotama and Vasudeva, both of whom have attained nirvana. When one recognizes one’s self as not only a divine being, but as river, animal, plant, woman and man, then one becomes a significant part of the whole order of the universe. Life affirmation can be achieved under these circumstances, because

unlike Christianity, “early Buddhism did not look for release in an eternal hereafter,” and the Buddhist “conception of existence is cyclical” (Swearer 88). One always returns to life.

Colin Butler writes that “a drop of water does not die, nor can it ponder its end in advance, for it has no conscious existence; it evaporates and merges with its environment by an entirely mechanical procedure. The individual, however, does die” (Butler 123). I’d like to assert that a human life is more like that of water, of a river, than Butler’s statement suggests. Especially when seen through the Eastern philosophical lens that Hesse employs in *Siddhartha*, we can see how water, symbolized with the river, moves organically through the world as do we, merges with its environment as do we, and does not *die*, but evaporates and returns to earth. As do we, according to both Nietzsche’s and traditional Buddhism’s philosophies of cyclical life. *Siddhartha* is a life-affirming tale, for the text reveals that life always continues as a river always flows, and cannot be negated when there is no death to end it absolutely. Through his journey from Apollo, to Dionysus, to a balance of the two, Siddhartha learns where affirmation is found. Life is not more fulfilling on one side of the river or the other – moments of truth and satisfaction are only found in the middle.

CHAPTER 5

SEEING THINGS OUTSIDE ONE'S SELF: SEPTIMUS'S ETERNAL LONELINESS AND CLARISSA'S COMMUNAL CHORUS

"Thus will I die myself, that ye friends may love the earth more for my sake."

-- "Voluntary Death," Thus Spake Zarathustra

"What is this terror? What is this ecstasy? ...What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?" (Woolf 172). These effervescent queries belong to Peter Walsh, an old flame of one of Virginia Woolf's most noted fictional characters: Mrs. Dalloway. Clarissa Dalloway has thrown a party, and amongst its flurry of clinking glasses and conversation, Peter sits musing. The answer to his question about the cause of his terror, his ecstasy and his excitement is the creation of the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy: an affirmative and reverent attitude toward every moment of life.

Essentially, this dichotomy is what the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* is about, though such a valuable realization cannot occur without effort, nor is it eternal. As "*Mrs. Dalloway* and other Woolf novels... repeatedly demonstrate... feelings exist in flux, stronger one moment, weaker the next" (Bethea 250). I will be focusing on the text's two protagonists, Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith, although every character in the novel embodies fleeting and wavering sensibilities. This is cardinal to my contentions, for capriciousness is vital to reaching balance just as harmony cannot be recognized without discord. Beattie writes: "uncomfortable with either unchecked flow or rigid fixity, Woolf chose a...middle ground that enabled her to fashion closed yet open endings [to her novels] that make sense of the world while also acknowledging cosmic uncertainty and cosmic vitality" (Beattie 523). Devoid of this middle ground and the balancing act between Apollo and Dionysus, it would be impossible for Woolf's characters to evoke harmonized moments of affirmation. These moments are not only the heart of *Mrs. Dalloway*, but the heart of my theory that a sanguine positivity towards life is created and accessed in modernist literature through the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy.

The events of *Mrs. Dalloway* occur in one day, and the novel follows a stream of consciousness format. The narrator jumps around from one character's thoughts to another, focusing primarily on Clarissa Dalloway, a middle aged, upper-middle class woman who is making preparations for a party she will host that evening, and Septimus Smith, a World War I veteran who is "aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed" (Woolf 11), and cannot seem to communicate with his wife nor his psychologist. The only major event that occurs in the plot is Septimus Smith's suicide, which Clarissa only hears about during her party at the end of the novel. In addition to being inside the minds of Clarissa and Septimus, the novel skims the thoughts of a few other characters as well, like Septimus's wife, Rezia, his doctor, Dr. Holmes, Clarissa's old friend, Peter, and her daughter's mentor, Miss. Killman.

Like many modernist works, *Mrs. Dalloway* is written in a stream-of-consciousness format, but its tone is uniquely lucid, concise and extremely poetic. Liesl Olson writes that "Virginia Woolf's prose has frequently been called poetic, a description that alludes to the rhythm and sound of her sentences, the lyric plotlessness of her novels, and the self-conscious interiority of her characters (42). *Mrs. Dalloway* subtly utilizes this "plotlessness," along with its stream-of-consciousness, lyrical prose, to allow the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy to gently and successfully manifest itself. For instance, the novel is full of poetic passages like:

Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour,
irrevocable. (Woolf 2)

Here, Woolf invokes a strong image of time, not only through the reference to Big Ben, but through rhythm, which is created by the utilization of the dramatic pause, or caesura. These pauses are "part of the novel's tendency to create pockets where time functions in a different manner" (Haffey 137) than usual. The passage's rhythm brings to mind the Dionysian association with music, movement and *time*. Nietzsche attests that "Dionysus suffers the prototypical agonies of existence inflicted by time. He is severed from the eternal flux... then torn to pieces and reunited with the whole" (Dienstag 88). The Big Ben passage above is a simple example of *Mrs. Dalloway's* poetic form, which, like Dionysus, is broken into individual pieces that ultimately come to form a unified whole. The strategically placed exclamation mark, commas and semicolon create a rhythm that invokes the passing of time: "First a warning" and

“then the hour” each contain 4 syllables and the words “musical” and “irrevocable” work together as off rhyme.

Much of *Mrs. Dalloway* is written in this measured, melodious manner. Septimus Smith, who considers himself a poet, thinks lyrically about his surroundings:

...the excitement of the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to green of a hollow wave, like plumes on horses' heads, feathers on ladies', so proudly they rose and fell, so superbly...

(Woolf 18)

Septimus uses repeating words and sounds, vivid imagery and similes to process his world. His perceptions, I attest, are focused on Apollonian concerns: aesthetics, the beauty of nature, words; while Clarissa's perceptions (like in the Big Ben passage above) tend to account for the Dionysian: musicality and mystery. These initial perceptions and observations are not all that define the characters. How each absorbs and reacts to his or her world are of equal importance, and I aim to show how Septimus drowns in the Apollonian while Clarissa finds balance.

Before I concentrate solely on the unique philosophies of *Mrs. Dalloway's* protagonists, I want to further emphasize the Greek influence that is present in the novel. Doing so helps to support the existence and prominence of the Greek dichotomy that is at work within the characters. It has been said that “the Greeks haunted Woolf” (Fowler 217), that their influence seeped into most of her writings, giving them each an inkling of a mythic and epic spirit. *Mrs. Dalloway* does not just hint at Greek allusions; Greeks are directly mentioned, especially in the thoughts of Septimus Smith. He hears sparrows “sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words,” and then his thought repeats: “they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words” (Woolf 20). The repetition of comparing the birds' songs to “Greek words” prompts the reader to imagine what these words must sound like. Woolf, in her own essay “On Not Knowing Greek” (1925), stresses the aloof and alluring nature of the Greek language. One Woolfian critic describes the Greek language as: “magic, vision, dialogue, perfection, elusiveness: Greek is the perfect language, which we can never truly know” (Fowler 218). The sparrows' song sung to Septimus is incomprehensible, yet enchanting. Its enigmatic make-up may be the reason behind Virginia Woolf's

pursuit of the language. She studied Greek, referenced the ancients often, and created essays and diary entries about their nature.

Although Woolf does not repeatedly, directly name the Greeks throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, she consistently shadows a Greek sensibility. Not only does the novel employ multitudes of similes, but specifically, the novel “contains an unusual number of similes that draw on epic language and imagery” (Monte 589). Critic Steven Monte uses the scene where Clarissa meets up with her old friend and love, Peter, for the first time in several years, as an example:

So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground; toss their heads; the light shines on their flanks; their necks curve. So Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting side by side on the blue sofa, challenged each other. (Woolf 38)

The image of a battle scene is brought to mind, but not the type of contemporary, World War I battle that Septimus fought in. Woolf creates a stage where “the objects of the comparison are Homeric, so much that we can almost imagine Woolf lifting the image of the horse straight from the Greek” (Monte 590). Hence, the “battle” between Clarissa and Peter is surrounded by an aura that whispers of the personal and the tragic.

Monte does not further discuss this scene, but its Greek images do continue. Peter tells Clarissa that he is in love, and Clarissa notes that he says this “not to her... but to some one raised up in the dark so that you could not touch her but must lay your garland down on the grass in the dark” (Woolf 38). When Clarissa asks who the woman is, she thinks, “now this statue must be brought from its height and set down between them” (Woolf 39). The woman Peter loves is likened to a statue, a statue that is raised up which one brings offerings to, which must be lowered if anyone is to directly approach it. This seems to be a forthright allusion to a sculpture of a Greek goddess, for statues of their deities were famously created and passionately worshipped by the Greeks.

By using these types of epic similes and metaphors, Woolf clues readers in to pieces of her story, and “as in a classical epic, [they] are lyric interruptions of the narrative. They hold our attention on the moment and briefly stop the flow of time” (Monte 590). The epic similes win the reader’s attention and motivate focusing on the objects being compared. As with the examples above, one stops to muse over the kind of relationship that Clarissa and Peter must have. There must be a touchy history there, and we

are pulled into the middle of that aftermath. In fact, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a tale that begins *in medias res*, like Homer's the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Besides Septimus's suicide, the key events of the novel are only discussed in moments of remembrance. Readers put together pieces of the past as the characters talk, reminisce and wonder.

Another important connection to the Greeks, and especially to Greek tragedy, is used in *Mrs. Dalloway* "to negotiate modern issues in fiction writing" (Monte 506): "the chorus." Utilizing a Homeric chorus in the setting of early twentieth century London is a virile move by Woolf as it urges open the gateway to tragedy, and hence leads to the balance of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy. Nietzsche contends that "despite every phenomenal change, life is at bottom indestructibly joyful and powerful, [and is] expressed most concretely in the chorus of the satyrs, nature beings who dwell behind all civilization and preserve their identity through every change of generations and historical movement" (qtd. in Scherr 263). In Greek tragedy, the chorus "represents existence more truthfully, really, and completely than the man of culture does who ordinarily considers himself as the only reality" (Nietzsche 61). The satyr chorus is a group of spectators, a wall of reality sitting outside the action of the Greek play, an objective team that completes the individual's recognition and acceptance of her/his whole self. As I will later bring to light, Clarissa Dalloway longs for, creates, and greatly benefits from the chorus.

These Greek qualities: Homeric language, *in medias res*, direct invocations of the Greeks, and the chorus, float in and out of *Mrs. Dalloway* like changing tides. These Greek characteristics favor the naturalness and effectiveness of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy that is present in the novel. The differing natures of Septimus and Clarissa illuminate the distinctions of each half of this dichotomy. Both Apollo and Dionysus are powerful forces, and if an individual strikes them out of balance, the reigning deity will strike down the individual.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith serves as a prime example of an individual who is out of balance. He is so centered on Apollo that he is led to destruction. I begin, however, by investigating Septimus's Dionysian tendencies, for they are certainly present and cannot be overlooked. However, I attest that he is resistant to Dionysus, and that all of his Dionysian characteristics are a result of his sole focus on the Apollonian. By first exposing Septimus's Dionysian traits, I can then reveal how it is Apollo who vanquishes them, and hence pushes him into madness.

To begin with, Septimus is not entirely mentally sound. Most criticism attributes this to Septimus's role in World War I. One critic says about Septimus:

The upsurge of repressed memory which tortures him has become familiar to [readers] in recent years. It happens as the result of trauma too extreme for the victim to bear. Septimus has returned from the 1914–18 war with perceptions and functioning so changed that he feels that to die himself is his only option.

(Thomson 55)

Another critic refers to Septimus as “the shell-shocked Septimus” (Fowler 233). Indeed, Septimus's mind has been affected by the war. He constantly hallucinates, seeing his dead comrade Evans amongst the flowers and trees:

He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself... (Woolf 61)

Referencing Greece again, Septimus imagines his old friend Evans perhaps as one with the ancient Greek heroes, dead in Thessaly. Evans's ghost permeates Septimus's mind, frightening him and confusing his sense of reality. His reality is again disrupted when he later envisions a terrier turning into a man: “It was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man!” (Woolf 59). This strange metamorphosis makes Septimus shudder, which implies his resistance to the Dionysian trait of unity between humankind and nature:

Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliations with her lost son, man. Freely, earth proffers her gifts, and peacefully the beasts of prey of the rocks and desert approach. The chariot of Dionysus is covered with flowers and garlands; panthers and tigers walk under its yoke... let your imagination conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck – then you will approach the Dionysian. (Nietzsche 37)

The fantasy Septimus has, of a dog turning into a human, very well relates to Nietzsche's description of approaching the Dionysian. Septimus is experiencing a moment where “beast and man” are “reconciled.”

However, he is disgusted by the vision. Septimus embodies Dionysian ideas but frequently neglects to accept them.

One Dionysian characteristic he generally does own is unrestrained, unpredictable behavior, which his wife Rezia fears and shuns. She notes that Septimus “[isn’t] Septimus any longer,” that he is inclined “to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself, to talk to a dead man” (Woolf 57), and that he “would argue with her about killing themselves; and explain how wicked people were; how he could see them making up lies as they passed in the street” (Woolf 58). He makes attempts to end his life more than once by heading into busy roads where omnibuses whirl by, though Rezia inhibits him, and he mutters, fidgets and stares off into space. He also has frequent nightmarish visions of “some horror [that] had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames... [that] The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames” (Woolf 12).

Like Meursault in *The Stranger*, Septimus is overly sensitive to heat and the sun. His fears of the earth exploding have been read as “an apocalyptic detail evocative of both the horrors of World War I and Christ’s prophesied triumph in Revelations” (Bethea 250). Due to his past in battle, it makes sense that the explosions of war would possess the mind of Septimus, and I will delve further into the idea of his “Jesus complex” momentarily. I attest that Septimus’s intimations of fire, heat and the sun are references to the flourishing power of the Apollonian within him: the light from Apollo, the god of the sun. Similar to Meursault’s experience on the beach before shooting the Arab, Septimus is so overly concerned with Apollo that his perceptions of the sun, which ought to represent clarity, begins to turn violent.

Septimus may initially appear as a Dionysian character due to his unsound mind, cluttered thoughts and erratic behavior, but investigating the subjects he focuses on and the causes of his actions reveal his Apollonian temperament. The sun and the heat stalk both his body and his mind, erupting into daunting visions that urge him towards death. How did Septimus come to let Apollo so thoroughly rule his being that he finally negates life itself? The most common, critical interpretation of Septimus’s delirium is that it was World War II which destructively altered him. The war required man’s “continued immersion in a war mentality that compulsively transfigures the peaceful English landscape into no-man’s land [and] the calm of home life into the explosiveness of battle” (Cole 491).

It is fairly certain that the war and experiencing the death of his friend Evans would unravel Septimus's sanity, though I believe his mind was already prodding too far into the Apollonian long beforehand. It must be realized why Septimus Smith went to war, for he "was one of the first to volunteer" (Woolf 75), and what he expected from it. *Mrs. Dalloway* briefly chronicles the motivation behind his willingness to fight: "He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (Woolf 75). Miss Isabel Pole, a past literature teacher of his whom he doted on and wrote poetry for, along with notions spun from the dreamy and valiant Shakespearean dramas, were the damsels in distress that Septimus sought to protect. It's as though Septimus saw himself as a character from the *Iliad*, Paris perhaps, fighting to keep his love Helen from her husband, the legendary King Menelaus. Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in the entire world, sparked the greatest battle of Greek mythology, the Trojan War. And what for? For love, and for beauty. It was these romantic ideals that inspired the irrational behavior of Paris, and Septimus has these same aesthetic, thoroughly Apollonian incentives as well: beauty, nature, truth and individuality.

Why was World War I really initiated? To be very general: imperialism and nationalism, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, and mutual defense alliances which obligated countries to fight for their allies. It's been said that the Great War was an "obscene expense of human life and material resources" (Cole 469), "fought much more because of incompetence than villainy," and that, disconcertingly, the "manner of fighting... shattered romantic notions of just chivalric warfare. There was nothing just or chivalric about trench warfare or poison gas. And... there was nothing godlike in war" (Bethea 249). Chivalry and the "godlike" are two crucial Apollonian matters that Septimus ventured to honor and defend, but the war did not reflect these concerns. Instead of recognizing this, Septimus seems to have created his own dream world where he can ever serve as a kind of Greek hero. He thinks:

The War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won a promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. (Woolf 76)

Like Achilles, he sees himself as being indestructible, and not because of luck. Septimus attributes his survival to being unique, a sole chosen paladin, again, like a Greek god. Amplifying his Apollonian proclivity and further removing himself from the Dionysian, he begins to not feel. He comes to manifest an Apollonian detachment from, or “indifference” to emotion, and it’s as though his passions completely dissipate. He thinks that “he could not taste, he could not feel... his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then – that he could not feel” (Woolf 77). Septimus separates himself from the world, as if it were working against him, and he becomes obsessed with redeeming it.

By cutting himself off from the world, from other people, and from even his own wife, Septimus exhibits a classic Apollonian trait: individuation. He does not practice a healthy level of individuation, however, but so far removes himself from the world around him that he cannot survive. How can one live in any sphere if they remove themselves from it? Here is a scene that highlights Septimus’s infatuation with being a singular being:

“Look, look, Septimus!” [Rezia] cried. For Dr. Holmes had told her to make her husband (who had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself.

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signaling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks. (Woolf 17-18)

That Septimus’s doctor has instructed Rezia to help her husband regard things “outside of himself” implies that Septimus is so deeply immersed in his own being that his doctor must fight to pull him back out into the world. This medical insight remains valid even though the doctor himself is discredited by Woolf as insufficiently sensitive to Septimus and his problems as a genuinely shell-shocked veteran. It was typical for doctors in the post World War I age to deny “that ‘real men’ could legitimately exhibit psychosomatic symptoms [from the war, and so those who did] were constructed as inferior, feminized

men” (Humphries 503). This is easily the case between Septimus and his doctor, although the doctor’s suggestion for Septimus to see outside his self is helpful advice for integrating the Dionysian into his life.

We see Septimus make an effort to look at something Rezia points out to him: smoke trails left by a plane in the sky which spells out a word that no one can quite make out. However, Septimus does not try to guess what it says, as Clarissa, Rezia and other characters in the novel do. He does not think it to be a clever advertisement for some company, sprawling above the bustling streets of London. He sees it as a sign, a phenomenal signal meant just for him, and the word “beauty” is used five times as he takes in its meaning. The message is indecipherable, or Dionysian, to the other viewers in the novel, but to Septimus, it is “plain enough,” clear cut, and beautiful: Apollonian.

This is not the only passage in which Septimus thinks as though he’s a divinely chosen vessel. Almost all of his musings throughout the novel bleed the pious tone of a martyr:

...he, Septimus, was alone, called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning, which now at last, after all the toils of civilisation — Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin, and now himself — was to be given... (Woolf 59)

Look the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, forever unwasted, suffering forever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness... (Woolf 21)

It appears as though Septimus attempts to seek some relief from the Apollonian when he waves his hand at it dismissively, but this action is passive and weak. Septimus is enveloped by Apollo, and he sees himself as a savior, destined to reveal the meaning of the world. He thinks “men must not cut down trees. There is a God... Change the world” (Woolf 20), and that “the supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first that trees are alive; next there is no crime; next love, universal love” (Woolf 59). His ideas are Apollonian, a dream, idyllic, of nature and God and love, and he considers himself perpetually alone and singled out. He compares himself with great civilizations (Greek and Roman) and idolized savants

(Shakespeare and Darwin), and considers himself a martyr, the next person to go down in history and be exalted.

It is important to note that Septimus is not the Dionysian savior that Nietzsche supported. There is a crucial difference between the Apollonian savior – the Christian-like martyr that Septimus sees himself as, and the Dionysian savior whom Nietzsche glorified and even considered himself to be (years after writing *Birth of Tragedy*). Nietzsche writes in *Will to Power* regarding the difference between the two: “Dionysus and the Crucified: It is not a difference in regard to their martyrdom, it is a difference in the meaning of it... The problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning” (1052). What it comes down to is that human beings are “only given the choice of accepting this life as a whole or rejecting it as a whole” (Dienstag 935). According to Nietzsche, there are just two types of suffering: tragic or Christian, meaning there are only two options to choose from, life-affirmation or life-negation. Nietzsche sees the former as the choice of Dionysus: “Dionysus cut to pieces is a promise of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction,” and the latter as the choice of Christ: “The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life” (1052). With a Nietzschean perspective, Joshua Foa Dienstag writes that “if one accepts...the world as a place of chaos and dissonance, one faces the choice of retreating from it or embracing it” (935). Septimus, who considers himself the “eternal sufferer” and commits suicide in part to free himself from the woes of existence, chooses to retreat from life. Not only can he be read as a life-negating, Christ-like martyr, as opposed to the life-affirming Dionysian, but he sees himself in this way as well.

In addition to revering himself as a savior, another Apollonian concern which enchants Septimus is science. “Empirical science [is in] the Nietzschean realm of Apollo” (Force 189), which includes the systematic arts of sculpture and poetry, while the Dionysian symbolizes the volatile arts of music and dancing. Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* has been interpreted as a piece which tries to “overcome the distinction... between science (*Wissenschaft*) and art (*Kunst*)” (Alberg 62), but Septimus tends to favor the scientific hemisphere:

Heaven was divinely merciful, infinitely benignant. It spared him, pardoned his weakness. But what was the scientific explanation (for one must be scientific above all things)? Why could he see through bodies, see into the future, when dogs will become men? It was the

heat wave presumably, operating upon a brain made sensitive by eons of evolution.

Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock. (Woolf 59)

Though much of the language in this passage is Dionysian, like “dogs will become men,” “flesh was melted” and “body was macerated,” the overarching spirit is Apollonian. Septimus claims that one must always be scientific, that he must methodically explain his dreams, and so he opts to think “scientifically,” using words like “eons,” “heat waves,” “evolution” and “nerve fibres.” The last image he creates is that of a body, forced soft and thin until it’s hardly existent. The Dionysian body is diminished, melted away from the world, and only the Apollonian mind remains. The above passage is one which showcases how hard Septimus struggles to be strictly Apollonian, for he fears Dionysian chaos, fellowship and obscurities. He is utterly obsessed with reason, scientific explanations, truth, beauty and singularity.

Nietzsche argues that, “the essence of the Apollonian lies in a serenely distanced perspective on reality, for which [the] analogy is dreams, [and] it could easily be seen as a symbol for the scientist’s mode of representing the world” (Foster 49). Despite the fact that Septimus is not *serenely* distanced from reality, his outlook on life fits Nietzsche’s definition of the “apollonian essence” rather closely. He lives in his own dream-world of illusions, and he tries to scientifically analyze everything he sees. James E. Force writes that science is an “overly Apollonian art for Nietzsche [which] shatters into individuated fragments the unity of reality” (Force 189). This description further supports Septimus’s Apollonian tendency to break up reality into individual, disjointed pieces.

As a character who lodges their being in one half of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy, Septimus is terribly imbalanced, and so cannot affirm life. Throughout the novel, he consistently speaks about committing suicide but had yet to follow through. The Dionysian in Septimus is indeed repressed, but always fights to find balance with its other half. In his last scene, readers witness a final account of the Dionysian being trumped by the Apollonian.

But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings — what did THEY want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. “I’ll give it to

you!” he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer’s area railings. (Woolf 132)

A spark of life affirmation shines in Septimus just before he heaves himself out the window when he notes that “he did not want to die” and that “life is good.” However, this positivity is fleeting and overshadowed by Apollo. Septimus’s thoughts turn to the heat of the sun and to his conviction that he must be separate from other human beings, for in his mind, he is a god-like martyr. By his own will, he meets death. Nietzsche might have said to Septimus: “...because you had abandoned Dionysus, Apollo abandoned you” (B 75). Septimus abandoned the Dionysian indeed, avoiding its presence and perpetually striving to live in a solely Apollonian world. In the end, Apollo abandons Septimus, turning from a symbol of truth and light into a harrowing and deadly sun.

To be ruled by Apollo is to be ruled by “the god of the plastic energies... the soothsaying god.” Apollo is, “(as the etymology of the name indicates)...the ‘shining one,’ the deity of light,” and the “ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy” (Nietzsche 35). Septimus fell victim to these traits; he was ever mindful of the sun on his shoulders, considered himself an oracle, meditated on beauty, and was shrouded by his inner illusions. His Apollonian-self focuses on individuation, which ultimately results in “incommunicable moments of isolation and loneliness” (Wang 183). Septimus is a modernist literary character who exposes how an imbalanced Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy leads to life-negation.

In contrast to Septimus, Clarissa Dalloway serves as the modernist character who achieves a balanced dichotomy between the Apollonian and Dionysian, and relishes life. Her characteristics are a bit more difficult to sort than those of Septimus, because unlike him, Clarissa counterbalances every Apollonian trait she maintains with the Dionysian, and vice versa. As Clarissa’s character is revealed throughout the novel pieces at a time, it becomes clear how she moves in and out of each Greek deity, finding equilibrium between them. I’ll begin by elucidating her Apollonian traits, as they may be more obvious upon first observing her character.

To very plainly describe *Mrs. Dalloway*, concentrating on Clarissa, one might say it is a story about a woman who is preoccupied with throwing a party. A shallow reading depicts Clarissa as concerned with very material matters. She buys flowers for the party, worries about who will and will not attend it, and ponders over her curtains, tables, and what everybody is dressed in. “Clarissa’s control is in

the physical scene of the party” (Littleton 43), and both physical objects and control are Apollonian characteristics, as is her consciousness of the sun and enthusiasm for beauty (both similar to Septimus). One Apollonian trait Clarissa demonstrates that Septimus does not is restraint. For instance, she restrains from marrying Peter, for she knows a relationship with him will pull her too deeply into the Dionysian and lead to imbalance. She explains:

But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable...she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced. (Woolf 5)

Clarissa chooses Richard for her husband, who gives her the space she needs, “over the more passionate option of marrying Peter,” and therefore can “maintain an autonomy which [Peter] would certainly not have allowed” (Littleton 52). Peter and Clarissa would have grown so Dionysiacally unified that they’d lose any singularity they had.

Clarissa even has a desire to appear Apollonian, wishing “she would have been, like Lady Bexborough, slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified, very sincere” (Woolf 7). She does not maintain these overtly Apollonian characteristics, but she still describes herself in an Apollonian sense: “She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self — pointed; dartlike; definite” (Woolf 31). The words, “pointed,” “dartlike” and “definite” invoke Apollo’s clear and straightforward disposition, and one might imagine Clarissa as an orderly and composed woman. These adjectives do accurately describe Clarissa, but their antonyms do as well. As seemingly whole as she may be, she is equally unassembled. She is connected and disconnected, spirited and aloof, dauntless and inhibited. Peter sees Clarissa in two differing ways, first the Apollonian:

She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said. (Woolf 5)

And what is a perfect hostess if not a woman responsible for the material aspects and superficial courtesies of a party? Fit to marry a Prime Minister, Peter perceives Clarissa as dutifully polite and aristocratic. It is true, as Clarissa is consistently congenial throughout the novel to whomever she

converses with. She says to a guest, "It is angelic – it is delicious of you to have come," and muses over how she "loved Lords; she loved youth, and Nancy, dressed at enormous expense by the greatest artists in Paris" (Woolf 157). Clarissa dotes on these Apollonian qualities; nobility, youth and ornate appearances. Nietzsche writes, "everything that comes to the surface in the Apollonian part of Greek tragedy, in the dialogue, looks simple, transparent and beautiful" (Nietzsche 67), which absolutely describes Clarissa's words and manners. But in order to make a Greek tragedy, the Dionysian must exist in proportion.

Because Clarissa is balanced, she does not only maintain Apollonian qualities. Peter concludes that it is only "a mere sketch... that even he, after all these years, could make of Clarissa" (Woolf 68). She is not just a flawless, amiable hostess with her "damnable, difficult, upper-class refinement" (Woolf 155); she is also equivocal and secretive, and her fixation on throwing parties is not only meant to satisfy her Apollonian needs. Clarissa secures her Dionysian instincts in various ways, most intensely through her desperate and profound seeking of connection and communication with other beings.

One way in which Clarissa achieves this is through her atheism. Whereas Septimus believes in God, and even thinks himself to be some type of divine savior, "not for a moment did [Clarissa] believe in God" (Woolf 24). To Clarissa, "there were no Gods; no one was to blame [for any occurrence]; and so she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness" (Woolf 68). Clarissa's beliefs are part of what allow her to think and behave in a unique manner, therefore enabling her survival and life affirmation in the modernist world of literature. "To develop a way of thinking that is not restricted by binary oppositions, Woolf suggests that God's death is necessary" (Lackey 349), and this comes out in *Mrs. Dalloway* through Clarissa. Because she does not believe in God, nor religion, or even love (she thought "love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul" (Woolf 111)), Clarissa can maintain balance. Unlike Septimus who is bound up in his idyllic and extreme beliefs, Clarissa can exist in the area between binary poles. She can have a "private soul" while sharing a communal soul with others. She does not have to choose one side or the other, but can accept both.

She assembles this communal soul through the Dionysian instinct, as Dionysus's foremost passion is uniting people and creating "a primitive sense of community" (Foster 52). In a Dionysian state, "the hierarchical structure and specialization of roles in everyday society disappear [and are] replaced by

a fraternal feeling uniting people simply as people” (Foster 52). In the atmosphere of Clarissa Dalloway’s party, the Prime Minister “looked so ordinary,” that Clarissa thinks “you might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits” (Woolf 152). Her Dionysian gathering eliminates societal positions, and the guests mingle and mix to form a unified “hum of Life” (Littleton 43) which Clarissa so desires to revel in. Clarissa holds in her hands all the elements that make up a Greek tragedy, actualizing the path to life affirmation, because she balances the Apollonian and Dionysian and savors Life:

Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh... 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 2)

The passage above maintains a thriving balance between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. It lists individual objects, sounds and ideas that combine to create the unity of one life. Dionysian images like “bellow and uproar,” “shuffling and swinging,” and “triumph and jingle” merge with each other in an almost Dionysian feeling of revelry in the streets. The Dionysian energies are then coalesced in an instance of near-Apollonian stasis to form one, individual moment: “this moment of June.”

In a similar excerpt, Peter notes:

of course (Clarissa) enjoyed life immensely. It was her nature to enjoy... She enjoyed practically everything... now it was a bed of tulips, now a child in a perambulator, now some absurd little drama she made up on the spur of the moment... She had a sense of comedy that was really exquisite, but she needed people, always people, to bring it out... (Woolf 68)

Clarissa mentions in *Mrs. Dalloway* how much more she enjoys living in the city than the country, and it is certainly because London keeps her surrounded with people. As Peter explains above, Clarissa only truly shines when others are around her. She is aware of this requirement, of needing people, and she thinks “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 who sat in her drawing room..." (Woolf 31). Her self is complete when the parts come together, and the "parts" are drawn from interaction with others, which is Dionysian, while her effortful concentration on forming a definite individual self is Apollonian. Clarissa Dalloway's parties are her attempt at creating a Greek chorus, which serves as "a surrender of individuality and a way of entering into another" (Nietzsche 64). The effect of the chorus, of the Dionysian unity, is distinctly showcased when Clarissa examines the communion of her party:

And, walking down the room with [the Prime Minister], with Sally there and Peter there and Richard very pleased, with all those people rather inclined, perhaps to envy, she had felt that intoxication of the moment, that dilation of the nerves of the heart itself till it seemed to quiver, steeped, upright; - yes, but after all it was what other people felt, that; for she loved it and felt it tingle and sting... (Woolf 154)

Not only does she feel her own enthrallment, (using the Dionysian feature of "intoxication" to describe it), but she feels it in conjunction with others.

The Dionysian "communal experience is the focal point of Clarissa's universe" (Littleton 45), but she surrounds and balances it with Apollonian traits, such as her naps alone on a narrow bed, which helps to balance the communal atmosphere of her parties. One cannot perpetually be in a primitive state of unity, else they'd be suffocated by Dionysus. In lieu of overindulging in Dionysian communion, Clarissa encounters glimpses of it "as one sees a landscape in a flash of lightning" (Woolf 30). Hence, she keeps her Dionysian instincts under control by only experiencing them in *moments*. The "moment" is a prominent facet of Virginia Woolf's fiction, perhaps due in part to her reverence of the Greeks who "found reassurance... in the prospect of renewed life born out of ecstatic moments" (Gambino 427). Clarissa constantly welcomes moments and delights in their memories, letting them glitter her present with new instances of bliss. She experiences these epiphanic moments in everyday events, such as simply walking down the hall of her home:

It was her life, and, bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified, saying to herself, as she took the pad with the telephone message on it, how moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of

darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only)... one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments. (Woolf 24)

This passage is a powerful example of a balanced Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy. Phrases such as “blessed and purified” (truth and clarity), “some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only” (individuation), and “exquisite moments” (beauty and singularity), all allude to Apollo. In contrast, “bowed beneath the influence” (primitive instincts), “flowers of darkness” (obscurity), and “secret deposit” (mystery) summon the Dionysian spirit. Because both deities are integrated together, Clarissa experiences a beautiful and affirmative moment.

Instances of balance, as illustrated in the passage above, are what keep Clarissa positive and content with her life. But because they occur fleetingly, it is not as if Clarissa is unflinchingly happy. In fact, alongside her affinity for life is her preoccupation with death, and she bears a morbidity that is eerily similar to that of Septimus. Readers learn early in the novel that Clarissa has “a perpetual sense... of being out, out, far out to sea and alone” and “the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day” (Woolf 5-6). Somewhere inside her she even longs for the comfort of death:

Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? But... somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived (Woolf 6)

Under the Apollonian, Clarissa sees the limitations of life – that she must “cease completely.” Under the Dionysian, she is reminded of the constant “ebb and flow” of life – that she is “here and there” and must survive from moment to moment. Under both Greek deities, Clarissa is consoled and accepts death.

Clarissa is also delicately connected to Septimus through his suicide. During her party she hears talk of the young man throwing himself out a window, and promptly heads upstairs to be alone and consider his dramatic action. She interprets it as “defiance” and concludes that his “death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them, closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death” (Woolf 163). Clarissa sees Septimus’s death through a balanced Apollonian/Dionysian perspective, and so she finds affirmation in it. She recognizes that all human beings are disciples of Apollo – ultimately alone and

searching for one “centre” of truth. At the same time, Clarissa understands the Dionysian side of human instinct – to communicate and to long for embracement. Septimus communicated the only way he knew how, through death, for he feared Dionysian communion, the “gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes” (Woolf 12), and kept himself uniquely and individually apart from others, under the light of Apollo.

Because life is constantly in flux, a balancing act of the Apollonian and Dionysian, a battle that makes no guarantees and a flow of misery and joy, death is a release from it all, an “embrace” that Clarissa honors Septimus for taking. Septimus becomes part of Clarissa’s Greek chorus, which enables one to “see oneself transformed before one’s own eyes and to begin to act as if one had actually entered into another body, another character...” Because Clarissa enlists Septimus as part of her chorus, she does not have to encounter her own physical death in order to experience the feelings of death. She can see and feel herself in his body, and she “felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living” (Woolf 165), and eventually returns to her party. Clarissa thinks that “she had escaped” and “had never been so happy” (Woolf 164), for Septimus’s meeting with death further emphasizes her own enchantment with and longing for life. It is not in her balanced nature to choose the route of death. She feels, with her Greek sensibility, that “the answer to individual death is the immortality of collective experience [which] springs from the common sensual world in which people experience each other” (Littleton 39). Although each individual being will finally die, unity and experience of the other allows life to continue. Life affirmation comes from equilibrium, and Clarissa not only continually welcomes the Dionysian as she communes with others both mentally and physically, but consistently reminds herself throughout the day to welcome Apollo: “fear no more the heat o’ the sun” (Woolf 7, 25, 33, 65).

CHAPTER 6

BALANCING THE CHAOS: THE DANCE OF THE GREEK DICHOTOMY

“In your dying shall your spirit and your virtue still shine like
an evening after-glow around the earth.”

-- “Voluntary Death,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

In *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche illustrates the opposing forces of the Apollonian and Dionysian instincts and sums up the ultimate goal of the dichotomy:

We are to recognize that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of the individual existence – yet we are not to become rigid with fear: a metaphysical comfort tears us momentarily from the bustling of the changing figures. We are really for a brief moment primordial being itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence; the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena, now appear necessary to us, and push one another into life... we have become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence, and when we anticipate... the indestructibility and eternity of this joy, in spite of fear and pity, we are the happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the *one* living being, with whose creative mind we are united. (Nietzsche 104-105)

The “metaphysical comfort” is not a god, but that divine, Dionysian communion mixed with Apollonian permanence. The moments of unity and beauty described above create the life-affirmation preserved by the poetic voices in *The Wasteland*, *The Second Coming* and certain works of Rilke, as well as in the characters of Meursault, Siddhartha and Clarissa Dalloway. The absence of God in conjunction with the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy is essential to modernist literary characters in order to find balance and to generate positivity towards life, even in the face of what often appears to be despair.

Balance, as determined by the Greeks in their tragedies and way of life (and through Nietzsche’s interpretation) can also be defined through Freud’s psychoanalytic terms, the *ego* and the *id*. Freud’s contributions to the dialogue of modernist criticism and interpretation are tremendous, and I do not

attempt to discuss the full implication of his theories here. I point out similarities between the *ego* and the *id* and Nietzsche's Apollo and Dionysus to further support my assertion that the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy plays a positive and significant role in modernist literature.

Essentially, in Freud's theory, the *ego* represents consciousness and the *id* the unconscious, and a balanced (sane/satisfied) mind holds the two in proportion. Because Freud wrote in his essay "The Ego and the Id" (year) that "the *ego* represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the *id* which contains the passions" (30), it is logical to interpret the *ego* as Apollonian, and the *id* as Dionysian. Re-reading each of the texts I have discussed through a psychoanalytic lens further supports my contentions that the Apollonian and Dionysian must achieve balance to promote affirmation. Freud noted that "the problem of the purpose and goal of life would be answered dualistically" (55-56), because each being has two essential parts: an *ego* and *id*, a conscious and an unconscious, and the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Life is a perpetual balancing act, whether looking at it as a Greek tragedian or a psychoanalyst.

Bruno Bettelheim's *Freud and Man's Soul* (1983) discusses Freud's uniquely innovative psychoanalytic perspectives. He notes that "Freud truly heeded the admonition inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi – 'Know thyself' – and he wanted to help us do the same" (15). Taking a lesson from the Greeks, Freud pursued finding methods to assist people in discovering, accepting, and balancing their selves. This goal rings through modernist literature in each character who has moments of self-discovery, moments of individuation and moments of communion. As Clarissa Dalloway says, these moments "all taken together [mean] the birth of a new religion" (Woolf 18). Clarissa of course is not religious; her declaration signifies the continual rebirth of moments, both past and present, that live on. Her focus is on the *birth* of balance, on affirmation, and on *life*. Freud believed something incredibly similar. Bettelheim wrote of Freud's preoccupation with the souls of human beings:

When Freud speaks of the soul he is talking not about a religious phenomenon but about a psychological concept... Freud's atheism is well known – he went out of his way to assert it... There is nothing supernatural about his idea of the soul, and it has nothing to do with immortality; if anything endures after us, it is other people's memories of us – and

what we create. By “soul” or “psyche” Freud means that which is most valuable in man while he is alive. (77)

Like Clarissa Dalloway, Freud exudes an atheistic sensibility that centers on life.

The “death of God” ought not to be read as a negative phrase in the modern world, for this contention allows the achievement of affirming life. The bulk of criticism on modernist literature has centered on meaninglessness, hopelessness, disconnectedness and disorientation for nearly a century, and while these readings leave texts open for infinite paths, few imply positivity. With the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy, literary characters do not find the answer to the ultimate meaning of life or the key to happiness, but they create moments of beauty, connection and a will to survive. After considering Septimus’s embrace of Death, Clarissa Dalloway sets out to join her party, her Dionysian chorus, and Peter waits:

What is this terror? What is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?

It is Clarissa, he said.

For there she was. (Woolf 172)

Serving as an embodiment of a balanced dichotomy, Clarissa assembles herself from the world around her and leads people together in a chorus of fellowship. Like Meursault, Siddhartha and the many modernist voices who affirm life from moment to moment, Clarissa diminishes life-negation. A modernist survivor of a confused and often negatively viewed world, and a being who simultaneously blends the Apollonian with the Dionysian, there she was, a living emblem of the dichotomy.

Nietzsche writes in *Zarathustra’s Prologue 5*, “One must have chaos within oneself, to give birth to a dancing star.” Although this statement serves *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as a philosophical proverb, it also speaks the truth from a scientific perspective. I have described how the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy works to sustain balance and generate life-affirmation (giving birth to a dancing star), for modernist characters, but science can help to explain *why* the dichotomy works on an empirical level, which may help explain its compelling literary power as a kind of substitute for religious faith.

Basic physics proves that balance is essential to generating and maintaining life; not only human life, but life throughout the entirety of the cosmos. A star, for instance, is held together by two forces:

gravity and fusion. As gravity pulls the atoms of a star inward, fusion works to push these atoms outward, and this balancing act is what enables every star to exist. Like Apollo, gravity is a steady and constant force. The law of gravity explains that gravitational force is always proportional to the product of any two objects. There is no single formula to describe fusion, however, for it is like Dionysus. It is a random act that can produce violent reactions. Gravity and fusion work together to keep stars alive just as the Apollonian and Dionysian instincts strive for equilibrium to affirm life. (Seeds 81).

Although stars are trillions of miles away from earth, they are present within each human being. In fact, it is the death of stars that produced human life. “All of the atoms inside [the human] body except for hydrogen were made inside stars... [We] are made of atoms scattered into space long ago by [their] violent deaths...We are stardust” (Seeds 276). At the core of every known life form are the same fragments that formulated the stars in the cosmos, and it is the balance of two opposing forces that gives each life. There is a physical and ethereal kinship between all individual beings and the cosmos because the very atoms of each are shared. This connection is illuminated as Meursault watches “the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, [and] for the first time, the first, [lays his] heart open to the benign indifference of the universe” (Camus 76). When Meursault is most alone he accepts his elemental connection to the universe and embraces life. Within similarly exquisite moments, modernist negativity is brightened: when the hyacinth girl looks into the heart of light as her body fades; as Rilke’s panther feels life within the confines of his cage; when Siddhartha locates his will to live in the river he tried to drown himself in; and as Clarissa thoroughly cherishes her existence while musing over Septimus’s death.

Through a delicate balance of the Apollonian and Dionysian, and through belief – not in a god – but in the divine and individuated Apollonian-self as well as the Dionysian communion with the cosmos, modernist characters affirm life. If Nietzsche’s statement that “one must have chaos within oneself, to give birth to a dancing star” is read as the secret to embracing life *as is*, the “chaos” represents the combination of the Apollonian and Dionysian instincts, and one bearing a “dancing star” symbolizes affirming life. As modernist characters demonstrate, the chaos within them has to be balanced – for it is only through balance that an individual can successfully dance.

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Kendall Stephenson has a B.F.A in Drawing and an M.A. in English Literature from the University of Texas at Arlington. She plans on continuing her studies and will pursue a doctorate degree. Kendall's primary fields of literary interest are years apart from one another: Greek classics and European modernist texts. She is concerned with the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy in literature of different cultures and eras, the Greek chorus, religion and mythology's influence on literature, and Virginia Woolf. Kendall is also interested in the relationship between visual art and literature and seeks to both critique and compose creative works.