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* Nice alliterative title :)

Misunderstood and Mistreated

Humans are naturally fearful of what they do not understand and conditions that deviate from what is considered the norm. This fear drives man to ask questions and seek logical answers to ease his apprehension. This battle to light a candle against the darkness of ignorance has led to the veritable mountain of collective human knowledge possessed today, knowledge sought through various fields of study. One such field, psychology, explores what motivates people to do the things they do. But despite the massive amount of data collected and research conducted by the scientific community concerning this subject, a gray area still remains surrounding mental disorders and insanity. Modernist writer Virginia Woolf was particularly interested in the idea of madness, having firsthand experience in witnessing her sister's "madness" and institutionalization and, later, through her own personal struggles. In her novel *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf demonstrates how some delusions and madness may be justified, making a statement about how mental disorders are not only misunderstood, but also mistreated.

From the reader's initial introduction to one of the novel's central characters, Septimus Warren Smith, it is clear he is mentally unstable. In response to such everyday occurrences as the backfiring of a car on a crowded street, he is overcome by paranoia, fearing his surroundings. His apprehension at that noise is evident in the free indirect discourse of the narration here: "this gradual drawing together of everything into one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him" (Woolf 12).

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Beautiful Hook!

* Thesis

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good internal transition

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Frequent hallucinations also accompany Septimus's paranoia, often involving a very close deceased friend named Evans, at the times when Septimus feels most desperately alone. NEEDS A QUOTE FOR EVIDENCE HERE.

Another element of his delusion is the intense feeling of numbness surrounding and suffocating him, revealed when he thinks, "He could read, [...] he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world—that he could not feel" (Woolf 65). Here, Septimus expresses numbness, feeling set apart like that from the rest of society contributes to his frequent episodes of madness, and more broadly, his suicidal ideations, the final sign of mental instability. NEEDS A QUOTE FOR EVIDENCE HERE.

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To the outside observer, Septimus's behavior indicates madness and, as such, is almost frightening; however, Woolf provides some justification for this condition through a look into his recent past. As an adolescent, Septimus was desperate to prove himself a man to the world and set about doing this determined to make a name for himself by writing poetry (Woolf 63-4). It seems strange that only a few short years separate this young, passionate lover of Shakespeare and the bedraggled, mentally unstable man with whom the reader is more familiar, but they were no ordinary years. Septimus was among the first to enlist and fight for the English on the French front in what would come to be known as World War I; Woolf writes, "It was there in the trenches [...] he developed manliness" (Woolf 64). This manliness, however, came at the price of witnessing and participating in the unspeakable horrors of war along with experiencing first-hand the deaths of many of his comrades, including Evans. NEEDS A QUOTE FOR

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EVIDENCE HERE. It is not unreasonable to connect these experiences to his transformation into the hard and calloused man, incapable of feeling any genuine or deep emotion apart from fear, of Virginia Woolf's novel. Like many who return to civilian life after active duty, Septimus is struggling to regain a sense of normalcy, describing "beauty [as being] behind a pane of glass"

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Analysis

Very
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(Woolf 65). Though his feelings and experiences are representative of a mind in trouble, in light of all he experienced in war, this mental illness is certainly not unjustified; in fact, the modern reader recognizes that Septimus is experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD.

Nice
Warrant

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Finally, by giving the reader insights into not only Septimus's mind, but also the minds of both outside observers and those who know him, Woolf crafts a deeper theme about madness and its treatment. It is clear Septimus is suffering from what his contemporaries would have termed "shell shock," but he receives wildly different (and extremely callously delivered) diagnoses from two separate medical professionals, highlighting both the lack of understanding on the part of medical professionals and the lack of adequate treatment options for patients with mental health issues. The first tells him absolutely nothing is the matter with him and advises his wife, Lucrezia, to try to distract him from his thoughts (#). On the other side of the spectrum, the second tells his wife he has suffered a serious nervous breakdown and needs to stay in a rest home where he can be in solitude and complete inactivity for a significant period of time (#).

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Both of these methods of treatments were fairly commonplace in the early twentieth century, but Woolf indicates neither is the solution. How? By having Septimus throw himself out a second-story window, killing himself, rather than undergo the later prescribed method of "healing" in isolation (108). Right before his fall, he thinks, "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot" (Woolf 108); but even though he still values his life, Septimus clearly feels he cannot continue living if he is to be controlled by callous doctors and subjected to ineffective and inhumane "treatment." His suicide is motivated by a desire to be free; because of the nature of mental health care in his time, he knows he can only be free in death. Virginia Woolf portrays his act as noble, but devastatingly unfortunate all the same, poignantly underlining how the medical treatments for madness or delusion in her time are doing patients more harm than good.

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Modernist giant Virginia Woolf uses the madness of Septimus Warren Smith to make a statement about the treatment of the mentally ill, specifically, the treatment of soldiers returning home from war. When the men returned from the trenches, they often did not feel like heroes; rather, they suffered tremendously from the deep, unseen scars of surviving what so many did not. Unfortunately, the society they came back to was ill-equipped to deal with the type and scope of psychological damage brought on by the war, isolating men who, instead, needed to feel safe and secure. Woolf's message remains as relevant today as it was for the generations that lived through WWI. Soldiers returning from active duty often experience post-traumatic stress disorder, yet they are still commonly written off and not provided with the care they desperately need. The novel begs its readers to remember that there is a human being behind every case of mental illness. In order to move forward and make a difference, one must not fear the misunderstood.

Beautiful
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WOW!
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