Septimus and Clarissa never meet, yet the reader sees the two characters as intricately connected. Both characters feel alienated from British society and are uncertain about their purpose in life. The two characters can be seen as the sane and insane, side by side (lx)(1). Both characters share common thoughts, such as their response to the trees in the park, and both have the same Shakespeare verse floating through their minds throughout the day. Both characters are detached from their spouses yet still enjoy their company. Septimus has his final moment of joy with Rezia just before his suicide and Clarissa and Richard are able to share a moment of love when he brings her flowers. Aside from these unique moments, both characters do not seem particularly attached to their spouses.

The most noteworthy experience in the book for connecting these two characters, is Septimus’s suicide. In the original text, Clarissa was the character who killed herself and Septimus was not even a character in the text (4). After Woolf decided that was not the end she wanted for Mrs. Dalloway, she added a parallel character who would ultimately commit suicide (4). This shows how strongly linked Clarissa and Septimus really are. The fact that he was actually constructed as a character to be her double is direct evidence of their connection. When Septimus commits suicide Clarissa experiences a moment of extreme clarity. The first time Clarissa knows of Septimus’s existence is after his death, yet Clarissa feels like she identifies with him completely as seen when Woolf writes, “She [Clarissa] felt somehow very like him” (182) (1). This is interesting especially because the reader is not offered any of Septimus's thoughts at the moment of his suicide. He explains very little of his thoughts except to express his confusion at human nature —“What did they want?” (146) —and then he jumps. Clarissa seems to be the one with the reflective thoughts on death. She discusses the possible motives Septimus may have had, what would cause him to behave so drastically and identifies how she herself feels similarly about death. Her sense of conviction and absolute certainty convinces the reader of her link to Septimus. Clarissa expresses extremely clear thoughts about death and does not feel sorry for Septimus yet understands him.

One particular Shakespeare line is referenced several times throughout the novel by both characters. It summarizes both character’s thoughts on life and death. Clarissa opens the exchange of thought by recalling the line "Fear no more the o’ the sun/ Nor the furious winter’s rages" (9) (1). As a reader, one next hears this line in Septimus's thoughts. Before his suicide Septimus is reflecting on life and thinks “Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more” (136). Septimus then makes several more Shakespeare references (pages 143 and 144) (1) and just before his suicide he references the quote again “Life was good. The sun hot.” (146)(1). These continued references show the link between the two character’s mind. Clarissa’s thoughts on death seem to pick up right where Septimus’s leave off. After reflecting on his death for a few moments "the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun” (182) (1). This shows the connective link between the characters’ minds.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of having Septimus as the character who commits suicide? How would the novel have been different if Woolf had kept Clarissa as the one who killed herself?