

Title: *Mrs. Dalloway and The Defense*
Author: Rachel Trousdale, Agnes Scott College

Despite his claim not to admire her, Vladimir Nabokov adapts the fate of one of Virginia Woolf's characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) for his own treatment of madness and obsession in *The Defense* (1929). Woolf's Septimus and Nabokov's Luzhin both commit suicide by jumping from the windows of their apartments. Each suicide is motivated by a desire to escape the imposition of a stifling conformity. Both men have loving wives who understand their decisions, and both, while not artists themselves, become figures for the artist's predicament. For Nabokov, Woolf's novel provides a model of how the personal scale of individual madness is both connected to and quite separate from the political. Tracing Luzhin to Septimus reveals the hidden presence of World War I in *The Defense*, and helps explain Nabokov's elision of it: for Nabokov, as for Woolf, the goal of fiction is to rescue subjective personal experience from erroneous definitions of "human nature."