



**Universidade de  
Aveiro**  
Ano 2012

Departamento de Línguas e Culturas

**Ana Luísa Ferreira**  
**Miranda Vítor**

***Mrs Dalloway e The Hours* em livro e filme –  
Uma Análise Intertextual**

***Mrs Dalloway and The Hours* in book and film –  
An Intertextual Analysis**



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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Línguas, Literaturas e Culturas – Estudos Ingleses, realizado sob a orientação científica do Professor Doutor Anthony David Barker, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro

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## O júri

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**Palavras-chave**

Woolf, Mulher, Homossexualidade, Suicídio, Cunningham, Horas, Intertextualidade, Adaptação

**Resumo**

A presente dissertação propõe analisar duas narrativas: *Mrs Dalloway* de Virginia Woolf (1924) e *The Hours* (1998) de Michael Cunningham, juntamente com as adaptações cinematográficas de ambos os livros. Este estudo irá incidir na progressão do papel da mulher ao longo do século XX e na compreensão do desenvolvimento da liberdade sexual.

**Keywords**

Woolf, Woman, Homosexuality, Suicide, Cunningham, Hours, Intertextuality, Adaptation

**Abstract**

This dissertation aims to analyse two narratives: Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1924) and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (1998), along with the film adaptations that resulted from the novels. This study will outline the shift of women's roles throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and also the development of a liberal sexual identity.

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## SHORT TITLE INDEX

(The following books are mentioned so frequently in this thesis that a short title convention will be used for ease of reference)

- MD* = Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway*. Wordsworth Classics.1996;
- TH* = Cunningham, Michael. *The Hours*. Harper Perennial. London. 2006;
- Diaries* = Woolf, Virginia. *A Writer's Diary – Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Leonard Woolf (Ed.) A Harvest Book. 1953;
- TC* = Woolf, Virginia. *The Cinema* in Woolf Online;  
<<http://www.woolfonline.com/?q=essays/cinema/full>>
- Film MD* = *Mrs Dalloway* (1997).  
Director: Marleen Gorris  
Screenplay: Eileen Atkins
- Film TH* = *The Hours* (2002)  
Director: Stephen Daldry  
Screenplay: David Hare

## Introduction

Advances in the cause of sexual liberation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and understanding of the nature of sexual identity, are very pertinent subjects in the works of Virginia Woolf and Michael Cunningham and these are the issues that will be analysed in this thesis. My analyse will include two literary works, from these authors, *Mrs Dalloway* (1924) and *The Hours* (1998) respectively, as well as the two films adaptations made from these literary originals. The film *Mrs Dalloway* was directed by Marleen Gorris in 1997 and *The Hours* directed by Stephen Daldry in 2002.

The first time I ever encountered Virginia Woolf was in my English Literature course at the University of Coimbra. We read *Mrs Dalloway* and even though it was not an easy book to read, I became fascinated with the author and this novel in particular. While researching for a course essay I discovered Gorris' film version of the novel. Years later I watched *The Hours*, without having read the book, something I only did when searching for a topic for this thesis. The reason why I choose to work on this subject has to do with the fact that Virginia Woolf is my favourite British writer and that, having written a few papers about her and the novel *Mrs Dalloway* before in the university, I felt I was able to build on this foundation. This is not the only reason, however. This subject also enabled me to combine two of my passions - literature and cinema. However, the research has proved to be challenging because Woolf is a writer who has been extensively analysed, from the works on her life to studies of her numerous literary works, and unfortunately due to time and other constraints, I imagine I have not been able to gain access to and read as many of these books as I would have liked. On Michael Cunningham, the situation was quite the opposite; there was very little available on him, aside from his own novels, and that is most likely due to the fact

that he is a contemporary writer. But, as this is not intended to be a biographical work, I will be putting the emphasis of this study on their novels and the adaptations made from them rather than on biographical interpretation. The films are of interest, to some extent, because they stand for an updated critical reading of these source texts for a wider but still informed liberal audience. Gorris' film has features of the so-called "heritage film", seeing as it is an adaptation from a literature classic. Daldry's is obviously more self-aware and perforce more actively focused on contemporaneous problematics.

The main subjects range from the perception of women, how their social roles have shifted within the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to how sexual fluidity and social conformity with the changing times and particularly with the changing mores in literary and performing arts, where gayness is generally well-accepted, are registered. The films are included because each adaptation is, as I suggested above, a diachronic critical reading and updating of the original; by conducting an intertextual analysis, the issues that are relevant in the novels come to be seen in a more contemporary light in the films. Thus intertextuality becomes also significant to this work because it allows for a more sophisticated inspection of the themes in the novels and how they play out in the films.

Intertextuality was a term coined by Julia Kristeva in *Word, Dialogue and Novel* (1966) to theorise what was already taking place, a generally new strand in literary and non-literary creativity. She drew on influences from Ferdinand de Saussure and Mikhail Bakhtin to extrapolate her view of intertextuality. Saussure interpreted the world through language, as a generalized and abstract system that contains the spoken word and its referential meaning. As for Bakhtin, the relational origin of the word comes from social registers, with specific moments for the use of words and their reception. Kristeva's approach dictates that texts are not finished products for rapid consumption, because ideas are not consumable objects, but they are presented so to persuade the

reader to find their own interpretation of the meaning. She also argued that the author does not produce texts based on his/her own mind; instead they access and re-collect pre-existing texts transforming them. To understand a text's meaning one must access the interior side of the text which corresponds to the reader's view and the exterior which is society's influence. There are three levels of intertextuality, developed by Paul Claes, that help us to conduct an analysis, in this particular case, between *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Hours*, and those three levels are: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. The syntactic level has to do with words or sentences that can be altered through repetition, substitution, additions and deletions. The semantic structure comes out of an analysis of the connections made between the literal meaning of a signifier and other meanings, through a comparison between the text presented to the reader and the source text from which meanings are extracted. Finally, the pragmatic structure has at its centre the relationship between the text and the reader, where readers themselves extrapolate intertextual relations in the text.

The chapters are presented in order to prioritise the points I wish to make; I have opted to begin with the foundational narrative, *Mrs Dalloway*, followed by Cunningham's re-invention and re-working of it and then deal with the two film versions, reviewing them in the light of arguments made about their source material. The chapter on Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* explores female/ feminized characters in the narrative who I believe are representative of how the author saw the struggles women (in particular) had to go through, what they had to endure when circumscribed by a society that viewed certain ways of being and feeling as forbidden and even punishable, as were homosexuality and recourse to suicide at the time. Woolf's stream of consciousness technique, which is largely based on the play of memory and association, allowing her characters suddenly to immerse themselves in the past and review their

own choices, will be examined as well. This first chapter finishes with how Woolf felt about having her own work subjected to criticism and how she feared that people might miss or disregard her intentions with the narrative. Also relevant is the extent to which *Mrs Dalloway* still remains an important and challenging novel for contemporary readerships.

*The Hours* chapter explores similarities between Cunningham's novel and Woolf's; although in general the main story-line is preserved, certain aspects of it are altered to accommodate his own struggles and perceptions. Cunningham exemplifies women's social evolution through three different narrative strands in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, each of them reflecting a crisis point and depicting women on the edge of breakdowns as they struggle to deal with personal demons and social pressures. The novel explores the affective and sexual dimensions in each strand which climaxes in a moment, a kiss, and I reflect on the extent to which this last is an attempt to alleviate such pressures. Dealing with Cunningham's characters' social pressures brings suicide to the fore as a theme – and the narratives at least ponder over it as a viable solution to pain and distress. Like in *Mrs Dalloway*, recollections and past regrets also have a part to play in the narratives and how memory helps to analyse one's life choices. At the end of the chapter 2, I establish a relationship between the narrative and the reader/the act of reading and how *The Hours* is a way of demonstrating respect and admiration for Woolf, but at the same time how it promotes a certain (perhaps limited) view of her and her work.

The final chapter takes up the question of intertextuality and applies it not only to the two clearly related novels but also to the subsequent film adaptations made of these books. Adaptations are for the most part expected to be faithful to the original work but that is hardly possible in many crucial aspects of transposition of literary

originals and generally speaking that is not always the intention of adapters. Adaptation is a creative process that consists of using an already existing work and transforming it to fit a new medium with the potentiality of reaching audiences, for one reason or another, perhaps beyond the reach of the original. In order to avoid misconceptions as to how one might judge a film adaptation I apply Geoffrey Wagner<sup>1</sup> (1975) three categories for three different types of adaptation. After these general theorisations, I look at both films individually, trying to establish what in particular is distinctive about these works, on what level they are a success (or otherwise) and how they were received by the critics.

Many years have passed since Virginia Woolf's most productive years in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But it is interesting to reflect that, even at this early stage in its history, she had something insightful to say about cinema. It was then the final years of silent films and her essay "The Cinema" came out in 1926, only one year after *Mrs Dalloway*'s publication (1925). In it, the author provides her view of cinema as a newly emerged social and artistic form, what it can do, and what it shouldn't (at least for then) attempt to do, how others see it and what social purpose it serves. Woolf was excited by the idea that cinema could capture reality "when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it" (Woolf, *TC*) but along with this came the idea of adaptations of already well-known literary works, and here she actually uses a strongly negative metaphor:

The cinema fell upon the prey with immense rapacity, and to the moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim. But the results are disastrous to both. The alliance is unnatural. (Woolf *TC*)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wagner, Geoffrey. *The Novel and the Cinema*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press: Rutherford. 1975;

For her, at this time, film met neither the technical requirements nor possessed the sensibility to take on such endeavours. However this did not mean that she was altogether against film. In fact she believed in its ability to progress and achieve some sort of maturity as an art, providing it acquired the ability accurately to show emotions, something so significant for the author, and when that specific feature came to be mastered she believed it would be astonishing to watch films.

Then, as smoke pours from Vesuvius, we should be able to see thought in its wildness, in its beauty, in its oddity, pouring from men with their elbows on a table; from women with their little handbags slipping to the floor. We should see violent changes of emotion produced by their collision. (Woolf *TC*)

The reluctance Virginia Woolf then felt regarding filmic adaptations of novels was not as misplaced as one might imagine, not when we consider that her own novels remain in fact quite resistant to film transposition. Of course, that did not stop those adaptations from happening but the stream of consciousness technique still poses a significant challenge to film directors.

(...) traditional nineteenth-century novels have always been more amenable to adaptation to the silver screen than modern and postmodern novels. This is due to the fact that the latter resist the linear and casual depiction of events usually considered essential for more mainstream forms of cinematic representation. (AbdelRahman 151)

This comment of course begs the question of whether any such adaptations would or should ever be considered what AbdelRahman calls “mainstream”. It also suggests that even nearly 80 years later, the problems Virginia Woolf identifies in adaptation for the cinema remain relevant; the interiority of her characterisation presents obstacles for contemporary filmmakers. If nothing else, I can at least hope to offer in conclusion an opinion on whether Woolf herself has become “an unfortunate victim” of cinema’s “immense rapacity.”

## *Mrs Dalloway* - The Novel

*In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense. (Diaries 56)*

The writer Virginia Woolf (in this work henceforth to be referred to as Woolf) was born Virginia Stephen on January 25<sup>th</sup> 1882 in Kensington, London, to a well-to-do upper-middle class family which enabled her, without frequenting a school, to receive a privileged education through her family's library and the social circles they moved in. As her many biographies suggest<sup>2</sup>, members of the family enjoyed strong bonds; specifically, Woolf had a close relationship with one of her sisters, Vanessa Stephen. Despite this closeness, Woolf underwent a traumatic experience with a member of the family. At the age of 6, Woolf tells an appalling episode:

But as so much of life is sexual – or so they say – it rather limits autobiography if this is blacked out. It must be, I suspect, for many generations, for women; for its like breaking the hymen – if that's the membranes name – a painful operation, and I suppose connected with all sorts of subterranean instincts. I still shiver with shame at the memory of my half-brother, standing me on the ledge, aged about 6, and so exploring my private parts. Why should I have felt shame then? (Woolf, cited in Lee 126)

Whether this episode was decisive in determining aspects of her future life is a matter of speculation, but after 1895 Woolf experienced a series of breakdowns and her symptoms presented as “intense agitation, spells of auditory hallucination and

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. Chatto & Windus. London. 1996;  
Roe, Sue and Sellers, Susan (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge University Press. 2000;  
Bell, Quentin. *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*. Pimlico – Random House. 1996;

completely incapacitating depression” (Rosenthal 5). With these periods of depression came suicide attempts. In late middle-age, fearing another breakdown and a period of mental and emotional instability, Woolf drowned herself in the River Ouse by putting on a coat and filling its pockets with stones on March 28<sup>th</sup> 1941. Lee argues that she had been dealing with her terrifying illness, “She was not weak, or hysterical, or self-deluding, or guilty, or oppressed [...] She endured periodically great agony of mind and severe physical pain, with remarkably little self-pity” (Lee 175). Even with these dark periods in her life, she still managed to become the famous writer we know today; she wrote nine novels, fourteen non-fiction books, as well as short-stories, biographical works, letters and diaries which detail her day-to-day experience as a writer and a woman; the diaries have allowed scholars and readers to get to know her as well as any other great writer of her time, because in them she shared her anxieties, frustrations and victories.

*Mrs Dalloway* – referenced from now on as *MD* - is one of her three most revered and mature books (along with *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*); it was finished and published in 1925. The narrative takes place five years after the end of World War I. On a June morning, Clarissa Dalloway makes all the final arrangements for a party. In her early-fifties, she is married to MP Richard Dalloway and has a daughter named Elizabeth. While Clarissa completes her errands, Septimus Warren Smith and his wife Lucrezia walk through the park, whilst waiting for an appointment with the doctor Sir William Bradshaw. Septimus has been having hallucinations related with his war experiences and talking about committing suicide; these symptoms have been diagnosed as shell-shock, a problem from which many soldiers suffered when they returned from the war. While Clarissa sits at home mending her dress, a man from her past re-appears – Peter Walsh. Although they haven’t been in contact, they were once

very good friends and former lovers. Peter even proposed to her but she refused him, thinking that it would be too suffocating to be with him and so she chose Richard Dalloway instead. However, on that fine day, she cannot help but wonder if she had made the right choices in life as she reminisces about her youth with Peter and another friend, Sally Seaton. The narrative reaches its culmination with Clarissa's party. Nearly all characters are there, except for Lucrezia and Septimus. The latter has committed suicide that day—driven by his madness, unfocused guilt and fear of confinement; he believes he is choosing freedom. Clarissa only knows of Septimus through the telling of his tale by his doctor but she cannot help but reflect on his action and feel some sort of sympathy. In the end, Clarissa overcomes her own desperate feelings and returns to her party; to life.

### **Feminine and Feminized Characters**

In general, Woolf drew aspects of her characters from people she knew, from people she met throughout her life, while others were a product of her imagination. In *MD* three of the characters have a connection, although perhaps not in the modern activist sense, to feminism thought. The women's movement was something Woolf defended very consistently; it was quite active during Woolf's life time, having begun early in the nineteenth century. Its proponents were seeking quite reasonably political, social and economic equality in relation to men. Women in the United Kingdom achieved the right to vote in 1918, earlier than in many other countries, and in 1928 they obtained equal property rights in law. In the twentieth century, with World War I, women were needed to join the workforce (and to reconcile that work with their domestic duties) since a high percentage of men were sent to fight in the war. When it

was over, many women strove to maintain their jobs. Women started attending schools, including universities, which would allow them to eventually take up key positions in the community. However, the journey that women had to go on to achieve what we can observe today was not at all an easy and overnight one; in a society that was then highly patriarchal, women had to find a way to resist certain social pressures that were deeply rooted and had been in place throughout most of English social history. With that knowledge, Woolf aligned herself with activities that challenged patriarchy and recognised women's need to acquire an active voice in the public sphere. Her work included reappraising literary works, including books from Jane Austen, Charlotte Brönte, and other proto-feminist writers. By re-presenting them, she had the idea of exposing the historic dilemmas of women and expanding her own view of the subject by realizing that it was necessary to demystify the notion of womanhood. One way to do this was, famously, by killing the ideal of 'the angel in the house', the notion of a woman with angel-like qualities, full of grace, self-sacrificing and passive, who would be submissive towards her husband. Rejecting the concept altogether, Woolf believed that "Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (Leaska: para. 2). Woolf was an important force in the feminist movement and her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is considered a central literary manifesto of the movement, where the writer raises the woman's voice in protest against male domination. Although *A Room of One's Own* is the one essay that scholars cite to when talking of the feminist wave, it is not the only one that addresses the topic. In fact *MD*, which was written six years earlier, also deals with feminism and sexual polymorphousness, but in a more veiled way.

Sally, Peter and Miss Killman are three characters from *MD* that represent, with varying degrees of disguise, feminist themes that take shape in the plot, deriving from

Woolf's desire to expose imbalances and injustices in British society. Sally is a direct challenge to what might be expected of a woman in 1923, in the way she was girlishly outrageous and spontaneous. She kept alive the possibility of, together with Clarissa, making a difference for women and so they would dream "(...) about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to find a society to abolish private property." (Shihada 132) But the plot reveals that by no means was Sally politically engaged. She eventually settled down and had little intention of changing the world; these were merely the desires of a young idealistic girl but even so it shows, from the writer's point of view, the possibility for young people to want a change and be open about it, something that one's state of political innocence allows, when there were no social repercussions to fear from taking such a stance.

Peter Walsh, although a male character, presents certain feminized aspects which ultimately come to set him apart when compared with other men and the world of public life. He is in touch with his feelings and has a sensitive side, one that Peter mostly shows when he goes to Clarissa's house and gets emotional and cries:

I know all that, Peter thought; I know what I'm up against, he thought, running his finger along the blade of his knife, Clarissa and Dalloway and all the rest of them; but I'll show Clarissa – and then to his utter surprise, suddenly, thrown by those incontrollable forces thrown through the air, he bursts into tears; wept; wept without the least shame sitting on the sofa, the tears running down his cheeks. (*MD* 34)

Peter also has a dilettante attitude towards life, he does not follow a strict career path, as might be expected, and he does not have a conventional love life; in the scene described above, Peter tells Clarissa about his new love, a married woman, "the wife of a Major in the Indian Army" (*MD* 33), yet he still mourns the fact that Clarissa and he did not marry and that she chose Richard instead. Peter's unconventionality is what differentiates him from all the male characters in the novel and what aligns him with the

female characters. His lack of a profession, which is something that men were expected to have so that they could provide for their families, shows a lack of strong male attributes and the fact that he puts such an emphasis on emotion, bears a certain resemblance to how Woolf seems to have conceived women's emotional lives. Peter can be perceived as analogous to the girlish Sally; his feminized demeanour makes of him a character mocked by those whose are committed to rigid social and sexual roles, as in the scene in Lady Bruton's house, when they talk of Peter and do so with a patronising under-tone.

“D’you know who’s in town?” said Lady Bruton suddenly bethinking her. “Our old friend, Peter Walsh.” (...) All three, Lady Bruton, Hugh Whitbread, and Richard Dalloway, remember the same thing – how passionately Peter had been in love; been rejected; gone to India; come a cropper; made a mess of things (...) (*MD* 78)

Nevertheless he still is, much as Sally was, very forthcoming when it came to voicing what he thought to be wrong. One example of this is his very strong opposition to Clarissa's parties, which he sees as futile attempts from a society wife to give meaning to her shallow life. Throughout the novel Peter offers trenchant social criticism of the world he moves amongst, but like in all of Woolf social criticism remains slightly undercut by a sense of his own weak subjectivity, his sense of personal failure.

The third character is Miss Doris Killman, a woman of German ancestry living in a post-war society which meant that acceptance did not come easily. She is a person who has perforce adopted certain male postures as if she feels the need to hide her womanhood in order to be taken more seriously. Integration was therefore difficult in Miss Killman's case; however she was a working woman, not only because it was the only way to support herself but also because it was what she believed all women should be. It is also something that justifies her resentment towards Clarissa, since Miss Killman sees her as the embodiment of all that is wrong in women's attitudes. She is

Elizabeth Dalloway's friend and teacher and in this role she passes on her own feminist views, what she believes has to change in order for women to be able to be themselves openly; and Miss Killman sees the potential to carry out these changes in Elizabeth. Miss Killman is in many respects a parallel figure to the Sir William Bradshaw character. He is a psychiatrist and Septimus's doctor; he is a self-confident and self-assertive man who believed that those who were seen as insane suffered from a 'lack of proportion', but just as Sir Bradshaw seeks and delights in wielding power, Miss Killman is motivated by hate, she is a proto-hard-line feminist and it is through her that Woolf seems to mark the limits of her feminism. Miss Killman goes a step too far; she is too like Sir William, mean-spirited and controlling, and Woolf did not respect a feminism based on personal bitterness.

Woolf's sympathetic characters are innocents who need to show strength and endurance, but what strikes one as curious is that in each of these cases, although they verbalize dissent at various points in their lives, none of them really ends up acting upon it. Sally advocates change to some extent, as a form of youthful unconventionality, but it is completely contained and one does not see words put into action. The same is true of Peter, he is out-spoken in his views and yet his dilettante demeanour and personal insecurity does not permit him to take actions against all that he critiques in British society. Indeed he himself is a small cog in the great wheel of the empire. Finally, Miss Killman seems to see herself as unable to achieve anything of significance, maybe because of her Teutonic descent, and so she deposits her entire faith in the future and another person.

Woolf explored elsewhere the concept of androgyny - in her novel *Orlando* (1928) the main character, a male, shifts genders in the narrative by one morning waking up as a woman - which "implies that the traditional gender identity (...) can be

formulated through the equal acquisition of the positive feminism and masculine traits.” (Shihada 146) If women could be more like men and vice versa, through a sharing of features, differences could become less aggravated and both parts could have meaningful roles in society. An androgynous transformation would imply constant change, an examination of one’s inner and outer self which would result in a more complex and complete being. This represents a literary device that could argue for and promote a better understanding of the different sexes, helping them to find a way to complement each other.

### **Society’s Pressures**

Society recommends certain social patterns that help people to lead a civilized life when brought together as a community, through the imposition of norms of conduct one needs to know in order to enter the communal sphere. These rules are not all provided by a code or institution like the law; most of them are a part of a collective social inheritance. However there are those who would try to restrict one’s liberty, to impose certain behaviour because of conventionality or because other forms of behaviour might be seen as outrageous to some. Conventions however are not absolute and inevitably accompany the changes in mentality that happen as time marches on, undergoing various mutations. There are certain areas which offer more resistance to shifts in mentality and in these cases societies and institutions like the law can be seen to dig in, for example in matters relating to sexuality and the sanctity of human life.

It is widely known that in the nineteenth century relationships between people of the same sex were common, although not socially accepted. In fact, where men were concerned, they constituted a crime. Within the Bloomsbury Group however, of which

Woolf, Leonard Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, E.M. Foster, John Maynard Keynes, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, Lytton Strachey, Vita Sackville-West, to mention just some, were a part, there was a somewhat more relaxed attitude to sexuality. Homosexual relationships developed among its members without censure. Indeed, Woolf's own relations with women have been extensively written about.

She lived in a milieu that included many lesbians and gay men, and she had passionate relationships with a number of women. (Barret and Cramer 4)

Even today, the idea that her sexuality was repressed is an argument used by scholars to explain her bouts of depression to some degree. Since sexual experimentation was a facet of Woolf's life, the presence of such features in her literary work, considering the times of change in which the author lived, is natural enough. Nonetheless, homosexuality had been for many centuries seen as either a sin or a crime in Britain, having been labelled as a sin by the Christian Church, followed by brutal punishments for those who committed what was perceived as immoral acts; it came to be punishable through death, penance or by being publicly burned. Judicially, in Britain at least, homosexuality was prohibited and punishable by short periods of imprisonment. However, only male homosexuality was regulated by law, lesbianism was never handled in the courts or even considered by the law. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was criminal to have homosexual relations, which is why the Irish writer and poet Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years with hard labour in prison in 1895.

In *MD*, Clarissa and Septimus are the two characters through which Woolf explores homosexuality; in each of them sexual orientation is repressed, misunderstood and the cause of torment. It is never openly voiced or acted on, as if it must remain a secret. This attitude is consistent with the time Woolf wrote the book and how homosexuality had to be treated to avoid society's censure, but that is not the only

reason. At the turn of the century, sheer ignorance accounted for a great deal of contemporary prejudice; people could not communicate easily and freely about sexuality and there was little official information available, which contributed directly to prejudice about things which were not understood. Clarissa Dalloway felt happy whenever she was with her friend Sally; her personality shocked and amused Clarissa because she would run around naked in the hallway at Bourton, she would cut off the flower heads and float them in water; she was different and that excited Clarissa and on that day, while reminiscing about her girlhood, she reminds herself of putting on a white dress and meeting Sally and thinking:

If it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy. That was her feeling – Othello's feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton!  
(*MD* 26)

Sally was all that Clarissa was not, her impulsiveness was captivating to Clarissa and she was protective of Sally. All of this would lead to the moment that makes Clarissa believe, after being married, after having had a child, that the intense moment and friendship that she shared with Sally, "had not that, after all, been love?" (*MD* 24)

Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it – a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (*MD* 26/7)

The key idea here is "not to look at it", a gift that is so precious but so forbidden that it cannot be reflected on. That kiss was the high point of their relationship, an awakening, and the first time Clarissa felt love. As readers, we recognise the importance of this

moment, but aside from Clarissa no other character in the story knows of it, not even Sally. It is as if the secret preserved the intimacy of that moment, but it seems that Clarissa is frozen in that moment and all that comes after appears distorted and refracted by it. Conventional married life is doomed to disappoint.

Septimus is a young poet that joined the army out of a sense of patriotic duty, but watching his friend Evans die in front of him had a profound impact on his mental stability. One might presume that if Evans had not died, dormant feelings would rise to the surface which would allow him to become aware and conscious of his love for Evans; but since Septimus was not capable of dealing with his feelings, he would hide behind his marriage to Rezia, trying to feel safe from his unruly emotions. Due to his wartime experiences and the trauma which attended them, his feelings and reactions are manifested as a form of 'insanity', a breakdown, and not even Septimus can consciously trace its origins to homosexual feelings towards his comrade.

Because of their situations, the author provides her characters with release mechanisms; Clarissa has her parties. They are partly social obligations but also her way to feel connected with others. She saw these events as a way to celebrate life and commit to it; for Septimus his release came through a different act altogether. Feeling cornered by his doctor into living with rigid rules in a near vegetative state, having hallucinations that made blurt out his sense of what was real or what was not, Septimus chooses to commit suicide in order to free himself from a tormented existence. When Clarissa learned of Septimus' action she, for a moment, contemplated the act as a possibility for herself but in the end, she would never be able to do it, she would choose life instead.

Just like homosexuality, suicide was considered a crime in England until the Suicide Act of 1961; those who attempted suicide or assisted such acts could be prosecuted and sentenced to prison. English law understood suicide to be immoral and an offense against God and the Crown; in fact, the Church regarded suicide as sinful under the premise that God gave the gift of life and only He can take it away. These controversial subjects are addressed by Woolf in *MD*; one finds there a hint of the discretion, indirection and incomprehension that shrouded desires and urges that were condemned by law.

### **Past Memories**

Woolf, as a classic modernist writer, favoured a view of the world as provisional, fragmented and without absolute explanations; her works are speculative, experimental and embrace change. In their role as observers, modernists write about how they feel, and about the nature of feeling itself under these conditions of social fragmentation and modernity. In modernist writings there is a focus on the inner world and human consciousness is a priority, a virgin territory to be explored. The stream of consciousness is a literary mode of experimentation within modernism; it presents a more or less orderly flow of thought, where consideration and conjecture, digression and association are welcomed, without the need for a precise conclusion. Woolf called it the ‘tunnelling process’:

I should say a good deal about *The Hours* [preliminary title for *Mrs Dalloway*] and my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters. I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment. (Diaries 89)

Through this technique, we as readers, can access their deepest thoughts in a flow of memories and emotions. Interior monologues are triggered by numerous exterior stimuli, which are followed by constant and contiguous impressions, images, thoughts, sensations and memories. The recollections in the novel provide the readers with a wider view of the characters and allow us to accompany their mental progressions as they happen, but they also give a sense of fluidity to the narrative, which shows the complexity of the human heart. Thus the narrative is not fixed; it gives space for the characters to grow within the plot, which differentiates the modernist narrative from classic realist narrative, as Woolf puts it:

This appalling narrative business of the realist: getting you from lunch to dinner, it is false, unreal, merely conventional. (Woolf, cited in Güneş 194)

Memory plays a vital part in stream of consciousness, for to glimpse the past one must roam through images, sensations and emotions stored in our memory, which will eventually help us to understand our present situations and possibly offer conjectures about our motives. Analysing the past gives the characters a chance to become more dynamic and participate in the discovery of their present feelings; characterisation becomes more psychologically profound. For each memory there is an emotion or emotions associated with it, and these emotions are what help to keep memory alive and to define personal identity.

In *MD*, memory is central to the development of the narrative. From the moment Clarissa leaves the house to buy flowers, her past memories are triggered and she begins to reminisce about her girlhood and this is a process that opens up and extends to other characters, even minor ones, throughout the novel. It is through her memories that she examines her choices in life and evaluates her current situation. For Septimus, memory is one of the causes of his profound depression. Because of his traumatic memories he

can no longer discern the past from the present and that only makes his alienation towards others and theirs towards him more aggravated, up until the point where he cannot tolerate that situation anymore and takes his own life. At the party, when Clarissa hears of Septimus' fate:

She absorbs the tragic loss of a young man in order to remind herself of the fleeting nature of life: "Odd, incredible; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long." (Patrucco 45)

When she retreats into another room to think, a moment arrives when her past and present come together and she validates her own choices, she drives down her doubts about herself and by the time she re-joins the party (because the narrative does not have a definitive closure), she has decided not to kill herself, she will go on living.

### **Critical Responses to *Mrs Dalloway***

Woolf, like many other writers, did not like to subject her work to the critics and, being a literary critic herself as well and a perfectionist, doing so was at times harrowing. Woolf stated on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1925:

As for forecasts it's just on the cards *Mrs Dalloway* is a success (Harcourt thinks it "wonderful") and sells 2,000. I don't expect it. (Diaries 73)

In fact, Woolf was right and at the time the novel was not very successful. One thing that concerned Woolf was the fact that reviewers might not fully understand the narrative and neglect the connections she intended to make. The most important of these connections was the one between Septimus and Clarissa. As a preventive measure she decided to provide her readers with an explanation and so she wrote, in the 1928 reprint, a preface to the novel:

To tell the readers anything that his own imagination and insight have not already discovered would need not a page or two of preface but a volume or two of autobiography...Of *Mrs Dalloway* then one can only bring to light at the moment a few scraps, of little importance or none perhaps; as that in the first version Septimus, who later is intended to be her double, had no existence; and that Mrs Dalloway was originally to kill herself or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party. (Woolf, quoted in Leaska 86)

There was indeed criticism of her novel; in her diary, she wrote: “No, Lytton does not like *Mrs Dalloway*” (Diaries 77), he thought of Clarissa as being too limited and that the writer excused her. Another factor which might have contributed to a disappointing response to the book could have been the fact that in the post-First World War period, life was not easy. For many, it was economically hard; while for others there were issues of disorientating social change (intellectuals were questioning everything around them). Woolf’s ‘common reader’ therefore might not be particularly interested in getting wrapped up in the issues of a privileged upper-class woman and what she had to say about her problems. At least, I think that was a contributory reason why the book was not a major success; that and the fact that it was a difficult book for contemporary readers. It has an intricate plot that requires an attentive reader and without care for detail, it is probable to miss connections in the narrative.

Nowadays this novel has been extensively written about and critical opinion is, for the most part, very positive. There is a vast literature on the author and extensive analysis on her work has been carried out. *MD* has become a canonical work of English literature and Woolf’s novels are sold in numbers, read and taught all over the world. It was perhaps inevitable therefore that it should become a source text attracting the attention of other writers, notably that of Michael Cunningham. As he uttered:

*Mrs. Dalloway* also contains some of the most beautiful, complex, incisive and idiosyncratic sentences ever written in English, and that alone would be reason

enough to read it. It is one of the most moving, revolutionary artworks of the twentieth century. (Michael Cunningham, cited in IndieBound Website)

With such a testimonial, it is not surprising that he should go on to write a work that is at least in part homage to Woolf and her novel, borrowing revealingly the name by which it was first identified: *The Hours*.

## ***The Hours: A Reinvention***

*Like my hero Virginia Woolf, I do lack confidence. I always find that the novel I'm finishing, even if it's turned out fairly well, is not the novel I had in my mind.*

([Michael Cunningham] in Brockes 2011)

Michael Cunningham is an American writer; he was born in Cincinnati, Ohio on November 6, 1952. He studied English literature and has followed a remarkable academic path. Nowadays, Cunningham is a professor of creative writing at Yale University. As an author, he has written six books of fiction, one of non-fiction and a few screenplays. In a majority of the books, there are some overlaps when it comes to the subjects they deal with; they are all generally focused on the struggles people go through with age and the need for sexual liberty without preconceptions. Basically he seeks to explore human struggles and emotions, how people deal with their problems and, sometimes, how one finds a way to cope with what overwhelms us. It is a search for beauty, emotional rawness, unconventional love, for how to make sense of one's choices and how they have effects on others, disease, suicide and, finally, society's ability to accept unpreventable changes. As Cunningham has said in an interview with Jim Halterman: "I really and truly write what I know best and what is interesting to me." The author has been widely interested in exploring the ordinary; what everybody, at some point or another, goes through in life. That is what he encompasses in his novels; Cunningham has, for example, been arrested a couple of times for civil disobedience, primarily due to his attempt to create AIDS awareness. There was a major AIDS crisis in New York that Cunningham lived through and even had to go through

the painful experience of losing lots of his friends to the disease, as he claims in an interview given to Emma Brockes:

If you survive a war or epidemic, your sense of life and the world is changed. You've just seen a level of mortality which many people don't see. And you work with that. You simply take it as part of the material you've been given and try to negotiate it as a writer.

(Cunningham, quoted in Brockes: para. 21)

Although there is a sense of comfort in writing about what one knows, this does not mean that there isn't room for experimentation. But one can relate best having gone through the grieving, never taking lightly one's major losses. Being a gay man himself, Cunningham must have in fact endured a lot; this helps to understand why homosexuality and the AIDS epidemic are such a big part of his novels, but more on that later.

In order to concentrate on internal emotions, he uses the single-day narrative focusing on what goes on emotionally with the characters, and through it one can learn not only little things about them but also gain a deep insight of their entire lives. In *The Hours (TH)*, he uses the same technique Woolf did in *MD* and the one James Joyce had already utilized in *Ulysses*. With it, they were able to extract from the little events in life, from the ordinary, a great deal of insight into people's inner-lives. Cunningham said: "[T]he whole human story is contained in every day of every life more or less the way the blueprint for an entire organism is present in every strand of its DNA." (Cunningham: para. 6). The single-day narrative is further enhanced by another technique, one that Woolf is much associated with, the stream of consciousness, as mentioned previously; a narrative device that allows one to roam inside the characters' inner thoughts, much like a river flows – without constraints. Cunningham integrates this device in his novel; however in *TH* the stream of consciousness technique does not

show the same fluidity as it does in *MD*. While Woolf incorporated the character's inner monologues within the body of the text, Cunningham chose to present this flow in what might be perceived as "sidebar" moments in the text:

The old beauty, the old hippie, hair still long and defiantly gray, out on her morning rounds in jeans and a man's cotton shirt, some sort of ethnic slippers (India? Central America?) on her feet. (*TH* 13)

These breaks in the flow of the text provide a clear separation between the narrative and their thoughts. One can argue that it was intentional; it might merely be his own way of using this device in his novels or it might be just a means of differentiating himself from Woolf. These are mere conjectures.

There have been many theories as to why Cunningham decided to do something with one of Woolf's novels. According to the literary critic Harold Bloom, writers struggle with the notion of being as accomplished as writers from previous generations, people who have produced great successes, either in their life-times or posthumously, with major pieces of literary work. One always tends to look up to what came before us and what inspires us to greatness as well. This might be one of the reasons Cunningham attempted to retell a canonical text written by a female writer, which is a monument of British literature. There are many other explanations, one of which makes perfect sense to me, which is that Woolf made such an impact on Cunningham that he decided to pay homage to her by celebrating her literary work and drawing attention to it. At the same time, he made it his own work since he introduces new characters, a new style and gives a new historical resonance to the book.

He first came into contact with Woolf when he was fifteen years old in high school because a girl he was interested in dared him to read it and so he did. He read *MD* because it was the only novel of Woolf they had in the school library; he later

admitted that he didn't get most of it at first, but it was a book and an author that stuck with him for the rest of his life. When he finally decided to incorporate his obsession into his work, he thought of retelling the story of *MD* from a gay man's perspective, living in New York but he found that the plot would be unsustainable for an entire novel. Instead he adopted a different approach.

The narrative is about a day in the life of three women from different times and places. We follow the life of Clarissa Vaughn, a fifty-two year-old woman in late twentieth century New York, who is going to throw a party for her friend Richard. He has been calling her Mrs Dalloway as a pet name since they were quite young. While she is going through all the preparations, she encounters long-time friends and reminisces about her youth. When she goes to Richard's house to help him dress for the party, he is very frantic. He professes his love for her and claims he can no longer sustain a life of suffering (he has AIDS); he quotes a part of Woolf's suicide note to Clarissa and throws himself out of a window. The second story is that of Virginia Woolf herself, on the day she wakes up with the opening line for her novel *Mrs Dalloway*. She is living in Richmond, in the suburbs of London, nearly twenty years before she commits suicide. Virginia is feeling haunted by the fear of uncontrollable voices and the idea that her madness is coming back. On that day, her sister Vanessa and her children come to visit her. Just before they leave, Clarissa decides that the main character in her book will not commit suicide after all. At the end of the day, she tries to flee to London by train, but Leonard rushes out to find her and convinces her to come home, with the promise of moving back to London eventually. The third plot-line is that of Laura Brown and it happens in Los Angeles in 1949. She is married to Dan, a Second World War hero; she has a son Richie and is pregnant with a second child. It is Dan's birthday and he goes out to get her some flowers. When she can hardly stand the idea of getting

out of bed, she begins to read Woolf's *MD*. During the day she wants to bake the perfect cake for her husband, but she feels she has failed at this task and begins another one. Dissatisfied, she leaves Richie with a babysitter and checks into a hotel, where she finds enough quiet to continue reading the book. A couple of hours later, she picks her son up and the family celebrates Dan's birthday. The stories appear in alternate chapters and in the end, after Richard killed himself, the reader discovers that he was Richie, Laura's son. She appears in Clarissa's apartment and we learn that she eventually abandoned her husband and children. In the prologue, we get an interior evocation of Woolf's suicide in 1941, using her real suicide note.

In many ways *TH* remains true to Woolf's novel – all the female characters are preparing a party, each of them experiences a momentous kiss and in all three plots there is an attempt at or reflection on suicide; however there are clear alterations that must be acknowledged. Cunningham has added characters that were not originally in *MD*, he brought the novel's issues into a more contemporary time-frame (the late 40's and the end of the twentieth century), with the AIDS epidemic substituting the problems that soldiers had encountered after World War I. Another difference is the fact that Clarissa is a lesbian in a committed relationship with a woman named Sally, but still she wonders about herself and Richard. There are also the aspects of *MD* that Cunningham left out: Clarissa's party for Richard never actually takes place. Apart from additions to the narrative and omissions, there are also substitutions to it. Clarissa Vaughn substitutes Clarissa Dalloway; Richard Brown and Laura Brown seem to represent Septimus Warren Smith since clearly both of them are unhappy in their lives and act upon or contemplate suicide; Sally is a version of Richard Dalloway and Mary Krull is Miss Killman. Cunningham claimed:

I wondered what would happen if someone very much like Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway were alive today and free of the constraints that were placed on Clarissa Dalloway in London in the '20s. What if she were set free? Would it be different or ultimately pretty much the same? Would she impose her own restrictions? (Cunningham, in Schiff 367)

All of these differences allow Cunningham to tap into problems that hadn't appeared in Woolf's time, which will bring the narrative closer to his readers and will, at the same time, try to shed some light on some of the same issues Woolf poses in her novel.

### **Women through the Ages**

All three main characters: Virginia, Clarissa and Laura are crucial when it comes to understanding women's social situations and the changes they went through throughout different epochs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cunningham allows his readers to see women's journey from the Victorian Age until near contemporary times and how society has impinged upon them in every aspect of their lives. After the First World War, Britain had suffered great losses but there was a need to move forward and try to get past what the war had destroyed. However many were stuck on the idea that the British Empire had vanished and were reluctant to accept more drastic societal change. In the 1940s it was a time of economic growth and rapid change in the United States. After the Second World War; the economy boomed, it was a time of plenty and people began to put the war behind them, trying to accommodate those who had returned from the war so that everybody could resume a normal life. By the end of the twentieth century and with greater general prosperity and access to education, many of the social conventions that prevailed in earlier decades underwent changes or became obsolete. At this stage, the developed world was becoming first internationalized and then

globalized, which has had the result of broadening horizons and allowing for a reshaping of societies and their views on gender and sexuality, for example.

Each of the female characters tries to fit the roles that society has shaped for them, but in order to do so they end up betraying who they really are, their true selves. These three women find themselves in conflict between who they are and who they are expected to be. Each of them is very insightful and has a deeply sensitive side, which allows for a very intense response to what is around them, celebrating their victories as well as being overwhelmed by their failures; they often feel that their lives don't belong to them anymore, that they have been shut out from avenues of personal growth and satisfaction and all three dwell on choices made in the past. Virginia questions herself as to why she didn't turn out to be more like her mother or sister, since both could take charge of the household in a way she couldn't; while Virginia could not even manage her servant – Nelly, because she wasn't able to be authoritative enough for Nelly to take her seriously. Since she can't be the perfect hostess, she settles on writing about a character that can. Laura married Dan because she felt an obligation to do so, as if it were her patriotic duty as a woman to marry and be a wife and mother to a man returning from war. This meant that her needs had to be cast aside as a matter of duty. As a consequence, she feels disconnected from her life, house, husband and son. The only way she feels connected to her expressive side is when she reads. Clarissa lives with her female partner and her daughter. She has a career of her own and a stable family environment. However she feels, at times, alienated from her own house, she fails to recognize fragments of her surroundings, all the while Richard keeps telling her that she has become a 'society wife' and in line with this she often finds herself wondering if she has lost her way.

In order to keep on living a life that does not seem theirs, they hold on to little things: Virginia being hyper-sensitive to her surroundings is quite in tune with life, which she channels into her writing, Laura attempts to direct her creativity towards baking the perfect cake, which makes it that much more frustrating when she fails and Clarissa is also very much in touch with herself and as she walks down the street. She can't help but rejoice in all that crosses her path and have intense revelations, such as the one she has about immortality as she glimpses a movie star and how fame can keep your memory alive long after you are dead.

One can thus see a number of types of women over time and how they were positioned in relation to social expectations and *TH* represents those types. There is the pressure from the Victorian 'Angel in the House', as already explained in the MD chapter, the 50s' Suburban Housewife and its modern form. Each type displays a given set of characteristics and dwells upon the limitations of their age. These fictitious characters lived in entirely different epochs and each one of them brings out different nuances of the same problems, all unresolved. The setting of the fictitious Virginia Woolf is one based on the actual writer; she was expected to hold herself together, be devoted to her family, passively accepting of Leonard's control and a good hostess. Society dictated that a woman should live under a man's dominance and going against that required resistance and spirit. Cunningham's Woolf is not, however, a pristine example of the Victorian woman, in fact just like the real Virginia Woolf, she attempts to fight the notion. Virginia's marriage was by no means one dictated by obedience, even though the moments when Leonard tries to nurse her can come across as him being the dominant voice in the household. Aside from those moments, their marriage was more similar to a partnership, where both were equally entitled to make demands, give advice and look out for one another. Laura Brown is a later American derivation of the

‘Angel in the House’. Once again women were expected to marry, have children and live with a man that would provide financially for the family but, unlike in previous periods, it was common for women at this particular time to have received an educational training and even, due to the war, some working experience. This made women more independent-spirited, more defiant and aware. The Suburban Wife, as she is called, has no financial worries, is devoted to her family; she is seen as having the perfect life but, for some, domesticity is a curse and not something that was desired; Laura, in particular, is an example of that, she has been active and now in her homely domain she is not able to find happiness and a sort of depression sets in; but still she tries to achieve this idealized perfection by baking the perfect cake. The cake is metonymic or metaphoric, representing her obligation to fit in with her life in the suburbs, but no matter how many attempts she makes, it never seems to come out right. Laura believed it should have – but she can no longer perform menial jobs like baking a cake or having tedious conversations, like the one she has with Kitty:

[Kitty] This is such good coffee,” Kitty says, sipping. “What brand do you use?

[Laura] I don’t know. No, of course I know. Folgers. What brand do you use?

[K.] Maxwell House. It’s good, too.

[L.] Mm-hm.

[K.] Still. I’m thinking of switching. I don’t know why, really.

[L.] Well. This is Folgers.

[K.] Right. It’s good.

(TH 106-7)

She feels like she could never excel at being a housewife; either she would fail by her own standards or she would be set to fail Richie and Dan. Curiously or perhaps not, a distaste for suburbia is a recurrent subject for gay writers; it is as if the 50’s were the

last decade of self-repression and gay writers and artists identify themselves with women whose feelings were confined and, as the expression is, still in the closet. The use of a female suburban persona enables them, like Todd Haynes's protagonist (also played by Julianne Moore) in *Far From Heaven* (2002), to channel their own frustrations about social acceptance and conformity.

Clarissa Vaughn, a modern-day woman, bears some resemblances to the previous women but she also presents remarkable differences. In modern times, after numerous social struggles which included public protests, society changed the way it views women. They are, to some extent, inserted in society and have active roles in it. Clarissa is a successful book editor with a stable family and a good home but still she is rebuked as a "society wife", a pejorative concept even nowadays. But Clarissa Vaughn knows better than to listen to what others think of her, she has evolved past that. Modern women have a better understanding of what is thought of them and they do not bow to what others want – to the male-driven traditions imposed on women. Clarissa has got rid of the traditional role of women which can be seen from her non-traditional mother role and the fact that she didn't have to be taken care of by men; instead she is the one taking charge of Richard.

Through each of these characters one can see a clear evolution not only of minds but of scope for actions as well. Virginia, Laura and Clarissa show how heterogeneous a woman must be in order to keep her psychic balance in a society that presents so many obstacles and which, by setting up so many challenges, implicates them in states of depression that they attempt to fight. Virginia has to negotiate their return to London and for them to do so she has to play by the rules and be compliant, by showing some degree of social normality. As a hostess, she has to be more assertive (as was said before) but the only way she knows how to preserve and be herself is through her

writing. That is her way of fighting back and, at the same time, her escape from her own insecurities. For Laura, even getting out of bed was psychologically demanding and to hide it she had to try to assume the role of loving mother and wife, to fight against her creeping depressive state:

(...) she is again possessed (it seems to be getting worse) by a dream-like feeling, as if she is standing in the wings, about to go onstage and perform in a play for which she is not appropriately dressed, and for which she has not adequately rehearsed. (*TH* 43)

Even though there is a sense of discomfort, Laura can be the flour-sifting, the caring wife, thus proving that she is not in any way one-dimensional; and the same occurs with Clarissa, who has to undertake several different roles: she is a single-mother and a career woman, which makes her entirely different from the others. For Sally she is a significant other, a lover and finally for Richard, Clarissa is a friend, a helper, a reason to live for, a former lover, Mrs Dalloway and an inspiration for his books. These women have the ability to juggle multiple assignments and over the three stories their strain in assuming these roles offers a clearer view of women's changing place in society, because women are evincing a desire for a more active and significant role, not only in the home, but in the public sphere as well.

### **Sexual Fluidity**

Cunningham is an avid defender of a fluid sexuality, much like Woolf, but he takes it a bit further. He writes about the unconstrainable state of sexual desire and the freedom to be able to express it in *TH*. In the various plotlines the kiss, which exists in each of them, symbolizes a need to connect so that characters can engage with others and work around their social awkwardness. Each kiss happens in privacy, either no-one is there to see or they just have their backs turned and each of them makes the women

reflect on and analyse their lives. Virginia is married and loves her husband but she is drawn to kissing her sister Vanessa; the fact that this sisterly kiss occurs behind Nelly's back represents a transgression because her servant Nelly is a bastion of conventional behaviour and would regard this act as unacceptable. In Laura's plotline there is also a very meaningful kiss - which tells us a great deal about the plot and the author's intention - where Laura in an effort to reassure and be sympathetic with Kitty gives in to her desire and kisses her neighbour:

Laura desires Kitty. She desires her force, her brisk and cheerful disappointment, the shifting pink-gold lights of her hair. Laura desires Dan, too, in a darker and less exquisite way; a way that is more subtly haunted by cruelty and shame. Still it is desire, sharp as a bone chip. (*TH* 143)

It is my belief that Cunningham attempted to introduce a more unpredictable and unstable notion of sexual orientation with all its intricacies and complexities and to do so he uses Laura, who possesses a more polymorphous sexuality, occurring in many forms and often as a surprise to herself. Laura simultaneously loves Kitty and Dan but with different intensities and for different reasons; she loves her husband because they have children, they share a life but Dan is everything that Kitty is not; with her neighbour her love is unconstrained, she is all that Laura wishes she might become. An interchangeable and unstable set of sexual responses runs through Clarissa's story as well, but with a wholly different level of entanglement, since it involves: Clarissa, Sally, Richard and Louis. With this experimental configuration of conflicted lovers, Cunningham goes a bit further in exploring the idea that an unconventional partnering can be something natural and should not pose any sort of threat to morality.

She [Clarissa] will always have been young and indestructibly healthy, a little hungover, wearing Richard's cotton sweater as he wraps a hand familiarly around her neck and Louis stands slightly apart, watching the waves. (*TH* 131)

Even though she was adventurous in her sexual escapades in her younger day, she ended up in a relationship with Sally. Cunningham seems to want to argue that fixed parameters can be very constraining regarding sexual relations; one should have a little leeway to explore one's sexual desires provided they do not interfere or pose a threat to others. Cunningham's intention was to explore the notion of a fluid and judgement-free society and by substituting Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway with Clarissa Vaughn he has given Woolf's character the wishes she had longed for. However, Clarissa does not encounter relationship bliss after all, which suggests that the same fault-lines and problems are as likely to occur in homosexual relations and they are in heterosexual ones. As previously mentioned, androgyny is also common in Woolf's work, but Cunningham tries to envision a scenario where individuals can be free to express themselves and where there aren't any strict boundaries. A man can be with a woman or with another man, while the same choice is open to women. Nowadays, since societies have come to learn sexual orientation is not defining of a person's nature, as Cunningham himself says:

I feel that each of us has his or her own sexuality. And I try to be mindful of the fact that knowing whether somebody is officially gay, or straight, or bisexual, tells you almost nothing about that person at all (Cunningham, in Asatiani 2010)

This was obvious a social ideal too distant for Woolf to attain in her lifetime but it seem that it was towards this that she is reaching in her fiction and her essays.

### **The Ephemeral State of Being Alive**

As much as there is a fierce pleasure in life, both in Woolf's and in Cunningham's book, there is also an exploration of the subject of death and a reflection

on the processes of decline and mortality. With everything that was happening in women's lives they all required some kind of privacy, to use Woolf's expression, they needed a room of one's own, which would give them the opportunity to introspect on their own lives, to preserve their selves and develop clear ideas of their own; Virginia has her writing room where she ponders about whether her character, Clarissa Dalloway, should commit suicide or not, and her considerations about her character's fate might be seen as an actual deliberation about her own fate, showing her engaged in a real struggle with her demons. Laura has the hotel room; she concentrates all her private time on her books, a world that is quiet and where she can be alone, since in her house she is constantly observed both by her attentive son Richie and her husband. She has a feeling of being trapped in her life and so she eventually comes to envision suicide as a way out.

She shifts over to the left-hand lane, presses the accelerator. For now, right now, she could be anyone, going anywhere. She has a full tank of gas, money in her wallet. For an hour or two, she can go wherever she likes. After that, the alarms will start up. By five o'clock or so, Mrs. Latch will begin to worry, and by six at the latest she'll start making calls. If it gets that late Laura will have explaining to do, but right now and for at least another two hours, really, she is free. She's a woman in a car, only that. (*TH* 144)

For her, the idea of escaping even if for a brief moment was like a breath of fresh air and a form of self-indulgence and so she goes to a hotel to get some piece of mind and as she reads she contemplates a way out of her life:

It is possible to die. Laura thinks, of how she – how anyone – can make a choice like that. It is a reckless, vertiginous thought, slightly disembodied – it announces itself inside her head, faintly but distinctly, like a voice crackling from a distant radio station. She could decide to die. It is an abstract, shimmering notion, not particularly morbid. Hotel rooms are where people do things like that, aren't they? It's possible – perhaps even likely – that someone has ended his or her life right here; in this room, on this bed.

Someone said, Enough, no more; someone looked for the last time at these white walls, this smooth white ceiling. By going to a hotel, she sees, you leave the particulars of your own life and enter a neutral zone, a clean white room, where dying does not seem quite so strange. It could, she thinks, be deeply comforting; it might feel so free: to simply go away. (*TH* 151)

However she is an educated and rational woman; despite her initial contemplation of the act, she ultimately gives in to reason and decides against it. Still, something must be done and as one learns later on, she escapes. As for Clarissa, she has a sense of alienation from the life she leads too; she feels like a stranger in her own home, she has difficulty at times recognizing some aspects of the space.

Clarissa is filled, suddenly, with a sense of dislocation. This is not her kitchen at all. This is the kitchen of an acquaintance, pretty enough but not her taste, full of foreign smells. She lives elsewhere. She lives in a room where a tree gently taps against the glass as someone touches a needle to a phonograph record. Here in this kitchen white dishes are stacked pristinely, like holy implements, behind glassed cupboards doors. A row of old terra-cotta pots, glazed in various shades of crackled yellow, stand on granite countertop. Clarissa recognizes these things but stands apart from them. (*TH* 91)

Clarissa is a woman torn between her life nowadays and the one she experienced when she was young – that summer with Richard and Louis, something that compared with having to face Richard's illness now, makes her wonder about past actions, how life had progressed and how each had made different choices. But unlike the others she never considers suicide, although she feels, at times, insignificant either because someone failed to invite her for a lunch date or because she doesn't seem to recognize her own dishes and that for her, that feeling of inadequacy felt like death. Mortality is then a common theme in both books and so are the reasons why one could be tempted to commit suicide. Aside from Virginia, whose suicide was to have an all-too-real basis in fact, there is another suicide in *TH*, and that is Richard's. In *MD* we have Septimus, a character suffering from shell-shock, a relatively misunderstood disease at the time that

leads him to commit suicide. In Cunningham's novel, he explores instead the effects of AIDS, a disease that was clinically observed for the first time in 1981 and that caused many casualties. It had many popular names, and due to a major outbreak among the homosexual community, it was even known in the press as GRID, gay related-immune deficiency. A vast wave of discriminatory behaviour towards homosexuals was set in motion in the 1980s, a period that the author lived through and when he experienced the loss of many of his friends to this malady as well. Richard takes the place of the Septimus character in this narrative, but here he is a homosexual man suffering from AIDS. Just like Septimus, Richard had reasons to live, indeed as a poet he was a celebrator of life, a praised and acknowledged writer, but in the end he kills himself because he is no longer able to withstand the suffering of being imprisoned inside his debilitating disease.

He [Richard] says, I don't know if I can face this. You know. The party and the ceremony, and then the hour after that, and the hour after that. (...) But there are still the hours, aren't there? One and then another, and you get through that one and then, my god, there's another. I'm so sick. (*TH* 199)

The seclusion and loss of mental faculties became a tremendous burden for him to bear; in many ways Richard is like Septimus but there is one feature that distinguishes him from this character: Cunningham's character was doomed to die shortly in any event whilst Septimus choose to do it:

[Clarissa] You have good days still. You know you do.

[Richard] Not really. It's kind of you to say so, but I've felt it for some time now, closing around me like jaws of a gigantic flower. Isn't that a peculiar analogy? It feels that way, though. It has a certain vegetable inevitability. Think of the Venus fly-trap. Think of kudzu choking a forest. It's a sort of juicy, green, thriving progress. Toward, well, you know. The green silence. Isn't it funny that, even now, it's difficult to say the word 'death'? (*TH* 198)

Septimus was under medical supervision but stood in need of an appropriate intelligent treatment. The lack of it meant he was on a collision course with clinically insanity. As for Richard, because of his advanced diseased state, he was hearing voices, losing physical and mental control and would eventually die anyway. While for Woolf's character it was a choice, Richard had very much reduced options.

### **Parenthood, Childhood and Surrogates**

These loving questing sexual beings in *TH* are in many cases also parents. At times parents wonder when their children take a misstep in their lives, where they have gone wrong, where they have failed in the training and socialization they provided and they feel responsible. Children too, at times, question how much their parents actions have an effect on their lives and future choices, since we have become what our education and these influences make of us. In *TH* it seems to me that there are two instances where a sort of blame and resentment are attributed to a parent.

Whenever one misses a parent in one's life, of either sex, one could argue there is always a hole, something constantly missing. Julia, Clarissa's daughter, blames her mother for not knowing who her father is and, because of the absence of a male figure in her life, she seems to have substituted him with Mary Krull, a lesbian activist and radical feminist.

Even if you've been defiant all your life; if you've raised a daughter as honorably as you knew how, in a house of women (the father no more than a numbered vial, sorry, Julia, no way of finding him) – even with all that, it seems you find yourself standing one day on a Persian rug, full of motherly disapproval and sour, wounded feelings, facing a girl who despises you (she still must, mustn't she?) for depriving her of a father. (*TH* 157)

Krull comes out as very judgemental, seeing that she looks down on Clarissa's relationship with Sally:

Briefly, while Julia's back is turned, Clarissa and Mary face each other. *Fool*, Mary thinks, though she struggles to remain charitable or, at least, serene. Now, screw charity. Anything's better than queers of the old school, dressed to pass, bourgeois to the bone, living like husband and wife. Better to be a frank and open asshole, better to be John fucking Wayne, than a well-dressed dyke with a respectable job. (*TH* 160)

Krull's disapproving view is not so much against their sexual orientation but against their pusillanimous natures, seeing them as timid posers, with a kind of domestic lesbianism which might pass as 'normal' in an extremely homophobic world. Maria Krull is very straight-forward and does not hide her interest in Julia.

Mary lingers a moment behind Julia, allowing herself a view of Julia's broad, graceful back, the twin moons of her ass. Mary is almost overwhelmed by desire and by something else, a subtler and more exquisitely painful nerve that branches through her desire. Julia inspires in her an erotic patriotism, as if Julia were the distant country in which Maria was born and from which she has been expelled. (*TH* 161)

Her feelings are genuine and assertive, she is no timid poser like Clarissa; Krull is much more straight-forward and radical. However, what Krull might perceive as straight-forwardness Clarissa understands her to be "just as bad as most men, just that aggressive, just that self-aggrandizing" (*TH* 161). She has a butch appearance and personality, which makes her easily identifiable with a male figure, thus making Julia more susceptible to creating a bond with her, for Julia is fragile and vulnerable. Krull connects with Woolf's Miss Killman precisely because her sexual influence is coercive, judgemental and ultimately self-centred.

Clarissa's daughter, this marvellous, intelligent girl, could be some cheerful wife, shepherding her husband through a day of errands. She could be a figure from the fifties, if you made a few relatively minor alterations. (*TH* 159)

In an attempt to have in her life something she never did Julia preserves her friendship with Maria. One can, up to a point, attribute this decision to keep Maria close, despite her mother's dislike, to her household environment. Having been all her life surrounded by two women, Clarissa and Sally, these might have had an effect on how Julia views heterosexual relationships, which would make her more inclined to attach herself to Krull. Julia, just like Elisabeth in *MD*, has her whole future ahead of her but in both cases we never gets to see what they turned out to be. One only sees their uncertainty in their life choices; they become part of the unfocused anxiety of their mothers.

The other case that supports my feeling that this is a complicating cross-current in the theme of personal freedom is Richie, Laura's son. As one discovers at the end of the narrative, Richie grows up to become Clarissa Vaughn's friend Richard – a man in various sorts of pain. He seems to bear a number of resemblances to his mother; he has artistic leanings and a sensitive character but unlike Laura, he is a prisoner of his medical condition. Even if Richard wanted to, he could not abandon his life to start over like Laura did and she, unlike Richard, would never go through with the idea of suicide. However, also being abandoned by his mother in early life seems to have caused major psychological damage to Richard:

Richard, in the other room, sits in his chair. [...] Richard, in the far corner, in his absurd flannel robe (an adult-size version of a child's robe, ink-blue, covered with rockets and helmeted astronauts), is as gaunt and majestic, and as foolish, as a drowned queen still seated on her throne. (*TH* 57)

His still clinging to his childhood and his childish robe is a representation of that, it is something that he can't let go of, probably because it reminds him of happier days, of a time where his mother was present, where the person he worshiped and attentively observed was within reach. Another memory of his past is the sad old chair which he

insists on not throwing away; it appears to have something to do with the fact that it is the same chair that was in his parents' bedroom:

She [Mrs Brown] takes her robe, pale aqua chenille, from the newly reupholstered chair and the chair appears, squat and fat, skirted, its nubbly salmon-colored fabric held down by cord and salmon-colored buttons in a diamond pattern. (*TH* 42-3)

That chair is quite significant to him and even though it is in bad shape he won't let it go:

The chairs - an elderly, square, overstuffed armchair obesely balanced on slender blond wooden legs - is ostentatiously broken and worthless. It is upholstered in something nubbly, no-colored, woollen, shot through (this is, somehow, its most sinister aspect) with silver thread. Its square arms and back are so worn down, so darkened by the continual application of friction and human oils, that they resemble the tender parts of an elephant's hide. (*TH* 58-9)

These little tokens are a reminder of his mother, a person that is constantly at the back of his mind throughout his life. One has a better understanding of how much his mother meant to him exactly at the point where we learn that Laura Brown was this missing figure. Clarissa immediately realises:

Here she is, then, Clarissa thinks; here is the woman from Richard's poetry. Here is the lost mother, the thwarted suicide; here is the woman who walked away. (*TH* 221)

Richard appeared to adore her but, at the same time he blamed her for all that happened to him after she left. His future lifestyle may indeed be linked to the heart-breaking moment of his mother walking out on her family; his choices in life were to an extent influenced by that event: his failed relationships and his child-like attachment to Clarissa. He would have had a mother figure to support and love him but because he didn't, just like Julia, he spent all his life searching for that missing piece; if he had this maternal figure present one could believe that much of the behaviour in his life would have been entirely different.

It is public knowledge that Laura Brown came entirely out of Cunningham's imagination and he drew her from his own mother:

I realized that part of my attachment to Clarissa Dalloway, and to Virginia Woolf, stemmed from my sense that my mother was a little like an Amazon captured and trapped and sent to live a life that was too small for her. Although she was someone who wasn't really happy just keeping the house, she was obsessive about the house. She could spend all day looking for the perfect cocktail napkins. I began to think, if you take away the result, the end product, mom and Virginia Woolf had something in common; they were both devoted to an ideal, to the image of impossible perfection, and Virginia Woolf was trying to write great books, and did. Mom was just trying to make a great cake. (Cunningham in Brockes 2011)

One may conjecture that the author may be attempting, directly or indirectly, to blame his mother for being who he is; the Richie/Richard identification is a significant and emphatic twist in the plot which looks like a causal connection between loss and psychic damage. Maybe Cunningham wished his mother had had Laura Brown's bravery to leave suburbia which, according to Cunningham:

(...) my suburb was all white, upper-middle class and Republican. It was a little like a living death. (Cunningham, quoted in Doig 2003)

The author attributes to Laura Brown's suburbia all that he saw as wrong with the place where he lived, with the people he interacted with and with his own family home. He projected it all into this 1949 tale, so it is safe to conjecture that he might have projected himself as a child onto the character of Richie and to his subsequent development into Richard. Laura incarnates the feelings he believed his mother ought to have had living in suburbia, an intelligent woman that gradually makes herself feel smaller to fit her role; one could assume that as much as he transferred characteristics from his mother to Laura, he also transferred his own childhood feelings and fears as well his adult concerns to Ritchie/Richard.

## The Reader, the Critic

The novel *TH* is a novel that, within itself, contains another novel; the one Laura is reading, which is Woolf's *MD*. She is the one who provides direct access to the re-enactment of Woolf's novel, the most obvious way that a connection is established between them. Reading was as much an escape for Laura as writing was for Virginia and Laura is what Woolf regarded and wrote about as the common reader – "He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others." (Thomas 2012) Laura has a chance to glimpse Woolf's world, she can aspire to be like her and by reading all her novels she gets an insight into the author and establishes an emotional connection with her situation:

She, Laura, likes to imagine (it's one of her most closely held secrets) that she has a touch of brilliance herself, just a hint of it, though she knows most people walk around with similar hopeful suspicions curled up like tiny fists inside them, never divulged. (*TH* 42)

With this re-invention of Woolf's novel, its narrative becomes more accessible and more familiar to contemporary American readers. Indeed, there is a sort of simplification of the narrative in Cunningham's book; he strips from it some of the ambiguity of the modernist text. He explores and utilizes Woolf's techniques but also makes them his own, making it not a copy but his rendition of them. For example, Woolf creates a plot in which key characters are linked without ever meeting one another, Cunningham does the same but stretches it to the point where characters are linked throughout different eras and places in a very fluid way, without a disruption in the narrative.

*TH* has proved to be quite a controversial novel; some think of it as being a masterful narrative that complements Woolf's life as well as her work, while others

don't regard so benevolently. Many scholars find, very much to their distaste, the use of moments from Virginia Woolf's life in his book to be disfiguring, but not all reviews are bad. In fact, Hermione Lee, who spent several years writing a biography of Woolf herself, has a certain degree of appreciation for Cunningham's work in *TH*, as she claims:

He has a strong idea of what made Woolf's life heroic, her dedication to her work in the teeth of illness, and her violent swings between moods of pleasure, relish and excitement in life, and abysses of depression and despair. (Lee 2003).

Still there are several points made by scholars that are not so favourable; Lorraine Sim, a lecturer at the University of Western Australia, argues that Cunningham's novel "ultimately undermines the everyday in Woolf's life in favour of stereotypical narratives about mad women writers and their domestic melodramas" (O'Brien 26). This appears to be an opinion readily accepted in the literary community; the arguments range from Cunningham portraying Virginia Woolf as a decaying woman in constant pain, to her being a bit of a snob, unwilling to deal with others, obsessing about her household misfortunes and her own appearance. There are those who choose to apply Leonard Woolf's words in his autobiography, where he states:

For nearly 30 years I had to study Virginia's mind with the greatest intensity...I am sure that, when she had a breakdown, there was a moment when she passed from what can be rightly called sanity to insanity. On one side of this line was a kind of mental balance, a psychological coherence between intellect and emotion, an awareness and acceptance of the outside world and a rational reaction to it; on the other side were violent emotional instability and oscillation, a sudden change in a large number of intellectual assumptions upon which, often unconsciously, the mental outlook and actions of everyone are based, a refusal to admit or accept facts in the outside world. (L. Woolf, cited in Chuo 12)

This means that although Woolf indeed had to struggle with her own illness, she was not at all times an obsessive and paranoid woman; she had many periods of lucidity which allowed her to achieve some of the greatest and most exploratory novels in the English language. In contrast to this, as many have pointed out, in *TH* there seems to be an overall description of Virginia as being constantly in a paranoid state.

The voices are back and the headache is approaching as surely as rain, the headache that will crush whatever is she and replace her with itself. The headache is approaching and it seems (is she or is she not conjuring them herself?) that the bombers have appeared again in the sky. (*TH* 4)

However, in my view this is a false issue. It would have been possible to find stages of Woolf's life when she was far worse than those depicted in *TH*, periods when she was catatonic for weeks. As it is Cunningham's novel, it is not meant to portray a rounded picture of Virginia Woolf the historical character, but his own Virginia; because whether academics approve of it or not, it is fiction and the character "Mrs Woolf" is a fictionalized version of Woolf and in her, Cunningham as the writer has the liberty to attribute whatever characteristics he desires. However, despite the many criticisms of the book, it was actually very well received by the reading public. Cunningham won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Faulkner Award for it. The overall reviews of the book are extremely positive; the novel has been described as masterful, graceful and courageous. The *Los Angeles Times* Sunday Book Review has written:

[Cunningham] has fashioned a fictional instrument of intricacy and remarkable beauty. It is a kaleidoscope whose four shining and utterly unlike pieces--the lives of two fictional characters, of a real writer, and her novel--combine, separate and tumble in continually shifting and startlingly suggestive patterns. (Cited in BookBrowse)

It is my belief that Cunningham's objective has been achieved; as he said in an interview at the Prague Writer's Festival about what he wanted to do after reading *MD*,

he wished: "...to convey the strangeness and magic and off-kilter beauty of... where I am from, of the lives of people I know that are not full of highlights." He does just that and adds to it his profound respect for Virginia Woolf, the author, the artist. With his novel there was a renewed interest in Woolf. *TH* was such a success that within 4 years it was turned into a film, one that will now be analysed, along with the film version of Woolf's novel *MD*.

## An Intertextual Case Study

*The screenwriter who adapts a well-known play or novel lives in a special kind of purgatory, for he can never entirely please the original author; and everyone who has read the original work has positive and definite ideas and illusions about plot, characterizations, background, and motivation which a mere screenwriter, and a mere producer, and a few mere stars, and couple of mere million dollars, can never equal.*

(Daniele 200)

Intertextuality takes place when one makes use of an already existing text to produce another text; *TH* is without question the result of an intertextual creative process. Analysing Paul Claes' three different levels already outlined in the 'introduction' one can see how *TH* fits the criteria. Syntactically, the novel is a single day narrative which utilizes the stream of consciousness technique. It resorts to various devices such as: repeated elements that take place in both strands of the novel and even across novels, for example, Clarissa and Laura are preparing a party and, although in a more intimate sense, so is Virginia; in *TH* all three women share a kiss just as Clarissa Dalloway did with Sally (in *MD*) and finally, suicide is a common theme in the books. Cunningham added new characters and updated the stories and, in this way, he gives a new perspective to his work; but there are also differences between them. *MD* entails two stories (Clarissa's and Septimus'), *TH* has three stories: one about a writing process, other about a reader and another which is an updated retelling. There are deleted scenes, a significant one concerns the party itself which is something that never actually happens in Cunningham's novel and it is quite a relevant scene in *MD*; and substitutions, regarding the names of characters and their roles. For example, Woolf's

Clarissa, on her way to buying flowers, believes she glimpses the Prime Minister and in *TH*, Clarissa Vaughn thinks she is seeing a movie star across the street; this is not only a substitution, but an updating of the history as well, a transposition to modern times. Semantically, one can see that Cunningham inspired some of his characters from the novel *MD* but they are attributed to different roles; for example, Richard Brown is a simplified version of Septimus Warren Smith. Lastly, pragmatically there are certain subjects that occur in both novels which allow the reader to establish a link between them and transfer inferences and intuitions from one novel to the other. This brings both novels closer together but also sets them apart. For example, Septimus' suicide in *MD* is the result of a misunderstood illness at the time and even though he commits suicide, he wished to live but he could no longer stand the pain his illness was causing him and to the ones closest to him. To put a stop to everything he throws himself out of a window when his doctor comes to take him away. His death is witnessed by passers-by and his wife; in *TH* the suicide derives from a misunderstood illness as well, and somewhat like Septimus, Richard also had something to live for but he couldn't face the idea of living another hour with AIDS, an illness that was devouring his personality and strength. The poets from both novels commit suicide and their final action is left for the reader to decode; this is only one of the examples of a pragmatism which provides the reader with the necessary tools to make his/her own inferences. There is an intrinsic bond between a text and its reader and, in a text filled with intertextual references, the reader is placed in a pivotal position.

[...] it is the reader who traces the intertextual references, which in their turn guide him or her toward a better understanding of the text: "The term [intertextuality] indeed refers to an operation of the reader's mind, but it is an obligatory one, necessary to any textual decoding. (...)" (Wild 1)

The reader imprints each book with a little bit of his/her experience in the interpretation of the pages he/she is reading; the knowledge of previous literary works and even an overall knowledge of the world comes in handy when making inferences about a book.

(...) também o leitor tem o seu conjunto de textos latentes na mente, adquiridos ao longo dos anos, através da exposição a códigos sociais, interações culturais, contextualização histórica e interpretação literária. Por isso o texto ao qual o leitor responde activa estes textos adormecidos, o que conduz à compreensão intertextual de um texto (...) (Silva 17)

The easy access to previous texts is available to all and it is, for the most part, an involuntary action that will allow the reader to attribute various meanings to a text and by having this kind of freedom one can conclude that there is no right or wrong way to look at the text; each person can read it in its own way. This doesn't mean that the author loses its power over the work but it means that there is shared authority within the story.

### **Film Adaptations**

Intertextual inferences are commonly extracted out books but film adaptations are also a good means to explore intertextuality. In general, novels and films are two very different mediums. Serious novels can be very demanding reading as well as time consuming; while most films are easier to digest, take less time than a book to get through and, in the visual culture in which we live, perhaps people are more responsive to visual stimuli. Films have a tendency to compress the action because something that can take fifty pages in a book might only take five minutes or less in a movie and finally unlike books, films provide a more direct sensory experience.

Film adaptations of canonical and even non-canonical novels are very common in the film industry. The reasons it happens so often can range from mere vogue-ishness to a perception of commercial potential, or they may derive from a profound respect for the literary work where the adaptation is made in order to pay respect to the original in another medium or, finally the novel adaptation may simply be conveniently at hand, and attractive because novels and films share similar narrative features:

Whatever the cinema's sources – as an invention, as a leisure pursuit, or as a means of expression – its huge durable popularity is owed to what it most obviously shares with the novel. That is its capacity for narrative. (McFarlane 12)

From the moment an adaptation is made from a novel, intertextuality becomes an element in the mechanism of interpretation. From the very beginning, the cinema represented an entertainment medium, a place where families can go and let themselves enter the world of the story depicted in the film. As soon as one knows that a film is an adaptation from a canonical book, and because there is such a clear basis for comparison, people are often quicker and harsher in their judgements.

Everyone who sees films based on novels feels able to comment, at levels (...) on the nature and success of the adaptation involved. (...) talk of novels as being “betrayed” by boorish film-makers to those who regard the practise of comparing film and novel as a waste of time. (McFarlane 3)

For the most part, readiness to judge is based on one criterion alone: faithfulness to the original work. When one reads a book, immediately the words flow through our mind and images are created; when a movie adaptation is released, one feels at times that the film “(...) fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, or aesthetic features of its literary source.” (Stam and Raengo 14) This view, crude as it might be, can have at times a degree of sincerity in it since there are adaptations which are more respectful than others and there are those which mainly focus on certain

fragments of the action, leaving other parts behind, often those crucial to the novel's thematic. A film script can be read in many ways and can vary according to who is reading it, his/her perception of the novel, his/her motives for coming to see the film, among other various possible reasons. Just like those responsible for adapting the novel to the screen, the viewer might need to let go of the ideas already projected in his/her mind of how the action is supposed to develop or how the characters are supposed to look, and sometimes it is a difficult process to submit yourself to, which is why many viewers and even critics are so unforgiving when it comes to judging certain adaptations.

Screen adaptations are typically written by screenwriters appointed by publishers who "buy the rights" from the book/play writer. So except where book authors have chosen to adapt the original text themselves, someone else's vision now begins to reinterpret and rewrite the text. The new text therefore invites a different *reading*. The screenplay is taken over by production houses and teams comprising producers who finance the film, and director(s), cinematographers, actors and so on who further reinterpret the text. In this reinterpretation, the original text "mutates". Decisions made along the way about what is included and excluded and factors relating to character and plot development, *mise en scène* and so on are often not merely aesthetic choices. They are more often a result of institutional pressures or financial decisions, over which the original writer has little or no control. (Jetnikoff 4)

Adaptations should not be entirely reckless in respect of the faithfulness issue; but an adaptation has to be an adequate and autonomous work in its own right and not merely be faithful to the original one. In any case, when a medium transposition occurs certain aspects are inevitably lost, simply because they are not translatable.

Adapting literary works to film is, without a doubt, a creative undertaking, but the task requires a kind of selective interpretation, along with the ability to recreate and sustain an established mood (...) (McFarlane 7)

Certainly it cannot be an easy task and, at times, the intention of the adaptor is, from the start, to give another perspective to a literary classic. There are situations where the intention is only to use the original story as a platform for the production of an entirely different work, but when that is not the case recreators try to tell the story as convincingly as possible, so not to defile the original work. Some screenwriters see this whole issue of fidelity as being given a disproportionate amount of attention by critics; Geoffrey Wagner came up with three categories, three different types of adaptation, that can followed by the film-maker and recognised by the critic:

- (a) *transposition*, “in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference”, (b) *commentary*, “where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect...when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or outright violation”, and (c) *analogy*, “which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art.” (McFarlane 10/11)

With these three possibilities, it is easier (and helpful) to identify which kind of adaptation one is dealing with and Wagner’s categories also provide for a more mission-oriented adaptation and a more focused critical response. With these possibilities in mind, film-makers can feel free to pursue their vision, without the fear of having their intentions misinterpreted; as for the critics, they perhaps ought to be aware of these distinctions when forming their opinions.

### ***Mrs Dalloway - The Film***

The two films under analysis in this chapter are directly connected to the books already discussed in the previous chapters. The first film is the one directed by Marleen

Gorris - *Mrs Dalloway* (MD) and it came out in 1997; it was produced in Europe (UK and Netherlands) by European artists and it was a small film with a modest budget. Distinguished actress Eileen Atkins (who has a small part in *TH*) was responsible for the screenplay adaptation of Woolf's novel and, in the film, some major figures from British stage and screen, like Vanessa Redgrave, Natascha McElhone, Rupert Graves and Michael Kitchen, just to name a few, take the leading roles.

A film adaptation requires quite complex reconfiguring in order to be able to represent and unravel the difficult prose and numerous emotions in works of serious fiction. According to Christine Geraghty,

Novels are verbal and use words while films are visual and rely on images; novels can express internal knowledge of a character, but screen adaptations have to imply feelings or motivations from a character's actions since the camera is best suited to the objective recording of physical appearances; films can only use the present tense; voice-overs are noncinematic; and cinema and television rely on realism while literature requires the reader's imagination. (Geraghty 1-2)

With all of its complexities, and since Woolf's is such an iconic British literary personality, many doubted that a Dutch director like Gorris would be able to recreate adequately such an important piece of British literature. Marleen Gorris is a well-known feminist director of independent films and one of her best known works is *Antonia's Line* (1995), which received ten nominations for prizes, winning six of them, including the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Having directed women's films, Gorris was sympathetic to the novel.

[Marleen Gorris] I make the films that I want to make and the audience will see what they do. If they don't like it, well that's okay, they don't. If they do like it, great. But I think you should at least allow the artist the freedom of speech; the freedom to do what she or he wants to do. (Geraghty 58)

It was her belief that one must create a kind of distance from the original work, in order to pay a proper homage to it, but also to allow the contemporary artist to be creative. For her, “the book is the book and the film has to be something else” (Geraghty 58). Geraghty describes this type of cinema as art cinema and she emphasizes the elements of this particular adaptation: the narrative, which is more inclined to relate events that belong to common day life rather than Hollywoodesque fantasies which have little place on an ordinary day. Through devices such as dreams and flashback memories, psychological states such as the randomness of thought or mental distress can be imitated; and, finally, it uses as the strategy of beginning the narrative in the middle of the action and not giving it a definite closure.

Gorris’ *MD* is certainly no exception to the rule that adaptation is a difficult and precarious business. Due to the complexity of the novel, most critics expected this work to fail. Indeed there were a number of problems from the outset; during shooting the film had financing difficulties. However Gorris, undaunted, confides that she had a bigger budget on this film than she had had for any of her previous ones.

By present-day American standards *Mrs. Dalloway* wasn’t a very expensive film. It was only four and a half million dollars. And you know, if an American studio had made the film it probably would have been something like sixty million dollars. So, I think in Europe we manage to make quality films for much less money and I hope we continue to do so. (Geraghty 58)

Despite the problems, they were able to move forward with the film; the main reason why this particular film was difficult to transpose to the screen relates to the stream of consciousness technique utilized by Woolf in the novel. Although on the page one is able to follow it, on film the inner-monologues are not at all easy to perform and that is why there were many doubts whether it would succeed or not. There is a world of

difference between thinking a stream of thoughts and articulating them out loud, howsoever one uses film voiceover and visual sleight of hand.

[...] o fluxo da consciência, a grande contribuição para o cânone literário inglês no século XX e até mesmo o seu reconhecimento como literatura universal. O cinema, dessa forma, redimensionou a obra em dois momentos distintos da história através da tradução. (Viana da Silva 6)

Attending to the fact that both mediums are essentially narrative, as previously stated, it is not impossible for film to be successful in its attempt to translate stream of consciousness but it is not without its challenges. What a film tends to use to reproduce the technique is voice-over. Through it the viewer is allowed to go into the mind of the character and have a notion of his/her intimate thoughts. By using editing techniques, together with voice-over, it can create powerful and complex images reflecting states of emotion. For example, at the party when Sir William Bradshaw is narrating the death that has occurred, the image is then edited and we see Clarissa in a series of close-ups focusing on her eyes and tightening mouth, showing an expression of horror and together with the voice-over, she says: “Don’t talk of death at my party.” (Film *MD*). Stream of consciousness gives the novel a sense of fluidity, the ability to go back and forth in the narrative; the film exploits motivated cuts away to extended dramatic reconstruction from the past, which gives a more coherent feel to the narrative.

However a film does not depend solely the mastering of certain techniques, they depend on the actors as well. They are the people who give body and animation to what is on the page, they are the ones who must internalize a whole range of emotions and perform them convincingly.

The gap between characters and actor allows for a performance to be seen, a fact that helps to explain why so many acting Oscars have been awarded to performances in adaptations. (Geraghty 5)

The transformational process through which any actor must go is vital to a stellar performance. In *MD*, the first obstacle to clear was the need to show characters both in their youths and in the present, in the cases of Clarissa, Sally Seton, Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway. The director instructed those playing the young versions of the characters not to trade ideas with each other so that they could give more authentic performances and Gorris admitted in an interview that she believes she achieved her intended purpose. According to the director and the critics, Vanessa Redgrave's performance is the one that stands out, since many affirmed that it was her acting that gave life to the film. For critics who are passionate about Woolf's literary work, it was Redgrave's acting that made issues like the stream of consciousness become less central. In the film there are many moments where the stream of consciousness technique is used, one of them at the beginning when Clarissa is living the house and thinking to herself: "What a lark! What a plunge!" (Film *MD*) and immediately we are transposed to the past and see young Clarissa leaving the Bourton house saying "What a plunge!" (Film *MD*) and, as she runs out of the house, we follow the older Clarissa walking out into the street on her way to buying flowers. Gorris uses two different ways to express stream of consciousness; moments that refer to the past in the novel are shown in the film, mostly by scenes at Bourton, while the inner monologues appear, somewhat trimmed back, through voice-over. The film critic Roger Ebert outlines what is most significant in the film to him:

Redgrave's performances steers us through.... Stream-of-consciousness stays entirely within the mind. Movies photograph only the outsides of things. The narration is a useful device but so are Redgrave's eyes, as she looks at the guests at her party. Once we have the clue, she doesn't really look at all like a safe, respectable, middle-aged hostess. More like a caged animal – trained, but not tamed. (Geraghty 62)

Much of the praise given to the film is due to the presence of Redgrave, but despite the appraisals on her performance, which I also believe was brilliant one cannot fail to notice that Redgrave bears little resemblance to the character Clarissa Dalloway as described in the book. In fact, she looks more like Woolf herself. Like Woolf, Redgrave's Mrs Dalloway is tall and grave, whilst fictional Clarissa is described as a small birdy woman. Redgrave's was not in my view the only performance worthy of mention. Rupert Graves' performance as Septimus Warren Smith is very compelling. Graves captures the desperation and restlessness of a man dwelling with his insanity and emotional insecurity.

Aside from Redgrave's and Graves' acclaimed acting performances, the success of the film might also derive from the very well-planned and exquisite use of Woolf's language. By using lines taken from the actual novel it is easier to establish a connection to the film and it affirms the intention of paying homage to the original work, registering little to no need to alter the original. On the other hand, there are those who have not been so appreciative when it comes to talking about the film; they see it instead as a rather superficial piece of cinema:

[... ] the parade of dresses and vintage cars, the museum cabinet of social attitudes. This is not a Merchant-Ivory film... But it often behaves like one. (Geraghty 62)

Despite the mixed reviews, the film went on to be a modest success in the U.S. in the art house market.

### ***The Hours* – The Film**

Michael Cunningham's novel *TH* was turned into a film of the same name but although it shares much of the original narrative, the filmic medium raises some new and interesting questions. As with most adaptations from novel to film, it presents some

challenges and, given that the source text for *TH* is a novel from Woolf, the standard has been set high. As biographer Hermione Lee said of Woolf herself:

Virginia Woolf's story is reformulated by each generation. She takes on the shape of [a] difficult modernist preoccupied with questions of form, or comedian of manners, or neurotic highbrow aesthete, or inventive fantasist, or pernicious snob, or Marxist feminist, or historian of women's lives, or victim of abuse, or lesbian heroine, or cultural analyst, depending on who is reading her, and when, and in what context. (Lee, quoted in Grant 1)

There has always been a fascination with Woolf's life and work; the quality of the latter is perhaps beyond what might be expected from someone who struggled for mental equilibrium all her life and it is my belief that that is what has aroused so much interest and why so many writers - like Robin Lippincott, John Lancaster and of course Michael Cunningham - have interpreted and appropriated her work and her various characters.

The film *The Hours* was released in 2002, only four years after the publication of the novel; David Hare, a renowned dramatist, stage and film director and screenwriter, was the person who adapted the script from Cunningham's novel and Steven Daldry directed the film. The cast is filled with well-known Hollywood names, including Nicole Kidman (Mrs Woolf), Julianne Moore (Mrs Brown), Meryl Streep (Mrs Vaughn), Ed Harris (Richard), John C. Reilly, Jeff Daniels, Toni Collette and Claire Danes. The plot of the film is essentially the same as that of the novel. Once again, the director Stephen Daldry struggled with some of the same things that Gorriss did; the main difference was that the director of *TH* had to represent three separate mental landscapes instead of two.

The difficulty [...] is a general feature of this mostly internal novel. These inner conflicts are indices proper that present the most serious challenge to the process of adaptation for the screen. David Hare, "finding that so much of the defining action happens inside the characters' minds", was left with the choice to either use voice-over,

and let each of the women talk directly to the audience, or look for a more direct way to externalize the feelings, memories and emotions of the characters. (AbdelRahman 154)

Even though the most notorious and debated performances have been attributed to the three female main characters, which are central in the film, I would like to outline what I believe to be the most remarkable male performance in the film. Ed Harris in the role of Richard Brown is not, in my view, of secondary importance in the film's narrative. In fact, he produces the one surprise in the plot and I speak for myself when I say that (seeing the film before I read the book) I was not expecting that plot twist in the end. Ed Harris as the older Richard Brown transmits the despair and inevitable doom of his character's situation.

In the river scene, the opening sequence in the film, through a collection of camera techniques we arrive at Virginia's state of mind at the moment she is writing the notes to her husband and sister and how clearly upset she is; "through a mixture of tracking and zoom shots, many visual details (*mise-en-scène*) help create the mood and convey Virginia's psychological state of mind, such as her trembling hands as she writes the note, her body movements, and her way of walking that is paradoxically both sordidly self-determined and nervously absent-minded." (AbdelRahman 153), the use of devices is consistent throughout the film and quite enlightening when it comes to understanding the depth to which these emotionally charged scenes go. Another example of this is from the Clarissa's strand, when Louis appears at her house to pay a visit:

Hare has to turn those verbal conceptual images to non-verbal realization. This is brilliantly achieved through the kitchen scene, the conventional "woman's place". When Louis stops by Clarissa's apartment on a sudden visit, Hare indicates in the scene-heading that "she has an apron around her waist and green plastic gloves on. Her hair is a mess and Louis has plainly interrupted her in mid-work." She is also presented as an excellent cook, famous among her friends for a special crab soufflé roll. Cunningham

pays tribute to Hare and Daldry, pointing out how one shot can carry the narrative load of pages at a time. He remarks: “There are obvious things that you lose when you move a novel into film...what you get in place of that is Meryl Streep’s ability to separate an egg in a way that tells you more than five pages could about her history, state of mind (Hare and Cunningham).” (AbdelRahman 161)

For all that was changed, from one artistic medium to the other, certain aspects remained the same while others were necessarily altered; with a visual aid one is guided through the narrative, except when there is a non-verbal speech (which would be well understood on the page). When that happens one must rely on the talent of the actor/actress to be able to let that emotion reach the audience. The scene above described is a wonderful example of how experience and talent are vital to the accomplishment of a scene; the writer and critic Stephen Holden describes Streep’s performance as a “(...) continuing interaction of experience and memory in the instinctive human drive to infuse the moment with meaning and value.” (Daniele 205). Meryl Streep’s acting was not however the most remarkable and acclaimed of the three main performances, although her performance is never less than outstanding. There is also Julianne Moore’s performance, one where the actor is pivotal to understanding the character. Moore’s stillness, showing a near state of prostration, embodies Laura Brown’s depression. Without having to say it, her expressions show that her dissatisfaction comes from within herself. In the hotel scene, an emotional charged one, Laura does not utter a word for the most part. The sound one gets comes from Nicole Kidman’s voice-over as Virginia, and it consists of a reading of Clarissa’s thoughts on death. We then cut from that to show Virginia deciding not to kill her heroine in the novel. Simultaneously, Laura decides not to kill herself. In this scene, while she is contemplating ending her life, the unsettling stillness shows both the brilliance of Moore’s acting and the depth and emotional struggle within the character Laura Brown. Out of the three main performances, it was Nicole Kidman’s impersonation of the

Virginia Woolf character that won the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role in 2003. Her performance was closely scrutinized; some believe it to be a stellar performance while others see it as a distracting piece of miscasting. The chief film critic for the *Hollywood Reporter* Kirk Honeycutt liked Kidman's performance in the film and he wrote:

In her vocal inflections and body movements, the graceful, athletic Kidman morphs into an angular, tightly wound cerebral artist racked by hallucinations and voices. We see her fierce intellect struggle to work through these bouts to fulfil her artistry. (Honeycutt, quoted in Grant 10)

In order to be able to take on the role, Nicole Kidman's appearance was changed so that the actress would bear a much closer resemblance to the author. For this, she put on a prosthetic nose; Steven Daldry described it as a "releasing mechanism" (Grant 59). Although the intention was visually to approximate the fictional to the original, the American critic Daniel Mendelsohn and the author of *Not Afraid of Virginia Woolf* was not impressed:

(...) the frumpy creature we see on screen, clumping around in a housedress, breathing heavily through a broad, flat, putty-colored nose, bears little resemblance to the fine-boned, strikingly delicate woman that you see in almost any photograph of Woolf, whose mother was a famous beauty, and who herself was memorably described by Nigel Nicolson, who knew her, as "always beautiful but never pretty." Without the prosthesis, Kidman is pretty without being beautiful; with it, she is neither. (Mendelsohn, 2. 3rd paragraph)

The way Nicole Kidman impersonates Virginia Woolf shows a not very elegant person, a little too concerned with her appearance and, at the same time, unable to see her reflection in the mirror. As Grant writes (61), she is "playing a mad-writer turned captive in a housedress." Much like in the book, the film in the 'Mrs Woolf' strand concentrates only on a moment in Virginia Woolf's life and because of that it could

never be an accurate portrait of Woolf across her whole life-time and it was never intended to be. The adaptation in question is that from Cunningham's "Virginia Woolf" to Daldry and Hare's "Virginia Woolf"; any desire to equate these figures with the historical person, although understandable, must necessarily be naïve. The film stares directly at some of Woolf's darkest moments and shows her at her most vulnerable. Somewhat outraged by this representation was Woolf's grand-niece Angelica Nicholson, who writes in *The Independent*:

I thought it was a terrible bit of casting. What worries me is that a generation of cinemagoers will see Virginia Woolf as a neurotic, gloomy, suicide-obsessed femme fatale... To anyone who knew her, she was enormous fun, made everyone laugh and had a crazy sense of humour. Her nieces and nephews didn't sit around mooning over dead birds with her. They had a lot of fun and a lot of laughter. (Nicholson, cited in Grant 64)

For those who knew her and to those who admire her, the film and this strand in particular comes as a shock, as a one-sided and harrowing way of showing someone that might, for many, become known only as this suicide-driven, tortured and melancholic being, because of the film and to some extent the book as well. It is nevertheless the case that although some are inclined to establish a bond between the character in the novel/film *TH* and Woolf herself, one should resist this tendency. These are works of imaginative fiction and the idea is to reproduce or otherwise bring to life the characters Michael Cunningham wrote about.

The concerns that many critics, scholars and the author's fans share are related to the fact that there are so many filters through which one observes the depiction of Woolf in the film. Of the three men involved in the film, all have shown an interest in working with this aspect of the author:

Cunningham states the he “always wanted to do something with it [*Mrs. Dalloway*], about her [Virginia Woolf], the way you want to write about your first love,” David Hare, the screenwriter, explains: “all my own work has to do with exploring lives of modern women.” And director Steven Daldry, coming from an academic background, states that he has “always been a fan of Virginia Woolf.” (Grant 12)

In the film we get to see these men’s ideas about the author; we get their perspective and how they have filtered Woolf through the many stages of the adaptation: Cunningham’s story line, Hare’s adaptation of it to a screenplay and Daldry’s visual realisations, which culminate in Kidman’s performance. She gives the characters her own interpretation through her poses, gesturing, vocal tones and all that the role demands of her. As director Daldry states:

We never wanted to impersonate or imitate Virginia Woolf but find our own Virginia Woolf that was right for us and for Nicole. (Grant 12)

Cunningham handed his book over to be worked on by the film industry without any apparent anxiety and that is because: “I don’t have any notion about the ‘sacred text’ in terms of turning a book into a film, at least for any book of mine” (Cunningham, cited in Grant 58); and he was pleased with the result, as he states:

And so I find myself in an enviable if slightly embarrassing position as one of the only living American novelists happy about his experience with Hollywood. These actors are not who I imagined when I wrote the book, but I feel as if they are reincarnations of people I’ve known intimately. It’s as if people dear to me had died, and I find myself meeting them afterward, in other bodies, and simply knowing, from their gestures and their eyes, from some ineluctable familiarity, that these are they, returned. (Cunningham, cited in Daniele 206)

Regardless of some of the critics’ objections, the film was a success at the box office and with it came an increasing demand for Cunningham’s book and a renewed interest in Virginia Woolf and her writings.

(...) the fact remains that far from undermining the status of the novel or decreasing its readership, the movie actually propelled the novel to the top ten US fiction best-sellers chart, along with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* on which it is based. (AbdelRahman 151-152)

If one disregards popular misconceptions, it is noticeable that all the transformations made to the author's "Virginia Woolf" made the writer, the historical figure, more accessible to a non-academic public; by removing some of her depth and variety, more people came in contact with her and subsequently her work, when otherwise they might have known little about her. In fact, according to Steven Daldry, this was his intent all along:

What we wanted with Virginia is a contemporary, somebody that felt part of our generation, part of our world, not her literary figure lost in the mists of time, but somebody who was speaking directly to us now. (Daldry, cited in Grant 74)

The subsequent popularization of Woolf is unquestionable. Many people went to theatres out of curiosity to see how the author had come out in the film, then there were those who, with only a slight knowledge of the writer's work, came to further their understanding of her life and, finally there are the ones that, having never read anything of Woolf's, came to access what they imagined she was.

## Conclusion

As I was writing this dissertation I tried to understand how, using these texts and films as a basis for investigation, women were and are situated in society and how they have gradually acquired the power and autonomy to make their own decisions, to get, as it were, rooms of their own. Seeing how society has changed in the way it regards gender roles, it is no surprise to find it also changing in respect of sexual mores. In studying both films, I came to grips with something that I had seen for a long time as a failure in cinema, which is the fact that adaptations do not preserve, for the most part, the same characteristics as literary texts. This is because each medium must possess its own specificities. The lack of fidelity in a film to the original story is not, as I understand it now, something that subtracts credit from a film, since it may never have been the director's idea to remain faithful to the original and it is not at all clear with what authority one should expect him/herself to be thus faithful.

*MD* might not be Woolf's most interventive and expository feminist novel but it contains a number of radical critiques of British society, its fragility and misconceptions. Through certain characters, the author exteriorizes her perception of the social subordination of women. How in a society plagued by ignorance and with strict conventions, some pressures were very difficult to overcome – like those bearing on sexuality. Because of their sensitive nature, they have to be addressed carefully since they cannot be remedied rapidly. Instead these issues have had to go through long periods of adjustment and a process of acceptance and understanding. While in *MD* the problematics presented are circumscribed to the period in time in which the author was writing, Cunningham expands the action of his narrative over a longer period of time. By doing so, this allows for a more expansive view on the progressive state of themes

like sexual identity and gender. Having the opportunity to follow three characters throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century one can observe how certain constraints could be superseded, but also have an idea of how women lived on to deconstruct lingering Victorian ideals, suburban environments and contemporary times. Each decade had its obstacles and demands which nearly drove the main characters to breaking point. With these story-lines, Cunningham explores sexual identity and its polymorphousness. The exploration and introduction of unconventional subjects are what stretches and defies society's pressures. The themes and motifs are similar in both novels although from slightly different perspectives. The conversion of the novels into film constitutes yet another way of looking at the narratives and critically exploring those similarities from a new standpoint.

In respect of intertextuality, one can see the differences and similarities between the two mediums – books and films. Aspects challenging to the process of adaptation have been identified in this thesis, as have others features not at all rendered from the original because they were not considered pertinent for the new work. Indeed, all of Woolf's novels have been a challenge to translate to the cinema. As I have shown, the use of interior monologues and the constant recollection of past events are the main problems when adapting her works. Marleen Gorris, in order to translate stream of consciousness to film, uses voice-overs and shows extended scenes from the past that help audiences to follow the characters' recollections. Michael Cunningham having himself used the stream of consciousness technique in his novel, his director Daldry uses voice-overs in the film *TH* too, but in this narrative the transmission of interiority relies much more on the actor's ability to show the anguish each character feels. The films are to some extent an updating of the originals, although in the main the films are very similar to the books' narratives. Indeed very little updating was required in *TH*'s

case because the film was only produced a few short years after the novel had been published. However, by adapting these subjects to a medium very different from a book, they are more likely to win over other audiences. Thus their messages are more widely spread and are more likely to reach both younger and more socially divergent audiences.

Ultimately, both Cunningham's novel and the two films have as one of their purposes the desire to pay homage to the writer Virginia Woolf. They cannot help but celebrate both her work and her genius, to show a profound love and respect, from all the principals involved in these works, for an iconic figure of the British literature. This is how I finally see them because, even though they are all original works, each of them seems in one way or another to be content to be subordinate to Woolf's perceptions. In *TH* this fact is quite clear, for example, in the Laura Brown's strand. One observes that her world revolves around Woolf through the novel *MD* but also through reflection upon events in the writer's life, namely her suicide, which is referred to in *TH*. Although in principle they are original stories in *TH*, Woolf over-shadows all three works.

Many other angles of research could have been explored with these materials, however due to the time constraint it was not possible for me to address them all. It would have been interesting when looking at both novels to understand better each fiction in respect of the tenets of the modernist and postmodernist movements, to research themes that the authors dwell on separately. For example, Woolf felt a powerful hostility towards the medical profession, believing passionately that her condition was never understood by doctors and so was treated with crushing insensitivity. Cunningham has not had the same personal experience and so in *TH* doctors are only briefly referenced. He however is much more aware of sexual orientation as a political and public issue than Woolf (who is striving to take it from the

private to the public domains). These are only some possible topics; there are many more like: the nature of marriage, social privilege and the claims of artistic creativity, just to name a few. It would also have been appealing to incorporate *Mr Dalloway* by Robin Lippincott (1999) and *Mr Philips* by John Lancaster (2000), together with *The Hours*, in this analysis. Regarding the films it would also have been valid to study them separately from the novels, perhaps as part of the movement of self-conscious “heritage cinema.”

Personally, I would have liked to have had the time to go into more detail as to the extent to which most of the characters from both authors are a more or less direct representation of a part of their own lives and how this might be a significant factor in the way the narratives develop. But these biographical aspects are a long way from my main theme of looking at the processes of adaptation over the century and across media.

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## **Filmography:**

### *Mrs Dalloway* (1997).

- Production Co: First Look International, Bayly/Paré Productions, Bergen Film, Newmarket Capital Group, BBC Films, The European Co-production Fund U.K., Dutch Co-production Fund, The Dutch Film Fund.
- Director: Marleen Gorris.
- Screenplay: Eileen Atkins.
- Lead Actors: Vanessa Redgrave, Natascha McElhone, Michael Kitchen, Alan Cox, John Standing, Robert Portal, Sarah Badel, Lena Headey.

### *The Hours* (2002).

- Production Co: Paramount Pictures, Miramax Films, Scott Rudin Productions.
- Director: Stephen Daldry.
- Screenplay: David Hare.
- Lead Actors: Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, Ed Harris, John C. Reilly, Stephen Dillane, Jeff Daniels, Toni Collette, Claire Danes, Allison Janney, Miranda Richardson. Eileen Atkins.