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Michael Cunningham's Reading of *Mrs Dalloway*

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THESIS DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis independently and I have acknowledged all sources used.

Prague, 7th April 2008

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* in the context of postmodernism. As *The Hours* is a postmodernist interpretation of *Mrs Dalloway*, the thesis also discusses Virginia Woolf's modernist approach in order to compare it with Cunningham's postmodernist position.

I have adopted the methods of close reading and analysis in both *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Hours*. To substantiate my assertions I have consulted a number of secondary sources that form the basis of the theoretical part. The aim of the thesis is to provide a sufficient theoretical background to a detailed analysis of the two novels in question and support it by a number of adequate examples contained in the novels.

The thesis consists of four chapters, each divided into several sections that focus on specific aspects of modernism and postmodernism.

The first chapter "Major principles of modernism" deals with the basic features and principles of modernism, with a special focus on the genre of the novel.

The second chapter "Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*" focuses on *Mrs Dalloway* in the light of modernism and draws an outline of the techniques used and themes contained in the novel.

The third chapter "Major strategies of postmodernism" tries to demonstrate the links between modernism and postmodernism to further explore major features and strategies of postmodernism in literature.

The last chapter "Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*" focuses in detail on Cunningham's novel, discussing the three stories individually. I have tried to show the links between the individual stories as well as their reference to *Mrs Dalloway*. This last chapter concentrates predominantly on the analysis of specific extracts from *The Hours*, comparing them with extracts from *Mrs Dalloway*.

1. MAJOR PRINCIPLES OF MODERNISM

1.1. MODERNITY AND MODERNISM

Before opening the actual discussion on modernism, it seems appropriate to comment briefly on the related notion of “modernity”, so as to demonstrate the link between modernity and modernism on the one hand, and their mutual non-interchangeability on the other. As Jürgen Habermas points out, the term “modern” has a long history: in its Latin form “modernus” the word was first used in the 5th century in order to distinguish the present, which had become officially Christian, from the Roman and the pagan past. With varying content, the term “modern” tended to reappear during those periods in Europe when the consciousness of a new epoch formed itself and was thus connected with a transition from the old to the new.¹

In a narrower sense, the “modern” era and the notion of modernity are tied to the philosophy of Enlightenment and its belief in the progress of knowledge, moral growth and social betterment. As Jonathan Israel maintains, Enlightenment is connected with scorning the existing categories and premises, with sweeping away of previous scientific and philosophical authority together with all criteria of legitimacy based on past authority, knowledge, and practice.² Enlightenment opposes tyranny, intolerance and superstition, and introduces new concepts and values, such as adoption of reason as the exclusive criterion of what is true; freedom of thought based on independent critical thinking; equality and justice; personal liberty.³ Together, these form the essence of modernity. In general, Enlightenment is characterized by the belief in progress for the sake of the general good. In this sense, Habermas talks about the expectations of Enlightenment thinkers that the arts and sciences would promote the control of understanding of the world and the self, moral progress, and even the happiness of human beings.⁴

This optimism, however, underwent a radical change in the early 20th century and was shattered especially with the reaction to World War I. And it was then that the more radicalized consciousness of modernity emerged. And it is in this context that the term “modernism” needs to be mentioned. Modernism is generally associated with the era between 1900 and 1930. This periodizing is, of course, not to be taken too strictly. As any cultural

movement, modernism cannot be assigned any exact date of beginning and terminating. In general, modernism can be regarded as a project of rejecting the traditional, as a search for originality. Habermas understands modernism in terms of the principle of unlimited self-realization and the demand for authentic self-experience.⁵ Originality, novelty and authenticity are the basic principles of modernism. In this sense, the idea of an autonomous individual as the source of meaning and truth, as formulated in the Enlightenment, is still present here. Modernism must be understood as a project within the historically longer era of modernity. Nevertheless, new tendencies arise within modernism. Habermas explains this in terms of a new relation of opposites. In his view, art started to show the irreconcilable nature of the aesthetic and the social worlds, as a result of which art withdrew into complete autonomy.⁶ Artists could not find order in the real world anymore, and it was by means of art that they endeavoured to re-establish the “lost” order, or, in other words, to find unity. The next section shows how this was achieved in the field of literature, specifically in the modernist British novel.

1.2. THE MODERNIST NOVEL

The British novel experienced revolutionary developments in connection with modernism. This era in the history of literature is characterized by a desire to communicate something for which no accepted convention of literary communication existed. Works of modernism, growing out of this desire, can be understood as new approaches to the relationship between fiction and reality, the central recognition of modernism being the endeavour to redefine reality.

According to Andrew Roberts, one such redefinition concerns the view that, since individuals perceive reality through their own consciousness, the contents of consciousness represent the only accessible reality.⁷ What modernists sought was the recreation of the character’s inner, mental life. As Andrew Roberts further points out, the novel was a particularly suitable form to serve these purposes, as it offers the space for representing the nature of consciousness by describing events through the awareness of one or more characters.⁸ This shift from representation of the external world to a reflection of consciousness is a main principle of modernist literature. The awareness of the self as the source of meaning and of the significance of experience is a means of achieving what

modernists aimed at: the sense of complexity, a wide-ranging understanding of life, as opposed to the orderly world that had been presented to the reader in Victorian literature. In modernist works we have no more to do with a narrator who is omniscient but rather with one searching for understanding. It is no more the intention of the writer to make readers recognize the moral truth in an exaggerated or selective representation of life as was the case of the 19th century novel. As Peter Faulkner argues, according to the modernist view, the world is different for different observers.⁹ Thus, reality is not fixed, it is not the same to each person. Relativism and subjectivity are therefore among the key concepts of modernism.

The already mentioned shift of perspective from an interest in the world of objects to an examination primarily of the mind perceiving them to reveal the complexity of human sensibility logically leads to searching for alternative forms and adequate approaches to express the writer's relation to the world. Modernist techniques of presentation, such as stream of consciousness or interior monologue, stand in opposition to the conventional narrative method. This, however, does not mean that works of modernism are devoid of ~~arrangement~~ ^{structure}. The artist is always preoccupied with aesthetic unity, and, to paraphrase¹ Joan Bennett, all art implies selection and arrangement.¹⁰ Modernist writers found diverse ways to achieve this. In this sense, we can even speak about "modernisms", in the plural. The approach of Virginia Woolf, one of the representatives of modernism, will be discussed more fully in the next section by focusing on her novel *Mrs Dalloway*, of 1925.

2. VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS DALLOWAY*

2.1. RENDERING EXPERIENCE

The form of *Mrs Dalloway* is a concrete example of how the author strives to capture some part of the consciousness of being alive. Woolf refuses to describe environment, to record events or define characters. She ceases to draw characters in outline or to give her readers the illusion that the character's identity is constant and definable. Instead, as Joan Bennett argues, she emphasizes the fluidity of human personality as opposed to its fixity; identity is not to be defined, it is to be discovered by living in the minds of the characters.¹ It is the characters' moments, the instances of perception and recognition, that become particularly significant. Encounter of association and memory with the facts of external world is the underlying principle of the novel. *Mrs Dalloway* deals with the matter of experience – experience which any moment of life has the power to offer. What matters, is a continuous flow of impressions experienced during an ordinary day, some of which may seem trivial. Virginia Woolf expresses this in her essay "Modern Fiction":

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves to the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there... (*The Common Reader: First Series*, 106)

Consequently, the seemingly trivial will become potent and expressive, while the apparently important can be presented as frivolous or grotesque.

To render the person's ever-changing consciousness of the surrounding world, to express her fascination with the undefined, Woolf had to find adequate techniques: she uses the interior monologue combined with poetic symbolism. As N. C. Thakur maintains, since thoughts, ideas and emotions are intangible, shapeless, it is through carefully selected images that Woolf makes them comprehensible.² The repeated images become symbolic. Symbols should not inform, but suggest and evoke. According to Thakur, even characters have symbolic value, as they are presented by means of images.³

Woolf tries to record the process of immediate and random experience, while so selecting the experience that it will form an ordered whole. Moreover, Joan Bennett says, Woolf is not content with the record of a single mind; she also wants to communicate the variety of impressions made by one individual upon others.⁴ Woolf attempts to express that the transitions from one mind to another enhance the feeling of human consciousness transcending the limitations of individual minds. Therefore, the significance of an individual life is completed by other people. The following passage expresses this idea:

Clarissa had a theory in those days – they had heaps of theories, always theories, as young people have. It was to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known. For how could they know each other? You met every day; then not for six months, or years. It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people. But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not “here, here, here”; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter – even trees, or barns. (MD, 168)

Presenting diversity of experience, however, requires a certain arrangement. Moving from mind to mind must respect the intended sense of unity. Any possible confusion needs to be excluded. To achieve this, Woolf uses a number of techniques.

2.2. WAYS OF ACHIEVING UNITY IN THE NOVEL

All activity in the novel is held together by a specific use of time and place. Whenever the consciousness of a single mind is rendered, shifts to different points in time as well as to different places are introduced. However, whenever we move from one mind to another, it is either the shared place or time or both that enable the moves. In other words, the transitions from one consciousness to another are held together by the real time and place.

The novel is so structured that a small group of characters is assembled in the foreground, within a narrow framework of time and place. The whole of the action takes place in London within one day. It moves between Mrs Dalloway’s preparation for her party and the actual party in the evening of the same day. As Joan Bennett points out, despite the narrow area of time within which the story moves, the reader is given an intimate knowledge of much that has preceded the action and is continually conscious of wider horizons in the background.⁵

Gradually, by means of memories, the past is reconstructed for the reader. The past has a specific function in the novel in that it is involved with the present, there are simultaneous associations between the present and the past. Woolf expressed this idea in her essay “The Moment: Summer’s Night” as follows:

Yet what composed the present moment? If you are young, the future lies upon the present like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver. If you are old, the past lies upon the present, like a thick glass, making it waver, distorting it... (*The Moment and other essays*, 9)

Clarissa Dalloway looks for the meaning of her life primarily in the past. Already the opening section of the novel suggests this:

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken of their hinges; Rumpelmayer’s men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach. What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air... (MD, 5)

She hears now, more than thirty years later, the squeak of the hinges of the French doors at Bourton. In contrast, the doors of her home in Westminster are to be removed today – presumably to open up the interior spaces for the party. It is still Peter who dominates her imagination – which lives not in the London of her present, but at the Bourton of her late adolescence. It was there that she had refused Peter and accepted Richard. And it was there that she experienced “the most exquisite moment of her whole life” (MD, 40), a kiss by Sally Seton. Clarissa’s love story is already completed. But her experience of love is omnipresent below the surface of the story.

Time is an important theme of *Mrs Dalloway*. The motif of time serves to define both individual characters and the larger reality in which they interact. According to Joan Bennett, the totality aimed at includes also the effect of time: the passing moments of hours; the voyage from youth to age; the historic time, or time in relation to world-wide event.⁶ Moreover, as Jeremy Hawthorn points out, *Mrs Dalloway* is saturated with references to the war, which remains a lingering symbolic presence throughout the novel.⁷ The story of Septimus Warren Smith is the means of introducing a more profound sense of the historic background against which the whole is set. The novel works both with anticipating the hours as a promise of meaning and dreading them as an announcement of mortality. The related notions of eternity, mutability and death also serve the purpose of unity in the novel.

As Joan Bennett says, the events in the novel are not always the immediate causes or consequences of other events in the book, rather their importance depends upon their effect in the consciousness of the characters and not upon their function in the plot.⁸ This is connected with Bergson's idea of psychological time as opposed to historical time. The sequence of scenes is ordered by their emotional relevance to one another rather than by their logical interrelation. Continuity and fluidity is emphasized rather than boundary and definition. The pattern is composed of sequences rather than consequences. The result is a subtly organized patterning of experience, with each part having some reference to the other. Through the closely interrelated experience of the characters the reader receives a total impression.

The organizing principle of that patterning of experience is not only the use of time and place. An important role is assigned to images and symbols as poetic techniques that unify the novel. The focus on the aesthetic, achieved through poetic symbolism, derives from G. E. Moore's influence on Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury group. Moore writes:

By far the most valuable things, which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects. (*Principia Ethica*, 188)

These thoughts are obviously reflected in *Mrs Dalloway*. The poetic techniques function in the novel on two levels:

Firstly, they serve as a means of characterizing individuals as well as relating the characters with each other. Clarissa's inner life tends toward expression in the imagery of sea, waves, wind, sky, trees. The same goes for Septimus Warren Smith. These two are associated with similar patterns of imagery and literary echoes, such as the refrain from the *Cymbeline*. Also, both are referred to as beak-nosed, bird-like. All this helps to evoke close affinities and relations between Septimus and Clarissa, even though they never meet. These affinities can furthermore be understood in terms of Clarissa's theory of being completed by other people, as mentioned above.

Secondly, the supreme moments of communication and contact in the novel are not verbal, but presented through images. Typically, it is flowers that appear in the novel whenever the characters realize some intense moments of their lives. As such, they stand for an unspoken spiritual bond. They are present at moments of deepest communion in the book, such as when Clarissa is kissed on the lips by Sally or when Richard brings roses to Clarissa,

intending to tell her that he loves her, which he eventually does not do verbally but by means of the bunch of flowers alone.

Binaries BINARY

A further pattern of regularity is achieved through repeating dualities in the novel, such as fact versus vision; intellect vs intuition; words vs silence; society vs solitude; reality vs appearance; body vs soul.⁹ One of Woolf's central concerns is searching for a dialectic between public and private affairs, each based on different value systems. The form of the novel can also be understood as a journey from public self to private consciousness or, to use the terms of Alice van Buren Kelley, from the world of fact to the world of vision.¹⁰ In this sense, individual characters represent various adaptations to life in society. According to Kelley, the factual world includes the world of social actions, of events that make one a social being. In her view, what distinguishes one from others within the world of fact is identity. In extreme cases, identity can be limited to this social self, as is shown on Sir William and his "sense of proportion". The factual world is also the world of the intellect that attempts to find order, using tools of objective reason. In opposition to this stands the world of vision. As Kelley further points out, the world of vision is most often discovered in moments of mystical understanding in which a person or object suddenly discloses the existence of a unity that transcends the bounded life of an individual.¹¹ For Woolf the world of fact is the world of physical isolation and limitation, the world of vision is the spiritual world of unity and pattern. But neither world can exist without the other if any order or meaning is to be discovered in life.

In the novel this concept is also expressed as an alternation between observing from outside and seeing into life of things, "slicing through everything", as Charles Schug points out.¹² The following passage, concerning the consciousness of Clarissa, shows this quite clearly:

Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (MD, 11 – 12)

Later on it is again Septimus who experiences a similar moment:

But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. (MD, 26)

On another level the principle of unity and dispersal can be explored in the way the characters interact. As Daniel Albright says, the characters are “separating and coming together, running off into random privacy, clustering for a moment into satellite groups”.¹³ There are moments when the group becomes like a single person, as the crowd watching the sky-writing aeroplane. But surely at this point we are reminded more of the atomism of the crowd – each member of it interpreting the message in different ways.

Also the war is specifically associated with the habit of separating public and private experience, as the next example makes obvious:

The War was over, except for some one like Mrs Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed... (MD, 6 – 7)

As has been suggested above, the merging of the outer and the inner world, of the world of fact and the world of vision, is used to render individual characters. The following section deals with the central character of the novel: Clarissa Dalloway.

2.3. CLARISSA DALLOWAY

“Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (MD, 5). This is how the novel is introduced. And it is at the very end that Peter Walsh thinks: “It is Clarissa” (MD, 213). Little as we get from these two sentences, they still convey much of what the novel is about, namely the move from a view of “Mrs Dalloway” to that of “Clarissa”.

Clarissa’s existence takes place on several levels. According to Hermione Lee, the external level presents Clarissa in her social roles, as the wife of Richard Dalloway, as “the hostess”.¹⁴ Throughout the novel there are numerous external views of Clarissa. There are moments when Clarissa, too, thinks of herself in the way in which other people tend to sum her up. Walking up Bond Street, she has the feeling of “this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway” (MD, 13). Or later on, when looking into the glass, she can see “the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give

a party; of Clarissa Dalloway, of herself” (MD, 42). At the same time, however, she is aware that below this lies her deeper self, made up of her feelings about experience. Then, again, Clarissa refuses to define her own personality in terms of any fixed categories and concludes that “she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (MD, 11). Thus, the fluidity of her personality is emphasized.

Mrs Dalloway emerges as a complex character. The picture of Clarissa presented by her own consciousness is further developed by others in whose minds we see Clarissa reflected. And we perceive, either directly or by sharing the memories of diverse people, a number of crucial moments in her life, in which her personality expresses itself.

According to Lee, there is “a continual interplay between Clarissa’s sense of reaching out to others and withdrawing from them”; between her sense of failure, loss and coldness, and her involvement with the pulse of life.¹⁵ Clarissa feels both sheltered and anonymous, useful and trivial. As Hawthorn suggests, the whole novel seems to be trying to connect and combine (but not necessarily to reconcile) different and contradictory views of Clarissa.¹⁶ The central image toward which everything is directed to is the party, which can also be understood as a symbol of Mrs Dalloway herself.

2.4. THE PARTY AND ITS SYMBOLISM

Clarissa’s strength can be seen in her attempt to draw people out of their isolation, the result of which is the party itself. Her attitude is reflected in the following idea:

Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? (MD, 134 – 135)

The party represents a moment of communion, bringing the separate selves of the people together by the action of Clarissa, although temporarily. The party is the climax to the various tensions appearing in the novel. It includes and combines all main themes and ideas, without letting any of them dominate over the others. The parts of the novel are drawn together at the party, where Clarissa becomes the centre. The reader is aware that everything is somehow present here, even though not necessarily mentioned. There are the flowers, for example, that Clarissa bought at the florist’s at the beginning. They are here, although no

more reference is made to them and the only flowers Clarissa notices during the party are “the roses which Richard had given her” (MD, 188).

The notion of time is developed at the party on several levels. The strictly limited clock time is combined with a flowing of various consciousnesses in which past, present and future are merged. The past and the present are brought together, especially by the presence of Peter Walsh and the sudden emergence of Sally Seton. In this respect, Lee talks about the ironic dichotomy between youthful aspirations and middle-aged resignation.¹⁷ Lady Rosetter, “who had been Sally Seton” (MD, 198), is now a mother of five sons, “older, happier, less lovely” (MD, 188). Peter Walsh, being asked whether he has written anything as he had planned, replies briefly: “Not a word!” (MD, 206).

The mutability and inexorability of the past is furthermore highlighted by the announcement of Septimus’s suicide. Thus, even death is present at the party. And it is through this interruption that Clarissa is able to leave her past and embrace the present. In the middle of the party she suddenly feels the need to withdraw alone to the privacy of the small room. As Lee argues, at that point Clarissa and Septimus are connected at an intense moment of consciousness; their communication defies “real” time, since it is made after the hour of Septimus’s death.¹⁸

The ending can be understood as re-opening, in the sense that it shifts what has gone before into a new perspective. As Charles Schug maintains, even the story of Septimus Warren Smith that seems at first a parallel subplot, becomes at the end part of a larger pattern of events structured around Clarissa.¹⁹ Also, the novel includes a series of images and foreshadowings that seem to point to Clarissa’s dying. Until the very end a fate like that of Septimus seems possible for Clarissa. But it is only Septimus who dies. Clarissa remains and goes on, as the following lines show:

She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. (MD, 204 – 205)

That can be interpreted as going on either with the routine or with her vision or – and this seems to be the most accurate way of viewing it with respect to the very essence of the novel – with both.

The ending of *Mrs Dalloway* is intertwined with the beginning by the above mentioned patterns of regularity. The opening section of the novel renders the consciousness of Clarissa. Via her consciousness we “plunge” into the story and are introduced to Peter Walsh. The closing section renders the consciousness of Peter Walsh and his thoughts about Clarissa. Thus, we get a similar pattern, but a different perspective. A special effect is achieved even by choosing similar language devices. In this way the first sentences of the novel: “Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her...” (MD, 5) are linked to the last sentences: “It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was.” (MD, 213) This patterning does not have the character of a mere repetition, but rather of certain reconsideration. “Mrs Dalloway” and “Clarissa” point to the same referent, yet each suggests different features, a different point of view. An analogy is drawn also by the word “said”, which appears in both parts. However, the “said” at the very end has little to do with actual words. In fact, it is related to the notion of silence, one of the underlying principles of the novel. Moreover, both the second and the last sentence are introduced by the conjunction “for”, yet the final “for” does not explain much or give reasons. Again, this is what the whole novel aims at: *Mrs Dalloway* is concerned with suggesting and invoking rather than giving answers.

3. MAJOR STRATEGIES OF POSTMODERNISM

3.1. POSTMODERNISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MODERNISM

The first chapter having started with the attempt to define “modernism”, it seems appropriate to go the same way with “postmodernism”. And, paradoxically enough, it is this very first step that introduces immediate questioning, so much connected with the postmodernist position. Merely the idea of defining seems to contradict the nature of postmodernism. To “view” postmodernism in certain terms may therefore be a more suitable expression than to “define”.

To start with, there is a range of different positions and views on postmodernism. It can be regarded as a cultural movement, a periodizing concept, an aesthetic concept, or simply as a term referring to a number of tendencies and approaches in the field of different disciplines. Linda Hutcheon, for example, accounts for postmodernism as a cultural enterprise; primarily a European and American (North and South) cultural phenomenon¹, while Patricia Waugh regards postmodernism as a theoretical and representational “mood”.² Moreover, Waugh views this “mood” as complex and variously focussed, and concludes that there is not one “postmodernism”, but many forms of it.³

As the term itself suggests, postmodernism cannot be thought about without its relationship to modernism. This relation is, however, not clear-cut, as might be assumed. As there are diverse views on postmodernism as such, there are also different approaches to the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Postmodernism emerges from modernism, while at the same time opposing it. But it would be misleading to label postmodernism as “a reaction against modernism”. It seems more suitable to use a less evaluative, more neutral description of postmodernism as “a reaction to modernism”. Hutcheon speaks about an extension, intensification, subversion, or repudiation of modernism, making thus postmodernism a contradictory phenomenon, one “that is implicated by that which it seeks to contest”.⁴ As she says, modern is embedded in the postmodern, but the relationship is a complex one of consequence, difference and dependence.⁵ It would be an unsubstantiated reduction to view postmodernism strictly as the opposite of modernism. In fact, such binary thinking denies the very nature

of postmodernism, i. e. the emphasis on plurality. According to Hutcheon, instead of understanding postmodernism in terms of listed oppositions between postmodernism and modernism, it is more adequate to view the former as using and abusing characteristics of modernism in order to install a questioning of both the listed extremes.⁶

The postmodern shift in thought cannot be discussed without taking into account the social-historical context. The devastating experience of World War II was crucial in re-evaluating the value system of Western civilization. Hutcheon uses the term “crisis in legitimation” to refer to rethinking and putting into question the bases of western modes of thinking.⁷ According to Roberts, as a result of the war, the very idea of cultural centrality became a doubtful one.⁸ The post-war developments can be summarized in terms of a growing critique of modernity together with its belief in universal morality and its pursuit of order. The 1960s brought important impulses and, as Hutcheon explains, provided the background of the postmodern.⁹ Postmodernist thinking was further brought about by the explosion of mass media, the growth of mass society, technological and economic changes as well as freer intercultural movement. Linda R. Williams talks about “the resultant sense of cultural collage” which characterizes postmodernism.¹⁰

Although there are many positions on postmodernism, they all share a suspicion of the notions of universality, stability and totality. The concept of norm is over. According to Waugh, the different forms of postmodernism all express the sense that our inherited forms of knowledge and representation are undergoing some fundamental shift; “modernity may be coming to an end, strangled by its own logic, or exhausted by economic changes which have driven us into a new age of information technology, consumerism and global economics which erode the stability of concepts such as nation, state or essential human nature.”¹¹

With postmodernism the idea of centralizing and the notion of authority are challenged. Also the belief in absolute truth is undermined and the idea of truth as socially constructed is emphasized. As Waugh argues, postmodernism tends to claim an abandonment of all metanarratives or grand narratives (first identified by Lyotard) which could legitimate foundations for truths, and, therefore, central to the postmodern condition is a recognition and account of the way in which the metanarratives (associated in particular with enlightened modernity) have broken down.¹² Such grand narratives were seen as no longer capable of corresponding to the sheer complexity of the world they had once tried to explain. Hutcheon characterizes the metanarratives as systems that once allowed people to think they could

unproblematically and universally define public agreement.¹³ In other words, metanarratives explain that “disorder” really is chaotic and bad, and that “order” really is good.¹⁴ Postmodernists regard such metanarratives as illusory and speculative and are incredulous toward them. The point is that such narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization.¹⁵ Totalizing theories are considered misleading, because they try to explain the heterogeneous world by reducing it to dominating centres and disdained margins.

Very close to this approach lies another postmodernist feature: questioning of hierarchies. As Hutcheon maintains, there are no natural hierarchies, only those we construct.¹⁶ In other words, the idea of centres dissolves and the loss of centralized control gives way to pluralism. But as Hutcheon says, to collapse hierarchies is not to collapse distinctions; postmodernism retains, and indeed celebrates, differences.¹⁷ What is important in this respect is the postmodernist understanding of difference in terms of multiplicity, rather than duality, so as to distinguish “difference” from “otherness”. As Hutcheon points out, postmodernism rejects the concept of “otherness”, associated with binarity and hierarchy, in favour of a more pluralistic concept of difference, or even differences, in the plural.¹⁸ The concept of otherness gives way. The opposition between centre and periphery dissolves; the centre is no longer viewed as superior. Thus, what happens is that the previously marginalized, that which was omitted or withheld, becomes a legitimate part of discourse. No taboos should be set. Hutcheon assigns the roots of this change to the 1960s, when issues such as race, gender, sexual preferences, ethnicity, or class started to be discussed.¹⁹ However, bringing out these concepts should not be equated with making them into a new centre. As Hutcheon maintains, postmodernism is characteristic of a “decentred perspective”.²⁰ As has been suggested, postmodernism questions such concepts as unity, hierarchy, or centre. Yet, this does not mean that postmodernism at the same time denies them. As Hutcheon explains, this questioning is not really a rejection of homogeneity and unity; it is a rethinking of these in the light of the heterogeneous, the hybrid, the provisional.²¹

Postmodernism is very often referred to in terms of the sense of fragmentation and its relation to supposedly exhausted unities. In fact, fragmentation and the idea of a fragmentary self are not to be mentioned exclusively in connection with postmodernism. Modernists also worked with a fragmented view of subjectivity, with the fluidity of personality. However, the modernist approach to this phenomenon differs significantly from the postmodernist one. Alan Wilde views this difference in terms of two varieties of irony: the “disjunctive” irony

out as redemptive
Hegel

associated with modernism portrays the world as fragmented but is propelled by an impulse towards resolution, transcendence and coherence which can exist simultaneously with the acknowledgement of fragmentation, while the "suspensive" irony associated with postmodernism intensifies fragmentation and suspends the impulse towards coherence. Wilde connects postmodernism with an acceptance of the impossibility of making any sense of the world as a whole, even with the willingness to tolerate and welcome a world seen as random and multiple.²² Being aware of and accepting chaos is an important part of postmodern sensibility. As already mentioned in the second chapter, modernists, realizing the fragmentation and lack of meaning in everyday life, endeavoured to provide the unity by means of art. Postmodernists, by contrast, have no aspirations whatever of this kind. Instead of being anxious about the idea of plurality, instability and fragmentation, they tend to celebrate these.

This then opens the debate on the possible function and role of art and culture. As Leslie Fiedler argues, while modernism attempted to protect the aesthetic by withdrawing from what was regarded as a debased mass culture, postmodernism attempts to extend art out of the confines of an elite modernist autonomy, thus separating art from distinctions between "high" and "low" with their concealed class bias.²³ Distinction between "high" and "low" culture becomes meaningless, as does any attempt to explain things by means of dualities. As hierarchized systems have no place in postmodernism, there is logically no point in viewing culture as hierarchized. But again, it would be wrong to associate postmodernist culture merely with mass culture. As Hutcheon explains, while postmodernism incorporates elements of mass culture, it at the same time challenges the increasing uniformization of mass culture as one of the totalizing forces.²⁴ Herein lies again the contradictory nature of postmodernism.

In this section I have tried to outline several postmodernist strategies. The overview is obviously not exhaustive. It was not my intention to go into much detail, but rather to present a collage of different strategies. In fact, exhaustiveness goes against the very nature of postmodernism.

3.2. THE POSTMODERNIST NOVEL

All the features and tendencies mentioned above are in various ways reflected in postmodernist literature. With respect to the scope of this thesis, I would like to focus my attention on the genre of the novel.

The postmodern period being in many aspects different from the modern period, it requires a new literary sensibility. However, this “new” should not imply rejecting all the previous. As Wilde says, modernism appears to have been sliding toward a state of exhaustion and impasse, however, no movement terminates abruptly, and crisis is not termination.²⁵ The aesthetic of postmodernism is clearly anchored in the aesthetic of modernism; some of the postmodernist strategies draw on the modernist ones such as discarding the representation of an outer reality in favour of subjective expression, narrative experimentation, or exploring fragmentation.

To introduce the new impulses brought about by postmodernists, I find it useful to mention an important postmodern concept, which Linda Hutcheon calls “the present of the past”. This refers to rethinking modernism’s purist break with history, in order to revisit the past and to open an ironic dialogue with the past.²⁶ As Hutcheon explains, postmodernism confronts and contrasts any modernist discarding and recuperating of the past in the name of the future; postmodernists suggest no search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of the past in the light of present.²⁷

This idea of confronting the past with the present is crucial for understanding postmodernist novels. Concerning the relationship between writers and their materials, postmodernists certainly have to find a way to give shape to a world that has become little comprehensible or transparent and extremely versatile and fluid. One possible way is entering into a dialogue with the past. As Ihab Hassan argues, the way from modernism to postmodernism is characterized by the tendency of literature to subvert or transcend its forms, to re-imagine imagination, to create a state of unmediated literary awareness.²⁸ What postmodernists do, is reformulate available materials. They often point to early works as inspiration for their experimentation with narrative. Also, they re-contextualize earlier genres and styles. As Fredric Jameson points out, stylistic innovation is no longer possible; all that is left is to imitate.²⁹

Mixing of genres and styles, as well as quoting from and making references to other works are typical approaches of postmodernist writers. Pastiche, as the idea of combining, can be seen as a representation of the chaotic, pluralistic aspects of postmodern society.³⁰ Intertextuality is another key word of postmodernism. Postmodernist novelists retrieve, reproduce, recombine, rework. As Hutcheon maintains, it is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance.³¹

Among the most recognizable postmodernist features are also playfulness, irony and parody in literature. According to Hutcheon, the “already-said” must be reconsidered and can be reconsidered only in an ironic way.³² She furthermore maintains that postmodernist texts are specifically parodic in their intertextual relations and that parody is a perfect postmodern form, for it both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies.³³

As a result of these approaches, the very idea of originality is challenged. Notions of autonomy, authenticity and uniqueness are undermined. As Linda R. Williams says, postmodernism develops “an aesthetic of the unoriginal, of the plagiarized”.³⁴ This can be practised to the extent of copying out whole passages from earlier works. This contrasts postmodernism markedly with modernism, for which novelty and uniqueness were the very purpose of art. Jameson talks in this context about the “death” of the subject, including the creative subject.³⁵ Hutcheon points out that the author – text relationship is challenged with the relationship between reader and text.³⁶ The reader is appealed to reflect upon the meaning of already existing patterns being shaped into new wholes.

As Hutcheon argues, postmodernism is characterized by transgressing previously accepted limits, the most radical boundaries crossed having been those between fiction and non-fiction, between art and life; in other words, postmodernism challenges the life/ art border.³⁷ This is achieved by means of metafiction. Metafiction – writing about writing – makes the artificiality of art or the fictionality of fiction apparent to the reader.³⁸ This has to do with undermining the author’s control of the narration (an extreme distortion of the 19th century omniscient point of view). According to Frank Kermode, authors should become as self-conscious as possible about the fiction-making process; “fiction must be metafiction or it may collapse into a dangerous mythology where subjective and provisional fictions are taken to be absolute realities”.³⁹

Talking about metafiction, it seems adequate to mention the term “historiographic metafiction” that was coined by Linda Hutcheon to refer to specific novels that are both

self-reflexive and lay claim to historical events and personages.⁴⁰ Such novels both install and then blur the line between fiction and history.⁴¹ Hutcheon asserts that history, as well as fiction, is a discourse, a human construct, and refuses the methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. She focuses on what history and fiction share, and concludes that both genres derive their force from verisimilitude rather than from any objective truth.⁴² Moreover, both are connected with textualizing, any historical references being only accessible to us in textualized forms.⁴³ Hutcheon brings to attention that language has the power to constitute (and not only describe) that which it represents; according to this perspective, there can be no value-neutral discourses – not even science or history.⁴⁴ Historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction. As Hutcheon explains, the interaction of the historiographic and the metafictional foregrounds the rejection of the claims of both “authentic” representation and “inauthentic” copy alike; what is challenged, is not only artistic originality, but also the transparency of historical referentiality.⁴⁵ Herein lies the postmodern tendency to rethink and rework the forms and contents of the past.

Such reconsidering and questioning is one of the ways to overthrow categories which are associated with the artificially imposed order. On another level, the rejection of order and unity is reflected in the postmodernist narrative structures. The postmodernist novel favours non-linear narratives, discontinuity and fragmentation. The disintegration is achieved, for example, by breaking the traditional beginning – middle – ending structure, or through deliberately misleading the reader into regarding something differently. Brian McHale talks in this context about a deliberate “mystification”, followed by “demystification” in which the true state of things is revealed.⁴⁶

To sum up, postmodernist literature can be characterized as a reflection of the postmodern state of lacking hierarchies or organizing principles. It embodies fragmentariness, contradiction, ambiguity, diversity, parody, intertextuality and interreferentiality.

3.3. POSTMODERNIST FEATURES IN A MODERNIST NOVEL

The link between modernism and postmodernism can be traced even when searching for features of postmodernism in modernist works. With respect to the scope of this thesis, I will

restrict myself to trying to support this assertion while remaining within the context of *Mrs Dalloway*.

Firstly, I would like to refer to the postmodernist rejection of a rigid genre distinction. *Mrs Dalloway* is, clearly, a novel. Nevertheless, the extensive use of images and symbols makes it a highly poetic piece of prose. The poetic quality of the following extract is self-evident:

Through all ages – when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise – the battered woman – for she wore a skirt – with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love – love which has lasted a million years, she sang, love which prevails, and millions of years ago her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages, long as summer days, and flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters, he had gone; death's enormous sickle had swept these tremendous hills, and when at last she laid her hoary and immensely aged head on the earth, now become a mere cinder of ice, she implored the Gods to lay by her side a bunch of purple heather, there on the big burial place which the last rays of the last sun caressed; for then the pageant of the universe would be over. (MD, 90)

Secondly, irony and ambiguity can also be discovered in *Mrs Dalloway*. To give a concrete example, there is the situation right after the suicide of Septimus, when Peter Walsh notices the passing ambulance that transports the dead Septimus:

One of the triumphs of civilisation, Peter Walsh thought. It is one of the triumphs of civilisation, as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded. Swiftly, cleanly, the ambulance sped to the hospital, having picked up instantly, humanely, some poor devil; some one hit on the head; struck down by disease, knocked over perhaps a minute or so ago at one of these crossings, as might happen to oneself. That was civilisation. (MD, 166)

Of course, this “triumph of civilisation” is of a highly ironic nature, because civilisation is in the novel associated with the shock of the war, with Sir William's sense of proportion, with Dr. Holmes, all playing their part in Septimus's disastrous end.

Furthermore, in *Mrs Dalloway* referring to other works (intertextuality) has the form of repeatedly quoting from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. “Fear no more” serves as a certain consolation for both Clarissa and Septimus.

Mrs Dalloway adds a specific dimension to the idea of intertextuality, because the opening part of the novel is, in fact, a reconsidered and reworked version of an earlier short story which bears the title “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street”. The short story is heavily echoed in the novel, as its first paragraph shows:

Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the gloves herself. Big Ben was striking as she stepped out into the street. It was eleven o'clock and the unused hour was fresh as if issued to children on a beach. But there was something solemn in the deliberate swing of the repeated strokes; something stirring in the murmur of wheels and the shuffle of footsteps. (*Mrs Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence*, 19)

What follows in the short story is, unlike in the novel, a memory of Clarissa's childhood, so that, same as in the novel, the significance of the past is foregrounded. Then comes a passage which again was used in a similar way in *Mrs Dalloway*, only in the novel it is more contemplative, while in the short story it runs as follows:

A charming woman, posed, eager, strangely white-haired for her pink cheeks, so Scope Purvis, C. B., saw her as he hurried to his office. She stiffened a little, waiting for Durtnall's van to pass. Big Ben struck the tenth; struck the eleventh stroke. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Pride held her erect, inheriting, handing on, acquainted with discipline and with suffering. How people suffered, how they suffered, she thought, thinking of Mrs Foxcroft at the Embassy last night decked with jewels, eating her heart out, because that nice boy was dead, and now the old Manor House (Durtnall's van passed) must go to a cousin. (*Mrs Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence*, 19 – 20)

Also the subsequent talk with Hugh Whitbread is almost replicated in the novel.

As the first sentence of the story makes obvious, Mrs Dalloway is on her way to buy gloves, not flowers. In fact, almost a half of the short story takes place in a shop where Clarissa is choosing the right gloves. This central event of the short story is embedded in the novel by means of a single sentence: "Choosing a pair of gloves – should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey? – ladies stopped." (MD, 21)

Despite the frequent word-for-word copying which makes the opening part of the novel strongly resemble the original short story, *Mrs Dalloway* puts a new – broader – perspective on Clarissa.

4. MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM'S *THE HOURS*

4.1. THE POSTMODERNIST PERSPECTIVE

What has so far been stated in this thesis should provide a comprehensive context in which Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours*, published in 1998, can be explored. *The Hours* being a postmodernist reimagination of *Mrs Dalloway*, this chapter focuses on Cunningham's novel in the light of the previous three chapters.

Before going any deeper, I would like to comment on the very title of Cunningham's book. "The Hours" had been an early working title of Woolf's novel, before she decided on the more straightforward "Mrs Dalloway". The following extract from her diary proves this:

But now what do I feel about *my* writing? – this book, that is, *The Hours*, if that's its name? One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoevsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No, I think not. 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. (*A Writer's Diary*, 82)

The title then is the very first hint that suggests a connection between the two novels. Since the connections are numerous, as I will gradually attempt to demonstrate, it is worth starting with a more general view on *The Hours*.

Concerning the structure of the novel, the postmodernist favouring of fragmentation and discontinuity is obvious. The novel consists of three stories and even the individual stories are not presented in a continuous way, but by means of fragments, each fragment being one chapter. The subsequent chapters are always fragments of different stories, as a result of which the stories are intertwined, each fragment functioning as a link in chain of narrative transmission. By means of leaps Cunningham returns to this or that story.

The stories are separated in time to present one day in the life of three generations of women. This single day perspective is a further link between Woolf's and Cunningham's novel. The three stories take place in different times and different places, but at the same time each is of particular relevance to Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. One of the stories draws creatively on the life and work of Virginia Woolf. It renders her engagement with *Mrs Dalloway* in 1923, thus viewing her novel as process. This is counterpointed with the next story, set in

Los Angeles in 1949, in which Laura Brown is reading *Mrs Dalloway*, the product. The remaining story, taking place in New York at the end of the twentieth century, presents Clarissa Vaughan as a contemporary parallel to Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway, so that the original character is reimagined in a new context.

The disintegration of the narrative structure is furthermore connected with non-linearity achieved by means of the prologue. The prologue depicts the last moments in the life of Virginia Woolf, including her suicide, thus introducing the novel with what chronologically comes after the actual story of Woolf incorporated in *The Hours*.

The postmodernist concepts of interconnectedness and interreferentiality can be explored in *The Hours* on two levels. Not only does the whole novel in a number of ways refer to *Mrs Dalloway*, but also the individual stories are related to one another. To sustain this assertion, I will elaborate on it by focusing on the three stories one by one.

4.2. MRS. DALLOWAY

I will start with the story entitled "Mrs. Dalloway", since it is this story that represents the actual pastiche of Virginia Woolf's novel. Obviously, Cunningham's Clarissa Vaughan is a postmodern version of Clarissa Dalloway. Not only do both bear the same first name and are of the same age, but they also display similar features, as the reader gradually finds out. Despite the number of similarities, Cunningham's novel puts a new perspective on the main character as well as on the whole story line. Not only episodes around Clarissa, but also a number of other characters in *The Hours* are to be viewed as parallels to those in Woolf's novel. That is why I will focus on certain extracts from *The Hours*, while at the same time recapitulating on moments of the characters in *Mrs Dalloway*.

The very beginning can be used to illustrate Cunningham's technique of reformulation:

There are still the flowers to buy. Clarissa feigns exasperation (though she loves doing errands like this), leaves Sally cleaning the bathroom, and runs out, promising to be back in half an hour.

It is New York City. It is the end of the twentieth century.

The vestibule door opens onto a June morning so fine and scrubbed Clarissa pauses at the threshold as she would at the edge of a pool, watching the turquoise water lapping at the tiles, the liquid nets of sun wavering in the blue depths. As if standing at the edge of a pool

she delays for a moment the plunge, the quick membrane of chill, the plain shock of immersion. (TH, 9)

These few lines reveal how Cunningham plays with the themes of *Mrs Dalloway* on the one hand, and with the style and language devices on the other. Same as Clarissa Dalloway, Clarissa Vaughan has flowers to buy and a party to give. In both cases the atmosphere of a June morning is rendered. In *Mrs Dalloway* the squeak of the hinges reminds Clarissa of opening the French windows and plunging into the open air, which is associated with the image of a wave. Similarly, in *The Hours* the vestibule door is opened, at which moment Clarissa has the association of watching the water in a pool before plunging into it. The atmosphere of New York at the end of the twentieth century is contrasted with the atmosphere of *Mrs Dalloway*, to which Cunningham's style corresponds. Therefore, the poetic "What a lark! What a plunge!" (5) in *Mrs Dalloway* is paraphrased in *The Hours* by "What a thrill, what a shock, to be alive on a morning in June..." (10).

What furthermore connects the opening parts of the novels is reflecting of both Clarissas upon the past, the associations being triggered on the spur of the moment by the sights and sounds they encounter. Their past memories again bear similar patterns, as the following passages show:

How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing here at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?" (MD, 5)

She feels every bit as good as she did that day in Wellfleet, at the age of eighteen, stepping out through the glass doors into a day very much like this one, fresh and almost painfully clear, rampant with growth. There were dragonflies zigzagging among the cattails. There was a grassy smell sharpened by pine sap. Richard came out behind her, put a hand on her shoulder, and said, "Why, hello, Mrs. Dalloway." (TH, 10)

The nickname "Mrs Dalloway" was an idea of Clarissa Vaughan's old love Richard, who was convinced that Clarissa Vaughan's life resembled that of the literary figure. In this way an explicit link to Woolf's novel is introduced.

In accordance with the postmodernist position, Cunningham's novel gives prominence to what is marginalized or subtly suggested in *Mrs Dalloway*. In Woolf's novel several hints

point to Clarissa's homosexual tendencies. There is one moment in the past that had a profound impact on Clarissa – the kiss on the lips by Sally Seton:

She and Sally fell a little behind. 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. (MD, 40)

There are also other passages in the novel in which this theme is dealt with, such as when Clarissa retrospectively thinks:

But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love? (MD, 37)

Although Clarissa herself contemplates her falling in love with women, nothing direct is revealed to the reader. Most importantly, Clarissa's fascination with Sally Seton is of a spiritual quality, not in the least connected with a physical desire. Woolf was inspired for this episode by her own experience of love to Madge Symonds (interestingly enough, Madge married Virginia's cousin William Vaughan, so that her later surname represents a link to Cunningham's fictional character, Clarissa Vaughan). Quentin Bell describes Virginia's relationship to Madge as follows:

Virginia was in fact in love with her. She was the first woman – and in those early years Virginia fled altogether from anything male – the first to capture her heart, to make it beat faster, indeed to make it almost stand still as, her hand gripping the handle of the water-jug in the top room at Hyde Park Gate, she exclaimed to herself: "Madge is here; at this moment she is actually under this roof." Virginia once declared that she had never felt a more poignant emotion for anyone than she did at that moment for Madge. Certainly it was a very pure and very intense passion – pure in almost every sense of the word; Virginia at sixteen, for all George's kissings and fumbings, was by modern standards almost unbelievably ignorant. (*Virginia Woolf, A Biography, Volume One*, 60 – 61)

In *The Hours*, by contrast, Clarissa Vaughan has an open homosexual relationship with Sally. There is no attempt to disguise their love. They have been partners for eighteen years, they share an apartment, "they are always generous with kisses" (TH, 89). Their relationship is presented as something absolutely natural, as in:

Sally takes Clarissa's head in her hands. She kisses Clarissa's forehead firmly and competently, in a way which reminds Clarissa of putting a stamp on a letter. "Let's feed everybody and go to bed," she says softly, close to Clarissa's ear. "It's time for this day to be

over.” Clarissa squeezes Sally’s shoulder. She would say, “I love you,” but of course Sally knows. (TH, 224)

The traditional centre of authority in the form of a typical family loses its power and is substituted with an alternative family unit. Clarissa has raised a daughter, Julia, but Julia’s father is unknown, “no more than a numbered vial, no way of finding him” (TH, 157).

The idea of different sexual preferences is associated with a number of characters in *The Hours*. There is Richard, for example, an old friend of Clarissa’s and her former lover, a bisexual, now suffering from AIDS. There is also Walter Hardy, a homosexual, or Mary Krull, who is attracted to Clarissa’s daughter Julia. They will all be referred to in more detail below.

The Hours and *Mrs Dalloway* are interconnected through similar episodes and themes. Like Clarissa Dalloway on her way to the florist’s, Clarissa Vaughan thinks about death; also the motif of being a part of other things is suggested:

Still, this indiscriminate love feels entirely serious to her, as if everything in the world is a part of a vast, inscrutable intention and everything in the world has its own secret name, a name that cannot be conveyed in language but simply is the sight and feel of the thing itself. This determined, abiding fascination is what she thinks of as her soul (an embarrassing, sentimental word), but what else to call it?); the part that might conceivably survive the death of the body. (TH, 12)

The following scene in the street is a further pattern that links the two novels:

She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall’s van to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door); a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. (MD, 6)

Compared with:

She straightens her shoulders as she stands at the corner of English Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the light. There she is, thinks Willie Bass, who passes her some mornings just about here. 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)

The subsequent encounter of Clarissa Dalloway with Hugh Whitbread and their talk about Evelyn Whitbread’s illness is counterpointed in *The Hours* by Clarissa running into Walter Hardy, a homosexual, and their talk about the recovery of Evan, Walter’s partner. Also, as Peter Walsh scorns Hugh Whitbread, so does Richard feel disdain for Walter Hardy. In both

cases their attitudes are summarized in equally extreme statements. In *Mrs Dalloway* Peter Walsh thinks: “Villains there must be, and, God knows, the rascals who get hanged for battering the brains of a girl out in train do less harm on the whole than Hugh Whitbread and his kindness!” (190). In *The Hours* Richard argues that “eternally youthful gay men do more harm to the cause than do men who seduce little boys” (18).

Another aspect that the novels have in common is that for both Clarissas beauty is very often revealed in ordinary things, such as in *Mrs Dalloway*:

For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (MD, 6)

Analogous to this is a passage in *The Hours*:

Still, she loves the world for being rude and indestructible, and she knows other people must love it too, poor as well as rich, though no one speaks specifically of the reasons. Why else do we struggle to go on living, no matter how compromised, no matter how harmed? Even if we're further gone than Richard; even if we're fleshless, blazing with lesions, shitting in the sheets; still, we want desperately to live. It has to do with all this, she thinks. Wheels buzzing on concrete, the roil and shock of it; sheets of bright spray blowing from the fountain as young shirtless men toss a Frisbee and vendors (from Peru, from Guatemala) send pungent, meaty smoke up from their quilted silver carts; old men and women straining after the sun from their benches, speaking softly to each other, shaking their heads; the bleat of car horns and the strum of guitars... (TH, 15)

The scene at the florist's in *The Hours* again mirrors an equivalent one in *Mrs Dalloway*, even to that extent that both Clarissas are disturbed in the peaceful atmosphere of the flower shop by a noise coming from the street. But while in Woolf's novel, the sound comes from a car in which someone of greatest importance – probably the Queen herself – is seated, Cunningham adapts the situation to suit the New York atmosphere by connecting the sound with late 20th century celebrity culture and filmmaking. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of something special is preserved, as Clarissa Vaughan notices a distance away a famous movie star. As the passers-by in *Mrs Dalloway* stop and watch the car, so does the crowd in *The Hours*, mostly tourists, watch the trailer from which the movie star emerged.

In the part coming right after Cunningham's playing with surfaces can again be noticed. He was inspired by the following passage in *Mrs Dalloway*:

...greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hand's-breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first time and last, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known. (MD, 19)

and reimagined it as follows:

These two girls standing beside Clarissa, twenty if not younger, defiantly hefty, slouching into each other, laden with brightly colored bags from discount stores; these two girls will grow to middle and old age, either wither or bloat; the cemeteries in which they're buried will fall eventually into ruin, the grass grown wild, browsed at night by dogs; and when all that remains of these girls is a few silver fillings lost underground the woman in the trailer, be she Meryl Streep or Vanessa Redgrave or even Susan Saradon, will still be known. (TH, 50 – 51)

In *Mrs Dalloway* the past is for Clarissa inseparably linked to Peter Walsh, who tends to appear in her consciousness again and again, as the following lines suggest:

For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter and his were dry sticks; but suddenly it would come over her, if he were with me now what would he do?... (MD, 9)

In *The Hours*, a similar role is assigned to Richard:

Wind worries the leaves, showing the brighter, grayer green of their undersides, and Clarissa wishes, suddenly and with surprising urgency, that Richard were here beside her, right now... (TH, 19)

In *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa's memories often reflect Peter as opposing Clarissa, arguing with her, teasing her. He once told Clarissa that "she had the makings of the perfect hostess". (MD, 10). In *The Hours* the relationship is very similar in this respect and Clarissa Vaughan remembers how "Richard told her, thirty years ago, that under her pirate-girl veneer lay all the makings of a good suburban wife" (TH, 16). Both women at the same time realize the justification for such remarks, they are perfectly aware of their own faults and weaknesses. In *The Hours*, for example, Clarissa thinks: "I am trivial, endlessly trivial." (94)

Richard is parallel to Peter also with respect to his caring for abstract questions and higher principles, while – unlike Clarissa – ignoring, neglecting the ordinary things, as the following two passages disclose:

But Peter – however beautiful the day might be, and the trees and the grass, and the little girl in pink – Peter never saw a thing of all that. He would put on his spectacles, if she told him to; he would look. It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope's poetry, people's characters eternally, and the defects of her own soul. (MD, 9)

She knows that a poet like Richard would move sternly through the same morning, editing it, dismissing incidental ugliness along with incidental beauty, seeking the economic and historical truth behind these old brick town houses, the austere stone complications of the Episcopal church and the thin middle-aged man walking with his Jack Russell terrier (they are suddenly ubiquitous along Fifth Avenue, these feisty, bowlegged little dogs), while she, Clarissa, simply enjoys without reason the houses, the man, and the dog. (TH, 12)

In Woolf's novel the love between Clarissa and Peter is presented as the crucial episode in Clarissa's life, as is their separation, which is in the novel relived by both Clarissa and Peter. Clarissa is aware of the intolerable fact that "with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into" (MD, 10), which she could not bear. Cunningham offers the same reason for Clarissa's separation from Richard, stating that "Clarissa wanted her freedom and Richard wanted, well, too much." (TH, 52) In *The Hours* the break-up is again something to which Clarissa returns several times and "as she looks back, it seems definite; it seems like the moment at which one possible future ended and a new one began." (52)

Cunningham draws on the final scene of Peter and Clarissa's relationship in one more way. In *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa announces the end of the relationship to Peter in the garden, with a fountain between them; a mention of vivid green moss is made. In *The Hours* there is a similar place in the garden that belongs to Clarissa and Sally:

They had a certain amount to spend and they lucked into these pine-planked floors, this bank of casement windows that open onto the bricked patio where emerald moss grows in a shallow stone troughs and a small circular fountain, a platter of clear water, burbles at the touch of a switch. (TH, 91)

Such referring to a specific place, but embedding it in a different context is one of many playful strategies used by Cunningham.

In Woolf's novel love is presented as a spiritual bond, not a physical passion. The notion of soul is emphasized, while body is suppressed. Cunningham, on the other hand, discloses any taboos and depicts love in all its aspects. Hence the following memories of Clarissa:

If it was late June, she and Richard would have been lovers. It would have been almost a full month since Richard left Louis's bed (Louis the farm-boy, the living embodiment of lazy-eyed carnality) and came into hers. (TH, 11)

It was 1965; love spent might simply engender more of the same. It seemed possible, at least. Why not have sex with everybody, as long as you wanted them and they wanted you? So Richard continued with Louis and started up with her as well, and it felt right; simply right. (TH, 96)

Clarissa Vaughan's first kiss with Richard can be regarded as a parallel to Clarissa Dalloway being kissed by Sally. However, Cunningham puts emphasis on the physical:

Richard had stood beside her at a pond's edge at dusk, wearing cut-off jeans and rubber sandals. Richard had called her Mrs. Dalloway, and then they kissed. His mouth opened into hers; his tongue (exciting and utterly familiar, she'd never forget it) had worked its way shyly inside until she met it with her own. (TH, 98)

Similarly as in *Mrs Dalloway* the experience of the kiss is presented as something that nothing else compares to:

What lives undimmed in Clarissa's mind more than three decades later is a kiss at dusk on a patch of dead grass, and a walk around a pond as mosquitoes droned in the darkening air. There is still that singular perfection, and it's perfect in part because it seemed, at that time, so clearly to promise more. Now she knows: That was the moment, right then. There has been no other. (TH, 98)

In stark contrast to this memory stands the present, in which Richard attempts to kiss Clarissa:

He lifts his massive, ravaged head. Clarissa turns her face sideways, and receives Richard's kiss on her cheek. It's not a good idea to kiss him on the lips – a common cold would be a disaster for him. (TH, 68)

This moment is shortly after Richard's death reappraised by Clarissa:

She would ask his forgiveness for shying away, on what would prove to be the day of his death, from kissing him on the lips, and for telling herself she did so only for the sake of his health. (TH, 203)

transfixed it, there – the moment of this June morning...” (MD, 41 – 42); in *The Hours* it sounds as follows: “You try to hold the moment, just here, in the kitchen with the flowers. You try to inhabit it, love it, because it’s yours...” (TH, 94 – 95).

Short afterwards both Clarissas are visited by unexpected guests. In *Mrs Dalloway* it is Peter Walsh who calls on Clarissa after five years in India, while in *The Hours* Clarissa is visited by Louis, who used to be Richard’s lover. In both novels the scenes are accompanied by certain uneasiness, despite the positive feelings the situations evoke. And then, all of a sudden, Peter bursts into tears, “to his utter surprise” (MD, 52), as does Louis, “to his complete surprise” (TH, 134). Analogically, the scenes are interrupted by the arrival of Elizabeth in the first case and Julia in the other.

The pattern of Richard Dalloway leaving Lady Bruton together with Hugh Whitbread, followed by Hugh’s decision to choose a bracelet for Evelyn, is reused in *The Hours* by letting Sally and Walter leave Oliver, followed by Walter choosing a shirt for his Evan. In Woolf’s novel Richard buys roses for Clarissa and intends to tell her how much he loves her. Arriving at home, however, he cannot bring himself to express his love for Clarissa verbally, still Clarissa understands without his speaking. In *The Hours*, on the other hand, Sally wants to tell Clarissa something important, which she feels she cannot get phrased. Eventually, she buys roses for Clarissa and arrives home full of expectations. Paradoxically, she finds Clarissa in a strange mood here and quite a trivial dialogue takes place (in contrast to the prevailing silence in *Mrs Dalloway*) before it comes to:

“Oh, look, Sally, you bought roses.” “What? Oh, well. Yes.” Sally flourishes the roses and, at the same moment, notices the vase full of roses Clarissa has put on the table. They both laugh. “This sort of an O. Henry moment, isn’t it?” Sally says. “You can’t possibly have too many roses,” Clarissa says. Sally hands the flowers to her and for a moment they are both simply and entirely happy. They are present, right now, and they have managed, somehow, over the course of eighteen years, to continue loving each other. It is enough. At this moment, it is enough. (TH, 185)

An analogy is furthermore drawn between the daughters of both Clarissas. In *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa’s daughter Elizabeth is specifically associated with her relationship to the religious and embittered Miss Kilman. Miss Kilman and Elizabeth are inseparable, the idea of which repeatedly haunts Clarissa. Miss Kilman with her condescending manners and her grudge against the world embodies the very opposite of what Clarissa stands for. In *The Hours* Miss Kilman is substituted with Mary Krull and her relationship to Clarissa’s daughter Julia. Both Miss Kilman and Mary Krull are perceived by Clarissas as dominating,

despotic. At the same time it is more what Miss Kilman and Mary Krull stand for than for any personal weaknesses that Clarissas do not like them. All this can be found in the next two extracts:

For it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those spectres with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants; for no doubt with another throw of the dice, had the black been uppermost and not the white, she would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world. No. (MD, 15)

You respect Mary Krull, she really gives you no choice, living as she does on the verge of poverty, going to jail for her various causes, lecturing passionately at NYU about the sorry masquerade known as gender. You want to like her, you struggle to, but she is finally too despotic in her intellectual and moral intensity, her endless demonstration of cutting-edge, leather-jacketed righteousness (...) You believe – you *know* – that you and Mary Krull suffer from the same mortal sickness, the same queasiness of soul, and with one more turn of the dial you might have been friends, but as it is she's come to claim your daughter and you sit in your comfortable apartment hating her as much as any Republican father would. (TH, 23 – 24)

The constant tension between the mothers and their daughters' companions again bears features of intertextual referentiality, as these two passages show:

...Miss Kilman felt, Fool! Simpleton! You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure; who have trifled your life away! And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to knees crying, You are right! But this was God's will, not miss Kilman's. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered.

Clarissa was really shocked. This a Christian – this woman! This woman had taken her daughter from her!... (MD, 138)

Fool, Mary thinks, though she struggles to remain charitable or, at least, serene. No, 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.

Fraud, Clarissa thinks. You've fooled my daughter, but you don't fool me. (TH, 160)

In *Mrs Dalloway* Miss Kilman's love for Elizabeth is of a possessive kind; Miss Kilman wants to triumph through having influence on Elizabeth. In *The Hours* the physical passion is added as a new dimension in Mary's relationship to Julia, as the following lines suggest:

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 exquisite painful nerve that branches through her desire. Julia inspires in her an erotic patriotism, as if Julia were the distant country in which Mary was born and from which she has been expelled. (TH, 161)

In *Mrs Dalloway* everything is headed towards the party. A similar atmosphere can be felt in *The Hours* as well. The sentence "Remember the party" echoes in both novels. But the circumstances, of course, differ. Clarissa Vaughan plans to throw a party for Richard to celebrate his being awarded the Carrouters Prize:

She will give Richard the best party she can manage. She will try to create something temporal, even trivial, but perfect in its way. She will see to it that he is surrounded by people who genuinely respect and admire him... (TH, 123)

Her motives are felt to be slightly selfish, which she eventually admits to herself by revealing she wanted Richard to come to the party and "exhibit his devotion in front of her guests" (TH, 203). Something similar can be found in *Mrs Dalloway*: "How much she wanted it – that people should look pleased as she same in, Clarissa thought..." (MD, 12).

In *The Hours*, however, there remains only the idea of the party, the party as such never takes place. Before it can start, Richard commits suicide in front of Clarissa. The way the suicide is committed – by jumping out of a window – is another aspect that connects Richard with Septimus Warren Smith. Septimus's death is contained in the following passage:

There remained only the window; the large Bloomsbury lodging-house window; the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw liked that sort of thing. (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it to you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs Filmer's area railings. (MD, 164)

Yet, the way of presenting the event differs greatly in each novel. As shown above, the moments before Septimus's suicide are rendered via his own consciousness; the external is only of secondary importance. His sitting on the sill is suggested by a single sentence

in parentheses. Cunningham does the very opposite, describing in detail the picture Clarissa has before her eyes:

He looks insane and exalted, both ancient and childish, astride the windowsill like some scarecrow equestrian, a park statue by Giacometti. His hair is plastered to his scalp in some places, jutting out at sharp, rakish angles in others. His inside leg, bare to mid thigh, blue-white, is skeletal but with a surprisingly solid little fist of calf muscle still clinging stubbornly to the bone. "You're terrifying me," Clarissa says. "I want you to stop and come inside. Now." She moves toward him and he raises his inside leg to the sill. Only the heel of that foot, one hand, and one fleshless buttock remain in contact with the battered wood. (TH, 196)

Even a textual link is made in this context between Woolf's and Cunningham's novel. Clarissa, in her attempt to discourage Richard from letting go, tries to describe the beauty of the morning to him and in reaction to her using of the word "fresh" Richard remarks: "Fresh as if issued to children on a beach." (TH, 199), a sentence included in the opening part of *Mrs Dalloway*.

In contrast to Woolf, Cunningham offers a detailed description of the fall:

She reaches the window in time to see Richard still in flight, his robe billowing, and it seems even now as if it might be a minor accident, something reparable. She sees him touch the ground five floors below, sees him kneel on the concrete, sees his head strike, hears the sound it makes, and yet she believes, at least for another moment, leaning out over the sill, that he will stand up again, groggy perhaps, winded, but still himself, still whole, still able to speak. (TH, 200)

In *Mrs Dalloway* the description of the fall and its consequence takes place only later on in Clarissa's mind:

He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. (MD, 202)

Any description of the dead body is avoided in Woolf's novel and is only implicit in Holmes's announcement to Rezia that "her husband was horribly mangled" (MD, 165). In *The Hours* this moment is of a face-to-face nature, Clarissa having come to see Richard:

She kneels beside him, puts a hand on his inert shoulder. Gently, very gently, as if she fears waking him, she pulls the robe down from around his head. All she can make sense of in the glistening mass of red, purple, and white are his parted lips and an open eye. (TH, 201 – 202)

Richard's creative genius together with voluntarily ending his life are aspects that are inseparable from the central character of the next story: Virginia Woolf.

4.3. MRS. WOOLF

The whole novel is introduced by a prologue which is directly connected with the story of Virginia Woolf, while at the same time referring to the other two stories as well as alluding to *Mrs Dalloway*.

The prologue depicts Woolf's suicide together with what immediately precedes and follows it. The atmosphere of the piece can be understood as an ironic dialogue with *Mrs Dalloway*. At the beginning of *Mrs Dalloway* the atmosphere of post-war London is rendered, in which people, among other things, are watching an aeroplane making letters in the sky. This event has something solemn in itself and different people are brought together by sharing the sight:

All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls. (MD, 24)

The prologue of Cunningham's novel turns this situation upside down. It is 1941, another war having begun. Virginia Woolf, alone, is walking through a rural landscape:

She walks purposefully toward the river, certain of what she'll do, but even now she is almost distracted by the sight of the downs, the church, and a scattering of sheep, incandescent, tinged with a faint hint of sulfur, grazing under the darkening sky. She pauses, watching the sheep and the sky, then walks on. The voices murmur behind her; bombers drone in the sky, though she looks for planes and can't see them. (TH, 3)

A marked contrast is thus made between the momentary state of silence and peace offered in *Mrs Dalloway* and the noise in the sky as well as in Virginia's mind in *The Hours*. The sky and plane (or planes) are present in both cases, yet the contexts are strikingly different. Virginia is on the way to end her life, but even when facing this extreme situation she cannot but marvel at the most ordinary things such as a farm worker cleaning a ditch, the sight of whom makes her think: "How successful he is, how fortunate, to be cleaning a ditch in an osier bed." (TH, 3)

The actual suicide – drowning in the river – is described in a great detail, combining both externals and Virginia's consciousness. Her step-by-step procedure is compared to following a recipe – a dramatic reversal of an episode included in the third story: Laura Brown making a cake.

The imagery of underwater world associated with Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway* and Richard in *The Hours* is herein connected with a real event. The three characters – Virginia, Septimus and Richard – are interrelated with each other by the fact of taking their own lives. Richard's suicide is linked to Virginia's even intertextually by means of a concrete sentence. Before Richard jumps out of the window, his last words to Clarissa are: "I don't think two people could have been happier than we've been." (TH, 200) Exactly the same sentence can be found in Virginia's suicide note addressed to Leonard.

The presentation of the moments after Virginia's drowning is accompanied with a postmodernist distance, Virginia's body becoming simply an object, a part of the surrounding world:

She floats, heavily, through shafts of brown, granular light. She does not travel far. Her feet (the shoes are gone) strike the bottom occasionally, and when they do they summon up a sluggish cloud of muck, filled with the black silhouettes of leaf skeletons, that stands all but stationary in the water after she has passed along out of sight. Stripes of green-black weed catch in her hair and the fur of her coat, and for a while her eyes are blindfolded by a thick swatch of weed, which finally loosens itself and floats, twisting and untwisting and twisting again. (TH, 7)

Interestingly enough, a similar imagery appears in *Mrs Dalloway* when Peter Walsh is musing about the idea of soul:

For this is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable... (MD, 177)

The prologue includes one picture which can be regarded as an anticipation of Laura Brown's story: on the bridge to which Virginia's body has been borne a little boy and his mother are standing. Also, the truck full of soldiers crossing the bridge relates to Laura's husband Dan having served in the war.

The prologue as well as the story itself can be discussed in terms of Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, introduced above. Since Cunningham fictionalizes an actual historical figure, Virginia Woolf, the real and fictional is conflated in the story. As a result,

the reader is aware of both fictionality and a basis in the real. As Hutcheon points out, fiction is offered as a discourse by which we construct our versions of reality.¹ Exactly one such version is Cunningham's story included in *The Hours*.

In the actual story called "Mrs. Woolf" Cunningham jumps back in time to render one day in the life of Virginia Woolf, a day during which she starts working on *Mrs Dalloway*. The very first sentence of this story is a thought emerging in Virginia's mind on the verge of awakening: "Mrs. Dalloway said something (what?), and got the flowers herself." (TH, 29) The process of writing the novel is thus introduced. Before it continues, Virginia falls asleep again and dreams about a park. In this dream of hers various images meet that echo either in *Mrs Dalloway* or in other parts of Cunningham's novel: lilies, roses, a pool, a woman singing. Virginia is referred to in the dream as "floating", which is one more play with words, since the same expression has been used to describe her movement in the river after her death.

The role of the dream is of a symbolic value because with respect to Virginia's life presented in *The Hours* (or at least in the one-day sample of it) the distinction between dream and reality is not clear-cut. Virginia is so absorbed by her work that the border between life and art is often blurred, as in:

For now, walking through Richmond, she focuses her thoughts on the question of Clarissa's first love. A girl. The girl, she thinks, will be brash and captivating. She will scandalize the aunts by cutting the heads off dahlias and hollyhocks and floating them in great bowls of water, just as Virginia's sister, Vanessa, has always done. Here on Mt. Ararat Road Virginia passes a stout woman, a familiar figure from the shops, a hale and suspicious old wife who walks two pugs on brandy-colored leashes, who carries an immense tapestry handbag in her other hand, and who, by her ostentatious ignoring of Virginia, clearly indicates that Virginia has, again, been talking aloud without quite realizing it. Yes, she can practically hear her own muttered words, *scandalize the aunts*, still streaming like a scarf behind her. (TH, 82)

This story is pervaded by the idea of metafiction, Cunningham inventively presenting the act of creating *Mrs Dalloway* – Woolf's collecting the ideas, evaluating and reconsidering them. The following three extracts clearly show Cunningham's technique of metafiction:

She may pick up her pen and follow it with her hand as it moves across the paper; she may pick up her pen and find that she's merely herself, a woman in a housecoat holding a pen, afraid and uncertain, only mildly competent, with no idea about where to begin or what to write. She picks up her pen. *Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.* (TH, 35)

She takes a sip of cold coffee, and allows herself to read what she's written so far. It seems good enough, parts seem very good indeed. She has lavish hopes, of course – she wants this to be her best book, the one that finally matches her expectations. But can a single day in the life of an ordinary woman be made into enough for a novel? Virginia taps at her lips with her thumb. Clarissa Dalloway will die, of that she feels certain, though this early it's impossible to say how or even precisely why. She will, Virginia believes, take her own life. Yes, she will do that. (TH, 69)

Yes, Clarissa will have loved a woman. Clarissa will have kissed a woman, only once. Clarissa will be bereaved, deeply lonely, but she will not die. She will be too much in love with life, with London. Virginia imagines someone else, yes, someone strong of body but frail-minded; someone with a touch of genius, of poetry, ground under by the wheels of the world, by war and government, by doctors; a someone who is, technically speaking, insane, because that person sees meaning everywhere, knows that trees are sentient beings and sparrows sing in Greek. Yes, someone like that. Clarissa, sane Clarissa – exultant, ordinary Clarissa – will go on, loving London, loving her life of ordinary pleasures, and someone else, a deranged poet, a visionary, will be the one to die. (TH, 211)

Having a special gift for writing is what relates Virginia to Richard. Moreover, both express doubts about their own achievements and feel they might have offered more than they seem to have managed. Virginia's opinion that "one always has a better book in one's mind than one can manage to get onto paper" (TH, 69) is shared by Richard who comments on his novel by concluding that "everything's left out of it, almost everything" (TH, 66).

There are also numerous connections between Virginia and Richard in terms of their insanity. They both suffer from headaches and hearing voices, both talk to themselves. Cunningham depicts their states of mind by using very similar pictures, as will be shown on concrete examples. This is how Richard describes the voices he hears:

I think of them as coalescences of black fire, I mean they're dark and bright at the same time. There was one that looked a bit like a black, electrified jellyfish. They were singing, just now, in a foreign language. I believe it may have been Greek. Archaic Greek. (TH, 59)

Later on the voices Virginia can hear are referred to:

Sometimes they are low, disembodied grumblings that coalesce out of the air itself; sometimes they emanate from behind the furniture or inside the walls. They are indistinct but full of meaning, undeniably masculine, obscenely old. They are angry, accusatory, disillusioned. They seem sometimes to be conversing, in whispers, among themselves; they seem sometimes to be reciting text. Sometimes, faintly, she can distinguish a word. "Hurl," once, and "under" on two occasions. A flock of sparrows outside her window once sang, unmistakably, in Greek. (TH, 71)

Her headache is compared to “a scintillating silver-white mass floating over the cobblestones, randomly spiked, fluid but whole, like a jellyfish” (TH, 70).

These extracts are interrelated by several textual references, marked by the words “jellyfish”, “coalesce”, “Greek”. Even the word “hurl”, which Virginia once heard, has not been used arbitrarily, as it refers back to another passage in *The Hours*, in the story about Clarissa Vaughan:

She opens the door with her key. She can hear Richard speaking in the room, in a low, amused voice, as if he is imparting scandalous secrets. She can't tell what he is saying – she makes out the word “hurl”, which is followed by Richard's low, rumbling laugh... (TH, 55)

Through the idea of birds singing in Greek a link has been established between Virginia and Septimus Warren Smith. The following passage supports this assertion:

He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (MD, 28)

This is one of a number of allusions to *Mrs Dalloway* contained in this particular story. Next, I would like to point out further examples of alluding to Woolf's novel.

Although no actual party takes place in this part of Cunningham's novel, the symbol of the party has been incorporated into it by means of this passage that refers to Virginia's rejecting of looking in the mirror:

She washes her face and does not look, certainly not this morning, not when the work is waiting for her and she is anxious to join it the way she might join a party that had already started downstairs, a party full of wit and beauty certainly but full, too, of something finer than wit or beauty; something mysterious and golden; a spark of profound celebration, of life itself, as silks rustle across polished floors and secrets are whispered under the music. She, Virginia, could be a girl in a new dress, about to go down to a party, about to appear on the stairs, fresh and full of hope. (TH, 31)

During the party in *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa hears about the suicide of Septimus, which makes the following impression upon her: “Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought.” (MD, 201) An equivalent reaction, though in a different context, has been reused by Cunningham. The occasion is Vanessa and her children coming for tea to Virginia, preceded by the discovery of a dying bird. Virginia's encounter with this moment

– facing the dying bird – is expressed by: “Oh, thinks Virginia, just before tea, here’s death.”
(TH, 116)

Vanessa’s short presence at Virginia’s house resembles to some degree Sally Seton’s staying at Bourton. As has been mentioned above, Vanessa served Virginia as a source of inspiration for Sally’s way of arranging the cut off heads of flowers in bowls of water, which is how Sally and Vanessa are related to each other. The kiss between Clarissa and Sally is played with more times in *The Hours*. A kind of imitation of the kiss occurs between Virginia and her sister:

Nelly turns away and, although it is not at all their custom, Virginia leans forward and kisses Vanessa on the mouth. It is an innocent kiss, innocent enough, but just now, in this kitchen, behind Nelly’s back, it feels like the most delicious and forbidden of all pleasures. Vanessa returns the kiss. (TH, 154)

Beside the kiss, there are other ^{waves} motives alluding to *Mrs Dalloway*. The image of waves appears in this story several times, such as when Virginia’s headache is compared to a “fin breaking through dark waves” (TH, 167) or when “Virginia stands in the doorway, watching the shifting patterns as she would watch waves break on a beach” (TH, 211). Next, roses are mentioned on several occasions. They appear in Virginia’s dream, Virginia’s garden is full of rosebushes, yellow roses are present in the scene with the dying bird. Even death as one of the reappearing themes is implied by the symbolism of these flowers, as Virginia compares her staying in Richmond to “gently dying on a bed of roses” (TH, 169).

It is also London that connects this story with Woolf’s novel. In *Mrs Dalloway* it is the actual scene of the novel, while in the story about Virginia London is present in the form of her dearest wish to return to the capital from the quiet Richmond. In this context certain sentences can again be detected in *The Hours* which are quoted verbatim from *Mrs Dalloway*. Namely, as Virginia imagines her going to London by train and walking through the city, her feelings are expressed by: “What a lark! What a plunge!” (TH, 167), just as was the case of Clarissa Dalloway remembering the fresh morning at Bourton. In Cunningham’s novel Virginia associates London with Big Ben that “strikes the hours, which fall in leaden circles over the partygoers and the omnibuses” (TH, 168), an evident paraphrase of “The leaden circles dissolved in the air” (MD, 6).

Virginia's wish to leave for London for a few hours and her unsuccessful attempt to do so is counterpointed by the last of the three story lines, in which Laura Brown finally leaves forever.

4.4. MRS. BROWN

Another day. Another start. This time it is Los Angeles, 1949, and Laura Brown is reading the first lines of *Mrs Dalloway*. *Mrs Dalloway* is thus introduced from one more perspective: the novel being read. Cunningham achieves a special effect by inserting extracts from *Mrs Dalloway* into his own story, thus creating the impression that what the reader follows is at the same time what Laura has before her eyes. There are several such intertexts, sometimes even of the size of a whole page.

Like in *Mrs Dalloway* it is a June morning. And similarly, the idea of an evening party – a small family party on the occasion of Laura's husband's birthday – lingers in Laura's mind. Also, the war is over, just as in *Mrs Dalloway*, although different wars are obviously referred to in each case. The atmosphere of post-war America shapes the lives of individuals, the public merges with the private, as these lines reveal:

Because the war is over, the world has survived, and we are here, all of us, making homes, having and raising children, creating not just books or paintings but a whole world – a world of order and harmony where children are safe (if not happy), where men who have seen horrors beyond imagining, who have acted bravely and well, come home to lighted windows, to perfume, to plates and napkins. (TH, 42)

There is a close analogy with Septimus who witnessed such "horrors beyond imagining". However, Septimus's coming back from the war has little to do with a decent family life. The story of Mrs. Brown is specifically associated with the notions of family, marriage and parenthood, with Laura's role of wife and mother.

Laura's mood in the morning is symbolized by the images of waves, for example:

She is taken by a wave of feeling, a sea-swell, that rises from under her breast and buoys her, floats her gently, as if she were a sea creature thrown back from the sand where it had beached itself – as if she had been returned from a realm of crushing gravity to her true medium, the suck and swell of saltwater, that weightless brilliance. (TH, 40)

In this way Cunningham alludes to *Mrs Dalloway* as well as to other parts of his novel with similar imagery. Also the idea of plunging into water is reused in this story in the following context: “Summoning resolve, as if she were about to dive into cold water, Laura closes the book and lays it on the nightstand.” (TH, 41)

After reading the beginning of *Mrs Dalloway*, Laura leaves her room and at that moment she becomes aware of certain artifice of her performance:

She pauses several treads from the bottom, listening , waiting; 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)

A similar moment is later experienced by Virginia in the other story:

On the steps of Hoghart House, she pauses to remember herself. She has learned over the years that sanity involves a certain measure of impersonation, not simply for the benefit of husband and servants but for the sake, first and foremost, of one’s own convictions. (TH, 83)

Laura goes to the kitchen to join her husband and their three-year-old son Richie at breakfast and “thinks of the cake she will bake, the flowers she’ll buy” (TH, 43). Paradoxically, the flowers are already present, roses having been bought by Laura’s husband Dan on his own birthday. Making the cake later that morning can be viewed in terms of postmodernist irony, since despite its triviality it is taken seriously by Laura and presented like that. It is another act of creation, juxtaposed with Virginia Woolf writing her novel. Laura herself thinks of the cake as of a way of self-expression and aspires to create something unique:

She imagines making, out of the humblest materials, a cake with all the balance and authority of an urn or a house. The cake will speak of bounty and delight the way a good house speaks of comfort and safety. This, she thinks, is how artists or architects must feel (it’s an awfully grand comparison, she knows, maybe even a little foolish, but still), faced with canvas, with stone, with oil or wet cement. Wasn’t a book like *Mrs. Dalloway* once just empty paper and a pot of ink? (TH, 76)

As Virginia and Richard doubt their literary achievements, so does Laura come to the conclusion that the final product does not live up to her expectations. “The cake is less than she’d hoped it would be” (TH, 99). Facing her failure, Laura is reminded of her favourite author, Virginia Woolf, and mixes their two worlds in an extreme way:

Virginia Woolf put a stone into the pocket of her coat, walked into a river, and drowned. Laura will not let herself go morbid. She'll make the beds, vacuum, cook the birthday dinner. She will not mind about anything. (TH, 101)

In this sense, Laura Brown can be regarded as a parody of the picture suggested in Clarissa Vaughan's story:

Clarissa's daughter, this marvelous, 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 alternations. (TH, 159)

Laura's cake is a failure. One more failure in a whole series of failures suggested first in *Mrs Dalloway* and later in *The Hours*: Peter Walsh's life is referred to as a failure several times; Clarissa Dalloway is afraid that her party is going to be "a complete failure" (MD, 184); Virginia feels she has failed as a writer and even the moment before her suicide "seems like another failure" (TH, 5); Richard is convinced he has failed; Clarissa Vaughan consoles herself that "it isn't failure to be in these rooms, in your skin, cutting the stems of flowers" (TH, 94). Laura's failing is not associated strictly with the cake; it is to be viewed on a more general level, such as when she thinks about her son: "He will always know precisely when and how much she has failed." (TH, 193)

The various forms of love presented so far in *The Hours* are completed through this story by another kind: the affection of a child for his mother. Richie is literally enchanted with Laura, "he is devoted, entirely, to the observation and deciphering of her, because without her there is no world at all" (TH, 192), "he is rescued, resurrected, transported by love" (TH, 44).

The presence of a child as one of the characters is a new quality added to the novel, distorting the centralized world of adults. Another postmodernist aspect is the de-centred male subject. Men tend to be described from a new perspective, as vulnerable or weak. The following passage refers to Dan:

It is a part of his loveliness (she would never use that word in his presence, but privately she thinks of him as lovely, a lovely man, for she has seen him at his most private moments, whimpering over a dream, sitting in the bathtub with his sex shrunk to a stub, floating, heartbreakingly innocent). (TH, 100)

Another example can be found in the story about Virginia in which Leonard Woolf is described in search of his wife:

Although he has come after her like a constable or proctor, a figure of remonstrance, she is impressed by how small he seems, in slippers on Kew Road; how middle-aged and ordinary. She sees him, briefly, as a stranger might see him: merely another of the many men who walk on streets. She is sad for him, and strangely moved. (TH, 170)

Mrs. Brown's story is suggestive of Laura's homosexuality, the concrete situation being Kitty's visit to Laura. This episode alludes in several ways to *Mrs Dalloway*. In Woolf's novel Peter Walsh comes to see Clarissa without letting her know in advance. Clarissa is just repairing her dress and, hearing a visitor approaching, "she makes to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy" (MD, 45). In *The Hours* Kitty visits Laura unexpectedly, as the latter is washing the dishes after having baked the cake. As Kitty sits down, Laura "glances nervously at the cake, wishing she could hide it" (TH, 103). Holding Kitty in embrace short afterwards makes Laura think: "This is how a man feels holding a woman." (TH, 109) A clear parallel can be found in *Mrs Dalloway* when Clarissa recalls her being charmed by women and believes that "she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt" (MD, 36). Sally Seton's kiss with Clarissa is paralleled in Laura's story by this scene:

Kitty lifts her face, and their lips touch. They both know what they are doing. They rest their mouths, each on the other. They touch their lips together, but do not quite kiss. (TH, 110)

Later on, when Laura drives to the city, her memory slips back to that moment:

She touches her lips, where Kitty's briefly resided. She doesn't mind so much about the kiss, what it does and does not imply, except that it gives Kitty an edge. Love is deep, a mystery – who wants to understand its every particular? Laura desires Kitty. She desires her force, her brisk and cheerful disappointment, the shifting pink-gold lights of her secret self and the crisp, shampooed depths of her hair. Laura desires Dan, too, in a darker and less exquisite way... (TH, 143)

The "exquisite way" in which Laura desires Kitty is a word link with "the most exquisite moment" of Clarissa Dalloway's life (MD, 40).

The notion of madness is discussed in this story from a new perspective, counterbalancing Virginia's and Richard's states of mind:

... as she lay on the double bed with the shades drawn and the bedside lamp lit, trying to read, she wondered, Is this what it's like to go crazy? She'd never imagined it like this – when she'd thought of someone (a woman like herself) losing her mind, she'd imagined shrieks and wails, hallucinations; but at that moment it had seemed clear that there was another way, far quieter; a way that was numb and hopeless, flat, so much so that an emotion as strong as sorrow would have been a relief. (TH, 141 – 142)

Laura's subsequent "trip" reminds of Virginia's idea to go to London. Similar sentence patterns contribute to relating the two episodes to one another, e. g. the sentence from Laura's story: "But now, right now, she is going somewhere (where?)..." (TH, 142) compared with the one in Virginia's story: "As she crosses Prince Street and goes down Waterloo Place (toward what?)..." (TH, 166). In contrast to Virginia, Laura manages to leave the routine, although only temporarily.

With Laura's arrival at the hotel Cunningham starts several postmodernist plays, one of them being a re-imagination of Doris Lessing's short story "To Room 19" in a new context. This is a second allusion to this author, because already in Mrs. Dalloway's story Clarissa Vaughan remembers having read *The Golden Notebook* by Lessing (TH, 98).

In accordance with the aims of this thesis I will focus on viewing this particular episode in the context of *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Hours*. Various connections can be discovered in this passage:

She goes to the window, parts the filmy white curtains, raises the blinds. There, below, is the V-shaped plaza, with its fountain and struggling rosebushes, its empty stone benches. Again, Laura feels as if she's entered a dream – a dream in which she looks onto this peculiar garden, so uninhabited, at a little past two in the afternoon. She turns from the window. She takes off her shoes. She puts her copy of Mrs Dalloway on the glass-topped night table, and lies on the bed. (TH, 149)

A fountain is mentioned once more, rosebushes reappear. Laura's feeling of finding herself in a dream relates this piece to the other story in which Virginia dreams about a garden. *Mrs Dalloway* is present in the room – not only as an object, but as the very purpose of Laura's checking into the hotel. And together with the novel Virginia Woolf is present in Laura's mind:

It seems, somehow, that she has left her own world and entered the realm of the book. Nothing, of course, could be further from Mrs. Dalloway's London than this turquoise hotel room, and yet she imagines that Virginia Woolf herself, the drowned woman, the genius, might in death inhabit a place not unlike this one. (TH, 150)

The story of Virginia includes one moment that resembles Laura's coming to the hotel room:

She gets to her study, quietly closes the door. Safe. She opens the curtains. Outside, beyond the glass, Richmond continues its decent, peaceful dream of itself. Flowers and hedges are attended to... (TH, 34)

The word “safe” functions as a link here, since in Laura’s story we can read: “Having this room to herself seems both prim and whorish. She is safe here.” (TH, 150)

In the course of her stay in the hotel room the possibility of dying occurs to Laura, but the idea seems unacceptable to her then, because “she loves life, loves it hopelessly, at least at certain moments...” (TH, 152), just as Clarissa Dalloway does. Clarissa Dalloway, confronted with the fact of Septimus’s suicide, decides to go back to the midst of her party. In a similar way, Laura Brown returns home to prepare the birthday party for Dan. The family being assembled in the evening, Laura thinks: “She must please; she must continue.” (TH, 205)

The last reference made in this story to Laura is: “From far away, she can hear a dog barking” (TH, 215). It is a final allusion to *Mrs Dalloway*, the same image appearing in connection with both Clarissa and Septimus, as shown below:

Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking. (MD, 45)

Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. (MD, 154)

4.5. THE NOTION OF TIME IN *THE HOURS*

As the title of the novel suggests, the notion of time has a specific role in Cunningham’s novel. On a surface level the novel deals with confronting three different eras, “Mrs. Dalloway”, “Mrs. Woolf” and “Mrs. Brown” set in the end of the 20th century, 1923 and 1949 respectively. Despite this long time span Cunningham stresses the instantaneous, depicting only one day of each of the three eras. Hours and single moments within these hours is what matters. Like in *Mrs Dalloway*, a number of instances are offered in *The Hours* that are ordinary, yet in a way special for the protagonists. An example can be Clarissa Vaughan’s experience:

It had seemed like the beginning of happiness, and Clarissa is still sometimes shocked, more than thirty years later, to realize it *was* happiness; that the entire experience lay in a kiss and a walk, the anticipation of dinner and a book. (TH, 98)

instantaneous,

Cunningham attempts to suggest that every single moment, even the most fleeting one, is pregnant with possibilities. This idea is expressed in the story about Virginia Woolf:

She sips her coffee, sets it down, stretches her arms. This is one of the most singular experiences, waking on what feels like a good day, preparing to work but not yet actually embarked. At this moment there are infinite possibilities, whole hours ahead. (TH, 34)

Later, Clarissa Vaughan remembers: "That summer when she was eighteen, it seemed anything could happen, anything at all." (TH, 95)

Individual lives are therefore patterned by choosing particular possibilities out of a variety. On a more general level, a whole life can be viewed as one possibility chosen out of many others that might have been decided on. Each of the three stories has its own history and present, the latter being often viewed as not fulfilling the past expectations, hopes and plans. Clarissa Vaughan associates her present with "a sense of missed opportunity" (TH, 97) and cannot help thinking about what the possible life with Richard might have been like:

Couldn't they have discovered something ... larger and stranger than what they've got? It is impossible not to imagine that other future, that rejected future, as taking place in Italy or France, among big sunny rooms and gardens; as being full of infidelities and great battles; as a vast and enduring romance laid over friendship so searing and profound it would accompany them to the grave and possibly even beyond. She could, she thinks, have entered another world. She could have had a life as potent and dangerous as literature itself. (TH, 97)

From the present perspective it is clear that "Richard will not accompany her, as planned, into old age" (TH, 91).

Similar feelings, expressed by similar word patterns, are associated also with some minor characters of the story. Louis, Richard's ex-lover, is convinced of "missed opportunities" (TH, 139). The career of Barbara, the florist, "has not gone as planned" (TH, 25). Similar discrepancy between the past and the present can also be witnessed in *Mrs Dalloway*, as has been suggested in the second chapter of this thesis.

Besides the past and the present there is of course the future, the anticipation of which also involves a number of ways and opportunities. Cunningham presents this future perspective in terms of the protagonists' facing the coming hours. This idea is formulated by Richard as follows: "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." (TH, 198)

The fact of living on is offered as one possibility, the other being death. Richard decides on the latter, as does Virginia. In the context of Virginia's suicide the other possibility is discussed:

She imagines turning around, taking the stone out of her pocket, going back to the house. She could probably return in time to destroy the notes. She could live on; she could perform the final kindness. (TH, 5)

In Laura's case the future perspective is expressed by:

She herself is trapped here forever, posing as a wife. She must get through this night, and then tomorrow morning, and then another night here, in these rooms, with nowhere else to go. She must please; she must continue. (TH, 205)

Cunningham deliberately misleads the reader into getting the impression that Laura decides to go on with the routine. This assumption, however, falls to pieces and is subject to revision in the light of a new piece of information brought about by the end of "Mrs. Dalloway" story. Only then does it become clear that Richie in Laura's story and Richard in Clarissa's story is one person. The first hint is made right after Richard's jump, when Clarissa is confronted with his dead body:

Guiltily, as if she is doing something forbidden, she leans over and rests her forehead against his spine while it is still, in some way, his; while he is still in some way Richard Worthington Brown (TH, 202 – 203)

This is the first time ever that Richard's surname, identical with Laura's, is mentioned. The very last chapter presents Laura Brown as an old woman, seeing Clarissa Vaughan after Richard's death. It is then that the true state of things is revealed to the reader:

So Laura Brown, the woman who tried to die and failed at it, the woman who fled her family, is alive when all others, all those who struggled to survive in her wake, have passed away. She is alive now, after her ex-husband has been carried off by liver cancer, after her daughter has been killed by a drunk driver. She is alive after Richard has jumped from a window onto a bed of broken glass. (TH, 222)

The fact that Laura tried to commit suicide and eventually left her family is thus told from a delayed perspective by including this piece of information into a different story than Laura Brown's. As a result, the pattern of three seemingly independent story lines breaks down before the reader's eyes. Clarissa's and Laura's stories are drawn together at the end, so that what seemed to be a parallel story becomes a part of the other one. Some of the events in Clarissa's story are in fact results of events in Laura's life (although not directly presented

in Laura's story). One of the effects Cunningham achieves by his discontinuous narration is that different time levels are presented as simultaneous, or in other words that "past" overlaps with "future".

Like *Mrs Dalloway*, Cunningham's novel works both with regarding the hours as a promise of meaning and dreading them as an anticipation of something worse to come. Death is an important theme of the novel, all the main protagonists are somehow confronted with it during a single day of their lives. But the experience of death is not communicated as a conclusion. Rather, it is presented as a part of living, a part of routine. Cunningham emphasizes single moments within the routine that are worth going on, as the following lines at the end of his novel make clear:

A few jump out of windows or drown themselves or take pills; more die by accident; and most of us, the vast majority, are slowly devoured by some disease or, if we're very fortunate, by time itself. There's just this for consolation: an hour here or there when our lives seem, against all odds and expectations, to burst open and give us everything we've ever imagined, though everyone but children (and perhaps even they) knows these hours will inevitably be followed by others, far darker and more difficult. Still, we cherish the city, the morning; we hope, more than anything, for more. (TH, 225)

In this way Cunningham returns in a circle to the beginning of *The Hours* that contains this passage:

New York in its racket and stern brown decrepitude, its bottomless decline, always produces a few summer mornings like this; mornings invaded everywhere by an assertion of new life so determined it is almost comic, like a cartoon character that endures endless, hideous punishments and always emerges unburnt, unscarred, ready for more. (TH, 9 – 10)

It is Cunningham's reformulation of the idea expressed already in *Mrs Dalloway*:

All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was! (MD, 135)

At the end of *The Hours*, Cunningham draws heavily on *Mrs Dalloway*. As Clarissa Dalloway returns from the little room to the party, so does Clarissa Vaughan return from the kitchen to the living room, to Laura Brown. In the final sentences of Cunningham's novel *Mrs Dalloway* echoes clearly: "And here she is, herself, Clarissa, not Mrs. Dalloway anymore; there is no one now to call her that. Here she is with another hour before her." (TH, 226)

On the level of Cunningham's fiction, Virginia Woolf's life does not really end with her death, since her spirit goes on by her book being read by Laura Brown. On the level of *The Hours* as process, the same can be said, since Cunningham has opened a dialogue with Virginia Woolf by means of his own novel. Through *The Hours* Michael Cunningham communicates with Virginia Woolf, defying the real time.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have attempted to explore how modernist and postmodernist features are reflected in the field of literature by demonstrating this on two specific texts: Virginia Woolf's modernist novel *Mrs Dalloway* and Michael Cunningham's postmodernist novel *The Hours*. The thesis shows links between modernism and postmodernism on the one hand and their contrasting tendencies on the other. The modernist endeavour to be original is confronted with the postmodernist approach to undermining authenticity by reinterpreting and reformulating earlier works.

Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* is presented as an open dialogue with Virginia Woolf. I have tried to make clear how Cunningham draws on *Mrs Dalloway* and interprets it from a postmodernist perspective. His approach can be studied on the level of reworking certain themes as well as on the level of reusing specific language devices. Cunningham's novel displays typical postmodernist features such as discontinuity of narration or focusing on the marginalized.

Each of the three stories included in *The Hours* refers in some ways to Virginia Woolf's novel. "Mrs. Dalloway" plays specifically with the main protagonist, presenting Clarissa Vaughan as a postmodern version of Clarissa Dalloway. In "Mrs. Woolf" Cunningham works creatively with *Mrs Dalloway* in process, fictionalizing one day during which Virginia Woolf is inventing her novel. "Mrs. Brown" introduces the perspective of *Mrs Dalloway* being read by Laura Brown. By combining the different perspectives Michael Cunningham has achieved an interesting pastiche of Virginia Woolf's novel.

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