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## IT IS TIME FOR VIRGINIA WOOLF

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the issue of time in two of Virginia Woolf's novels; *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. The study will not only consider how the theme is presented in the novels but also in their filmic adaptations, including *The Hours*, a novel written by Michael Cunningham and film directed by Stephen Daldry.

Time covers several different dimensions visible in both novels; physical, mental, historical, biological, etc., which will be more or less relevant in each of the novels and which, simultaneously, serve as a central point to many other themes such as gender, identity or death, among others. The aim of this paper, beyond the exploration of these dimensions and the connection with other themes, is to come to a general and comparative conclusion about time in Virginia Woolf.

Key Words: Virginia Woolf, time, adaptations, subjective, objective.

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Este trabajo consiste en una exploración del tema del tiempo en dos de las novelas de Virginia Woolf; *La Señora Dalloway* y *Al Faro*. Dicho estudio, no solo tendrá en cuenta como se presenta el tema en las novelas, sino también en la adaptación cinematográfica de cada una de ellas, teniendo también en cuenta *Las Horas*, novela escrita por Michael Cunningham y película dirigida por Stephen Daldry.

El tiempo posee diversas dimensiones visibles en ambos trabajos; física, mental, histórica, biológica, etc., que cobrarán mayor o menor importancia en cada una de las novelas y que, a su vez, sirven de puntos de unión para otros muchos temas como pueden ser el género, la identidad o la muerte entre otros. El propósito de este trabajo, brevemente explicado y a parte de explorar estas dimensiones y la conexión con otros temas, es el de alcanzar una conclusión general y comparada sobre el tiempo en Virginia Woolf.

Palabras clave: Virginia Woolf, tiempo, adaptaciones, subjetivo, objetivo

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses mainly on the issue of time in two of Virginia Woolf's best-known novels; *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), focusing as well in their filmic adaptation and including *The Hours* (1998). Time is one of Woolf's main concerns in her novels, and it is explored in several different ways throughout all her work. Furthermore, time has not only one dimension, the physical dimension to which we are accustomed; the hours given by the clock or weeks shown by a calendar; but many others such as the mental dimension, since time can be subjective in every individual's mind; the historical dimension, the historical context of a person may influence his/her perspective of time or the biological dimension, where an appreciation of time may be conditioned by can be the moment of life a person finds himself/herself in.

With this in mind, this paper aims to cover and study these different dimensions within the novels and films in order to establish a comparison between them as a means to arrive to a general conclusion that will encapsulate all. Regarding this objective, the structure of the work will go from the most specific information, with a chapter devoted to each of the three novels/films, to the author and adaptation theory, to a more general information which will re-cover the previous pieces combined into the conclusion.

## 2. ADAPATION

We cannot begin a chapter about adaptation without knowing the exact definition of “adaptation”; therefore, according to the Oxford Dictionary:

**Adaptation:** A film, television drama, or stage play that has been adapted from a written work.

And, to complete this definition:

**To Adapt:** Alter (a text) to make it suitable for filming, broadcasting, or the stage.

However, this definition may feel incomplete now that many studies have been done on this issue. In fact, this is how some adaptation critics define it:

- “Idea of ransacking the novel for source material” (McFarlane, 1996, p.6).
- “The broader notion of the process of adaptation has much in common with interpretation theory, for in a strong sense adaptation is the appropriation of meaning from a prior text” (Andrew, 1984, p.29).
- “Adaptation – the transfer of an ‘original’ (literary) text from one context of production to an (audio-visual) other” (Sheen, 2000, p.149).

Then, some questions arise like “why adapting texts that already exist? What are adaptations looking for?”

However, it seems that the answer is very closely linked to the origins of cinema. The first great film-makers supported their works on literary tradition in order to develop the first narrative and cinematographic conventions at the same time that they used literary and theatrical story lines as the base of their filmic narrations. For instance, Griffith in North-America based his films in theatre works, novels, short stories or even poems, as Daniel C. Narvaez mentions in his article called *La Visión Cinematográfica de D.W. Griffith*.

These practices were not isolated nor limited to the preliminary period of cinema. Interactions between literature and cinema, far from disappearing, became stronger and the adaptation phenomenon has developed until nowadays.

In general, and at least until 1957, opinions on adaptations were unfavourable. They were frequently criticised from the literary model and, in comparison to it. Analysis focused on the degree of fidelity with which a work had been adapted, especially highlighting omissions, simplifications or changes to discredit the film; instead of studying why those modifications were made or what the film-maker was looking for.

Nevertheless, and first of all, “the notion of fidelity is highly problematic for a number of reasons. It is questionable whether strict fidelity is even possible. A counter-view would insist that an adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium” (Stam, 2000, p.68). It is obvious that the possible ways of written expression are not the same as the cinematic one; therefore, the resulting product would be different unavoidably.

Another problem is the assumption of literary and old arts to be true and better arts than the visuals and new. However, Roland Barthes breaks this hierarchy and establishes film adaptations as a way of interpreting and criticising a text without necessarily being subordinate to it. According to François Truffaut, for instance, one literary adaptation too closely linked to the original text would be a literary film before a cinematographic one.

Other problems of this practice were, for example, that it was not considered cultural dissemination but rather a destruction of culture with the only purpose of entertaining people. It was, above all, during the 60s, since the publication of *Novels into Films* in 1957 by George Bluestone when the nature of this exercise began to be questioned, rising an interest in comprehending it from the different literary and cinematographic currents.

Christian Metz points this question out when mentioning that both words and images are a group of signs that belong to a system and that, at a certain level of abstraction, these systems are similar to one another. More specifically, within each of those systems there are many different codes (perceptive, referential, symbolic). What makes a study of the relation between two separated sign systems possible, as the novel and the cinema, is the fact that the same codes can reappear in more than one system. Therefore, adaptation has always been linked to cinema since its very beginning, being another way of interpreting a text.



### 3. VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf was born in London on January 25, 1882. She was the third daughter of Leslie and Julia Stephen. Her father, as well as her mother, had been married before and both brought those marriages' children to this new union.

Virginia's childhood and youth are part of one of the most studied and documented lives that we know. More than unhappy, she had a problematic childhood. Her mother died when Virginia was 13 years old and her stepsister when she was 15. At 22 she lost her father and two years later; her brother Toby. Another of her stepsisters was deranged. Virginia herself, from a young age, suffered periods of depression and even mental derangement. Her brothers sexually abused her when she was too young to know what was going on. So, to say, she suffered a series of calamities that could have led her to a profoundly traumatic youth. However, as many letters and her diaries show, Virginia grew normally, had a big facility to make friends and from a very early age, proved her impulse to acknowledge all her experiences in writing.

Her father was the son of *sir* James Stephen, a senior official who later became a history professor. He had been a clerk in his youth, but he lost his faith and changed Cambridge for London, where he earned a living as a political journalist and he became a distinguished intellectual when he created the Dictionary of National Biography, friend of Meredith, Henry James, Tennyson, Matthey Arnold and George Eliot. This way, Virginia enjoyed a childhood of high-middle class and intellectually stimulant.

The seminal newspaper Hyde Park Gate News that Virginia and Vanessa started in 1891 and kept for four years shows a funny family, cheerful and with talent, where mutual care helped soften any tension. Older members helped and supported younger members and younger members entertained older members; in this way, Virginia's talent for fiction developed very early. She never went to school, instead, she received classes at home, by her parents or private teachers. According to her own memoirs, her most vivid memories of childhood were those in St Ives, Cornwall, where the family spent their summer holidays between 1882 and 1894; influencing later the fiction that she wrote in *To the Lighthouse*.

After her father's death, she moved to Bloomsbury with her sister Vanessa and her two brothers; a place that became the meeting point for some old university classmates of her brother and that would be known later as the Bloomsbury group. In 1912, at the age of 30, Virginia married one of the group members; the writer and economist Leonard Woolf. Together they shared a huge bond and moreover, they collaborated professionally founding the Hogarth Press editorial in 1917, which edited some of her work as well as that of other writers such as T.S. Eliot or Sigmund Freud.

One of the Bloomsbury group's ethics was that of avoiding sexual exclusivity; therefore, in 1922, Virginia met Vita Sackville-West, a writer and garden designer with whom she had a lover's relation which lasted almost the whole decade of the 1920s. In 1928, Virginia gave Vita her novel *Orlando* as a present, which later, Sackville-West's son, Nigel Nicolson, would consider as "the longest and most charming love letter in literature" (Nicolson, 1998, p. 138).

As I have mentioned before, during her life, Virginia suffered from what we know now as bipolar disorder. After finishing the manuscript of her last novel, *Between the Acts*, she had another strong episode of depression. The outbreak of WWII, the destruction of her London house during the Blitz and the cold welcoming of her biography about her friend Roger Fry, worsened her condition until she was not capable of working any longer.

On March 28, 1941, Virginia Woolf committed suicide. She put on her coat, filled the pockets of her coat with stones and threw herself into the Ouse river near her home and drowned. Her husband buried her mortal remains under a tree in Rodmell, Sussex.

## 4. *MRS DALLOWAY*

Mrs Dalloway is Virginia Woolf's fourth novel, published on May 14, 1925. It follows the main character, Clarissa Dalloway, through one day in a post-First World War England.

The story line is simple, and it narrates a trivial event: Mrs Dalloway is giving a party. She is preparing everything from the morning to receive her friends in her house that evening. The party will gather together people who have not seen each other for years and due to this reunion, the story develops in three times that alternate: the past they have shared, the present that reunites them and the future which is waiting for them.

Since Mrs Dalloway starts the party arrangements, she is invaded by memories of the past which transfer her to her adolescence in Bourton, the countryside, where she frequented the friends who will come to the party and where she met her husband. Going back to the past will allow her to analyse the present, examining the reason behind her choices and projecting, simultaneously, her future.

There is another element which contributes to enrich the world that is presented to the readers and that element is the multiplicity of points of view. Characters are not only seen by themselves but also through other character's eyes, establishing a game of contrasts. The narrator introduces itself in their minds to reproduce what they think, not only what they say. In this way, we jump into a parallel story that is taking place at the same time as Mrs Dalloway's story and which, later, will interfere in Clarissa's thoughts and feelings, which is Septimus' story. Septimus Warren Smith is a First World War veteran who suffers from post-traumatic stress and who spends the day in the park with his Italian wife, Lucrezia. Septimus is visited by frequent hallucinations, especially about his dear friend Evans, who died during war. Later in the day, after being prescribed involuntarily into a psychiatric hospital, he kills himself jumping out of a window.

*Mrs Dalloway* covers a great variety of themes within its apparent simple story such as society and class; warfare; memory; suffering; isolation; madness; and others. However, the one which concerns this paper is the issue of time, which seems to be the axis of the novel.

We cannot begin to talk about time in *Mrs Dalloway* without mentioning that the novel's provisional title was *The Hours*. This is of great importance because it establishes time at the centre of *Mrs Dalloway* from the very beginning, making the readers aware that the hours are going to be very present throughout the novel.

The novel is written in a style called stream of consciousness, which means that we do not only have access to what people say or do but also to what is happening in the flow of thoughts in the minds of the characters. It is thanks to this type of narration that we appreciate as readers the distinction between time present and time past. As mentioned before, the novel takes us through the present day of the characters but, simultaneously, we are constantly taken to the past through their consciousness. In this way, "as mind ranges without limitation of time and space, the novel basically deals with the past of its characters rather than with the present of its single day" (Mahajan, 2017, p.135-136).

This distinction between time present and time past leads us to another division of equal importance; time of the mind and time of the clock. The former would be related to the past in the characters' consciousness since it is subjective and personal whereas the latter, objective, would be related to the present day of the characters because it is the clock marking the hours what takes them back to reality and reminds them that time is passing. "The words used to describe the passing of time like 'boomed', 'warning' or 'strikes' evoke the power and fear of the time passing" (Yadav, p.2), which is, undoubtedly, one of the most recurrent themes in Woolf's writing.

Nevertheless, there are not only these two dimensions of time we have seen; physical (time of the clock) and mental (stream of consciousness), but also some other dimensions that serve to refer to other important themes in the novel, such as war or gender. One of these is the historical dimension: historical time. Our identity, among other things, is built according to the experience we have lived in our historical context and the novel is set in an England that is affected by the First World War. Therefore, "Clarissa [...] has lived through the calamity of war and she has grown to believe that living even one day is dangerous. Death is very present in her thoughts. Paradoxically, she is travelling during that one day between her present, her past and her thoughts about the future" (Mahajan, 2017, p.136). As we can see, the historical context does not only build our identity but also influences our perception of time.

The other different dimension worth mentioning is the biological dimension. With the exploration of this dimension, Woolf also addresses the issue of gender since it is well known that the expression “biological clock” refers to women and maternity. The novel here establishes an analogy between the hours of the day and the female life cycle as Elaine Showalter states in her article *Mrs Dalloway: Exploring Consciousness and the Modern World* (2016). Woolf places Clarissa in the middle of this cycle, since she is over fifty years old, and surrounds her with different women from different ages; younger like her daughter Elisabeth and older like her aunt Helena. This position opens in her mind preoccupations about having lost her youth beauty or death.

Now that we have seen how time is treated within the novel, it is also one of this essay’s concerns to study the representation of this issue in the filmic adaptation of *Mrs Dalloway*. The film dates from 1997 and it is a British, American and Dutch production directed by Marleen Gorris. The cast includes Vanessa Redgrave and Natascha McElhone, as middle-aged Clarissa and young Clarissa respectively, Rupert Graves as Septimus, Michael Kitchen and Lena Headey, among others. The plot of the film does not go any far from the novel. We still have this middle-aged woman, whom we follow through the day and who is having a party that evening. We accompany her from the beginning of the day when she goes out to buy the flowers (herself) until the party is over, going back and forward in time through the characters’ consciousness. As the means are different, we do not have their thoughts written down but a voice over which exposes out loud the characters’ thoughts and feelings while we see them walking within the screen. In this way, the presence of the two dimensions, physical and mental, is established. However, we need more than that to get a glimpse of the differences between past and present, which is probably the reason for the film to show another set of scenes from Bourton and the characters when they were young. So, the portrayal of time past and time present is not only done by means of the written thoughts of every character but by means of these two methods; the voice over to show their insights and the scenes of the past with the younger set of actors.

With respect to the other two dimensions we talked about before, the differences in portrayal between the novel and the film are others. The historical dimension is mostly shown when Septimus appears on screen, whereas in the novel, it is not only seen with Septimus but also in the way Clarissa feels about, among other things, time. He is surrounded not only by the image of his friend dying during the war but also of the

sounds of bombs or helicopters. The effect of war in his personality is made very obvious since, finally, he puts an end to his life. Perhaps, the biological dimension is the less explicit in this filmic adaptation. As we mentioned when discussing it within the novel, we said that Clarissa was put in the middle of women who are younger and older than her and this can be seen clearly in the movie thanks to the rest of female characters, but it is not given that much highlight.

## 4.1 THE HOURS

*The Hours* is a novel written by American writer Michael Cunningham, published on November 11, 1998. It deals with three women from three different generations affected by one novel by Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*.

“In very plain terms, one could say that *Mrs Dalloway* is about one day in the life of a woman [and] *The Hours* is, essentially, about one day in the lives of three women” (Klecker, 2011, p. 209). The first woman is Virginia Woolf herself at the time in which she is writing *Mrs Dalloway* in 1923 and fighting against her mental illness. The second woman is Laura Brown, the wife of a war veteran (Second World War), who is reading *Mrs Dalloway* in 1949 while she is planning a birthday party for her husband. The third woman is Clarissa Vaughn, who is planning a party in 2001 to celebrate an important literary prize, which has been received by her friend and ex-lover, Richard, who is dying of HIV. The situations of the three characters reflect situations lived by Clarissa Dalloway in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*. The three stories, even though they are intercalated, develop in a lineal way.

The novel was taken to the big screen by Stephen Daldry in 2002. Virginia Woolf is played by Nicole Kidman; Laura Brown by Julianne Moore; Clarissa Vaughn by Meryl Streep and Richard Brown by Ed Harris. The film received several international prizes including an Oscar for best actress to Nicole Kidman.

Same as I have mentioned with *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Hours* also covers various themes. Some of them could be love; dissatisfaction; sexuality and sexual identity; women and femininity; to name some. But again, the one that concerns us the most is time, from which we can explore many other themes.

The relation between *The Hours* and *Mrs Dalloway* is not only obvious by the appearance and importance of the novel in *The Hours* but also because of the title. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, Woolf’s provisional title for her novel was *The Hours* and, therefore, Cunningham’s intention to establish a connection between the two works becomes clearer. In fact, “the adaptation as a whole can be seen as a localization of Mrs Dalloway in time and place” (Huion, 2019, p. 113) since each of the three character’s experiences are related to Mrs Dalloway’s experiences herself and each of

them live in different times (1923, 1951, 2001) and places (Richmond, Los Angeles, New York). The similarities are not only about their experiences but also about how those experiences are shown; through the present day of each of the characters, same as in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Despite the differences in contexts and times in which Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughn are living, “the first scenes of *The Hours* are interlaced together as the three women start their day, creating visual connections between their lives and destinies” (Woldarczyk, 2016, p. 21); connections which are lost in the novel, since the written media does not allow the readers to visually perceive them. In the film, we get a strong sense of simultaneity that we do not get in the novel because the film interlaces scenes of the three women when they wake up, one after the other, and start their morning routine. Moreover, the three stories are unified by the same soundtrack music and the important presence of flowers in the three cases.

Same as we could see time divided into two major dimensions in *Mrs Dalloway*, subjective time (in the mind) and objective time (in the clock); time is also presented in two different perspectives in *The Hours* which are simultaneous: “*La perspectiva lineal de las tramas aisladas y la perspectiva, totalmente diferente y que finalmente destaca y triunfa, del entramado que constituye la serie de episodios alternos*” (Cánovas, 2016, p. 467). However, the importance of time in these works, both Cunningham’s novel and Daldry’s film, relies more heavily in other aspect. We have seen how identity is strongly related to time; how the historical context can shape us or how the biological dimension of time and life cycles affect people, especially women. Both dimensions were present in Woolf’s novel, nevertheless, the relevance of historical time, WWI in this case and how it affects the lives of Mrs Dalloway or Septimus, for instance, is highly notorious; when the biological dimension, at least in the filmic adaptation, is just presented but not deeply developed.

*The Hours*, both the novel and the film, take that lack of development and build themselves around it. Time and femininity seem to be their major concerns, exploring femininity through three different focalizations and showing how it is developed over time, from the 1920s until the 2000s. Some of the aspects portrayed are those of maternity; marriage; homosexuality or the role of women. From a woman who is ahead of her time but incapable of having children because of her mental illness to a woman



who has a son and another child coming but who feels unhappy and trapped in her heterosexual marriage, portraying the perfect angel in the house or to a woman who is independent, has a grown-up daughter and a wife but who feels suffocated too.

Gender roles have always been very marked in society, while men should behave like this, women should behave like that. This can be related to Judith Butler's idea of performativity, "to say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment; the 'appearance' of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strict binary frame)" (Butler, 2009, p. i). Nevertheless, despite this strict parameter of action, in Woolf's novel there is a moment which escapes that traditional and heteronormative structure which is the kiss between Clarissa and Sally; often reminded along the novel as the moment in which Clarissa felt freer than ever. With *The Hours*, Cunningham "offers three readings of this kiss, readings that represent three related insights about temporality based on Woolf's representation" (Haffey, 2010, p. 138). The kiss between Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell; the kiss between Laura Brown and her friend and neighbour, Kitty, and the kiss between Clarissa Vaughn and Richard Brown. The two first kisses may stand for hope of more to follow, for the beginning of something new or different; Virginia kisses Vanessa, whom she loves deeply and with whom she feels good and Laura kisses Kitty, another woman, creating inside of her a space for something which is unimaginable but that she wants. The third kiss of *The Hours* does not stand for hope mainly, but for the true moments of happiness of Clarissa's life. A kiss in the past when she was young and free, what is clearly more related to the kiss in *Mrs Dalloway* between Clarissa and Sally. Curiously, the kiss that makes Clarissa Vaughn happy is the one she gave to her friend Richard and not the ones she gives to her wife Sally and the kiss that makes Clarissa Dalloway happy is the one she gave to her friend Sally and not the ones that she gives to her husband Richard. Thanks to this play with names, Cunningham carries out an exploration of marriage and how every marriage is the same whether if it is a heterosexual or homosexual marriage. In terms of maternity, the character which escapes the normative structure the most is Laura Brown. The social discourses establish that being a mother is the most precious thing that can happen to a woman, however, we can see that Laura is completely unsatisfied with it. She completely breaks away with the figure of the perfect mother

when she abandons her children and her husband, something that a mother would never do.

The dissonance between what is presupposed about women and femininity and what is real is made explicit through *The Hours* taking especially into account the biological time related to the lives of the three women. Both the novel and the film succeed to portray it; however, it can be said that the movie is even more effective since it allows the spectators to perceive it from many different aspects and not only the written paper. For instance, the colour palate used in every story is showing us many things. If we take into account the scenes of Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughn, we can see how the scenes related to the former have a more bright and vibrant set of colours and the scenes related to the latter have more muted colours. Bright colours are usually related to happiness and in this movie, they surround a character who is socially forbidden to do what she wants and therefore, who is unhappy. Muted colours cause the opposite effect and they surround a woman who is independent, who is married and have a daughter; a character who could be seen as a successful person but, in the core of herself, she is unhappy too. This establishes a parallelism showing how even when time has progressed, and everything seems to be what it should be, it does not necessarily mean happiness.

## **5. TO THE LIGHTHOUSE**

*To the Lighthouse* is Virginia Woolf's fifth novel and it was published on May 5, 1927. It follows two days of the Ramsay family's holidays separated by a period of ten years.

This novel is divided into three different parts. The first one, called "The Window", starts with James asking to go to the lighthouse. While Mrs Ramsay holds out hope they will be able to go, Mr Ramsay claims that the weather will be awful. During the rest of this part, several bits of action take place between the Ramsays and the rest of the guests in the holiday house.

Part two is called "Time Passes", which will be of great importance for this paper, is the shortest part, though it compresses the longest period of time: ten years. During this part, we see how the decadence in which the holiday house is immersed takes control of the narrative and important news such as the death of some of the characters are given into brackets.

Finally, the third part, called "The Lighthouse" starts with Mr Ramsay and two of his children, Cam and James, finally going to the lighthouse while Lily finishes her painting of Mrs Ramsay. The importance of the latter is made clear especially in this part.

Again, same as what happens with *Mrs Dalloway*, the plot of *To the Lighthouse* is very simple, very quotidian, which, however, hides an exploration of Virginia Woolf's past and many questions that had always disturbed her. Some of them being memory and the past, gender, marriage, identity, manipulation, and of course the one which interests us the most, time. Nevertheless, besides having many themes in common, this novel is slightly different from the other two we have seen in this essay.

We can see some of the dimensions of time we have already explored such as the biological dimension since we have many female characters in the novel which correspond to the different moments of a life of a woman, from childhood to middle age. The two main female characters are Mrs Ramsay and Lily Briscoe which stand as opposites. Mrs Ramsay is the prototypical figure of a middle-aged woman who is married, who has children and who takes care of the house and of everybody and Lily Briscoe is a young woman who is not married and who is mainly interested in arts, behaviour which Mrs Ramsay does not like very much, as we can perceive when

reading the novel. Another dimension that we can grasp, especially through the second part of the novel, “Time Passes”, is the historical dimension and how World War I influenced the writing of *To the Lighthouse*. We can say that it keeps some relation to the T. S. Eliot’s poem, “The Waste Land” (1922), since what is presented in this part of the novel is a waste-land in a symbolic manner, to portray the effects of the war, not only in physical places but also in people’s minds.

However, the main dimension which is presented in Virginia Woolf’s fifth novel is the existential dimension. “Existential temporality can be defined as a merge between external and psychological temporality” (Cáceres Oyarzo, 2013, p. 25). With this definition the connection with *Mrs Dalloway* is immediate since *Mrs Dalloway* establishes a duality between those two temporalities, objective time given by the clock, for instance, and internal time, which is in the characters’ minds. Nevertheless, the difference lies in that *To the Lighthouse* does not explore the same duality but is a mixture of both times.

Existential temporality is closely linked to death, which is one of the most prominent elements explored in relation to time, if not the most. As a clear example we can say that the whole of the second chapter is a metaphor of death. It establishes a parallelism between the house which is deteriorating and emptying and a life which is progressively coming to its end. As Cáceres Oyarzo states, “the emptiness of the house corresponds to the idea that a group of characters are running away from time” (2013, p. 42). Nevertheless, time in this novel is not as explicitly portrayed as in *Mrs Dalloway* or *The Hours*. Here, there are no comings and goings between the past and the present or there are no clocks to give us the hour. In this novel, time is represented through space, so that the two elements cannot be separated. “Temporality is portrayed through the erosion of physical things caused by time” (2013, p. 22). The deterioration of the house leads us to think that many years have passed without being completely explicit. Of course, this is done on purpose since “the mere fact of being unable to decipher at first glance the temporality of the section allows the reader to enter into a dialogue with the novel” (2013, p. 19), asking for the reader to be active, one of the facts that makes of this novel not a light reading.

As it is well known, Virginia Woolf’s writing technique is stream of consciousness, therefore, the importance of consciousness is higher than what is outside the mind. In

Mrs Dalloway we can perceive how the second in which Clarissa transports herself into the past is of more importance to her than the whole time in which the party takes place. A second of remembering has more relevance than a few hours of a party in the present. This idea is also well conveyed in *To the Lighthouse* since “the middle part which treats external time covering ten years is given far less space in the novel than the other two which, in terms of clock-time, cover only parts of two days (Ashraf, 2006, p. 183-184). This issue is important because the novel seems to be proposing this question: “How can one encounter meaning as time moves constantly forward?” (Jackson-Dufault, 2016, p. 10). All the characters are trying to provide an answer to it and the only way we get it, is through their consciousness. Trying to find meaning is trying to put order into the chaos that surrounds us and each of the characters have their way. For instance, Mr Ramsay is a very teleological thinker, as we can say with the passage of the alphabet, because with this method of cause and effect, of one thing after the other, is when he can find his order. Lily will not be satisfied until she finishes her painting and the only way in which Mrs Ramsay will find meaning is to transcend her death, to be immortal. That is why, for instance, she wants everyone to remember her; because that way, when she is dead, her memory will perdure in everyone’s minds.

Now, having into account what we have been saying, *To the Lighthouse* “gives evidence of the effects of loss upon the subject. Lily Briscoe, Mr Ramsay, Cam and James, and the reader all experience the loss of Mrs Ramsay. When at the end of the novel Lily Briscoe realizes, years after Mrs Ramsay’s death, that she loves her and therefore, lost her, she is finally able to mourn the loss” (2016, p. 6) and this way, “the novel’s final vision [...] symbolizes not only the importance of Mrs Ramsay’s life and death, but serves as well to mark the passage of time” (2016, p. 16). On the one hand, we have the issue of death, related to Mrs Ramsay and, on the other hand, the issue of consciousness which is where mourning and loss takes place, same as the ability to get over it and finish our paintings.

The way in which the novel is written, from the very beginning, gives the readers the impression of being mere spectators of what is happening to the family and friends depicted throughout the pages. The first thing we read is, “‘Yes, of course, if it is fine tomorrow’ said Mrs. Ramsay,” which generates the feeling of having entered a room and listened to what the people in that room were talking about in the readers. This means that those people were there before without you and if you are not an active

reader, the story will keep going on without you; as if it was alive. Afterwards, in the second chapter, we read about Mrs Ramsay's death in brackets. Brackets are used when adding information to a text which is not important, information that, if taken out, nothing happens; which gives us the idea that human lives do not matter, life is going to keep going on when you are not around anymore. With these two instances, time, death and life are connected to the experience of the reader as well, creating the dialogue we mentioned before. Same as time and life will keep going on despite the death of someone, the story seems to keep going on even though the reader is not there.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion for this paper, I will try to establish a connection and to draw some comparisons between the three novels/films that we have explored in relation to time and how this issue is portrayed in them. What can be said to be evident is that time lies in the core of the three works, being fundamental in their development.

“Growing up in the intellectual environment of a literary family, Virginia Woolf was impressed by the need for contemporary writers to formulate a new approach to the treatment of time in their novels” (Nelson, 1969, p. ii). We can understand this idea as the motor that propelled Virginia Woolf’s concerns towards the exploration of time in her own novels. As we have been seeing throughout this essay, time is not only one of the main topics of Woolf’s work, but it also constitutes a whole range of different dimensions and gates to the treatment of other topics such as identity, femininity, death or history, to name but some. Woolf even manages to explore time not in the stories but in the novel itself, by the use of the stream of consciousness, “in this way, she keeps the narrative constantly moving, dynamic; the narrator never stagnates but rather always progresses forward through time” (Rogers, 2015, p. 3), which in a way involves the readers, who are in dialogue with the narrator and the whole novel, since “time does not slow down for the reader or writer to keep pace but is an ‘irrevocable’ force which readers must simply follow along with” (2015, p. 4).

*Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, both the novels and the films, have different approaches to time and different main focuses. The first one may be more related to the memories of youth and happiness and the second one may be more related to existentialism and death; very briefly and generally explained. Nevertheless, they share other concerns which we can read more between the lines since they are subtler. Two of the most important “secondary” topics are history and war, on the one hand, which are present in all the texts and constitute determinant factors when it comes to talking about identity and, on the other hand, femininity and the life cycle of a woman, which is also present in all of the works through the female protagonists. Here, the importance of *The Hours*, again both novel and film, lies particularly in that it takes this last issue and explores it deeply, not only with one female protagonist but three and each of them in

completely different situations, times and contexts so that we can see how similar or different femininity is through time and space.

We can see the different focus in both Woolf's novels, not only in their stories but also in their structure. We could say that *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* have the opposite structure. The first one, takes one single day of the life of the characters and expands it throughout the whole novel; the second one, compresses ten years in the smallest chapter, 'Time Passes', separating 'The Window' and 'The Lighthouse' whose major action, going to the lighthouse, is the same. This shows how "Mrs Dalloway moved up and down in time between past and present [and] *To the Lighthouse* shows what is to come is very much present and shapes the present, and how what is past can be recovered later" (Ashraf, 2006, p. 186). This last idea can be related to the structure of *The Hours*, intercalating the three stories and giving a sense of simultaneity even though the three of them occur in completely different times.

Virginia Woolf's interest in contemporary writers to formulate a new approach to time in their novels lead her to be the writer who formulated that approach. Through her explorations, she broke with the traditionalist view of time as objective, time in the clock, and treated time as the opposite, something which is subjective and even personal; showing the many dimensions that time can take and how each of them can shape people's identities, taking into account their historical time, their gender, their age, among others. Time, eventually, is not another topic among the variety of issues which Virginia Woolf explores in her novels but it has managed to become, as we have seen through this essay, a central topic from which the rest can be explored.



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