

# Novels & Adaptations: A Postmodern Intertextual Approach to *The Hours*

**BÓKA ZSOMBOR**

Anglisztika (BA), végzett hallgató

Irodalom és vizualitás tagozat, I. helyezett

Témavezető: dr. Reichmann Angelika főiskolai tanár

## 1. Introduction

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) became a great interest of authors around the Millennium. Three writers chose this novel as a starting point and reference for their rewrites. The first of these was Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (1998), which was followed by Robert Lippincott's *Mr. Dalloway* (1999) and John Lanchester's *Mr. Phillips* (2000). Among these novels Cunningham's work enjoys the greatest reputation; it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction as well. According to James Schiff there is an explanation why *Mrs. Dalloway* could attract these authors, which is the fact that it takes place in the time of a single day. As he puts in his essay, one can be fond of such a work "because the external action is quotidian and largely unexceptional, the writer of a single-day novel is compelled to focus on the internal life" ("Rewriting Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*" 363). Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* thus has many similarities with and countless references to Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and also to moments of Woolf's own life. These intertextual relations can be seen in the plot, characters, themes and writing technique as well.

Concerning the plot of the two novels it can be seen that *The Hours* is derived from *Mrs. Dalloway* and both texts complete the other one, make 'the story' more comprehensible. But the immediately striking difference is that Cunningham's novel tells the story of three women, instead of one. Each story represents another aspect of the novel: Woolf's strand is about the writing, Laura Brown's strand is about the reading and Clarissa Vaughan's is about the living itself, the acting out of Mrs. Dalloway's one day in June. Only that last strand (concerning the chronological order of the plots), Clarissa

Vaughan's story resembles *Mrs. Dalloway*. It is because Cunningham "originally set out simply to do *Mrs. Dalloway* in contemporary New York" (Schiff, "An Interview with Michael Cunningham" 113). This plot line follows Mrs. Dalloway's one day in June almost simultaneously and unchanged.

The introduction of this story is just like a shadow that clearly links the fate of the two women. "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" writes Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1). Cunningham's hypertext reads as follows: "There are still the flowers to buy" (9). And a few lines later, "What a thrill, what a shock [...]" (Cunningham 10) reflects on Woolf's "What a lark, what a plunge" (1). With a few exceptions/changes exactly the same story is told if we approach from the direction of *Mrs. Dalloway*. One major difference is that in *The Hours* Clarissa meets her "double," Richard (who is an equivalent of Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*) and the other that the party that Clarissa organises will never take place in Cunningham's novel. The most astonishing twist in Mrs. Dalloway's retold story is that now she lives with Sally in a lesbian relationship.

The other two plotlines are the "real" creations of Cunningham. The first is set in a suburb of London in 1923. A single day of Virginia Woolf's is told, when she begins to write *Mrs. Dalloway*. It is "an imagined day in the life of a real person" (Schiff, "An Interview with Michael Cunningham" 115). Cunningham confirmed that he did not recreate the real Virginia Woolf, only a person who "in her particulars resembles Virginia Woolf" (Schiff, "An Interview with Michael Cunningham" 116). We learn about a quite dull day in action, but psychologically it is very tense. During the day Woolf wakes up, starts to write *Mrs. Dalloway*, goes for a walk, Vanessa and the children visit her for tea, after they leave Woolf goes to the station to leave for London, but Mr. Woolf interferes, and both go back to their house. What is more important than the plot is the progress that we see before us about the production of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and we can also track down personal information about Mrs. Woolf. The third significant aspect of this strand is the almost goddess-like directing power that Woolf has over her fourth novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. This goddess-like almighty writer can be clearly seen in the "third" strand – the plot line of Clarissa Vaughan, taking place in contemporary New York – but it is also noticeable in the "second" strand, which tells one day of Laura Brown. Her story is again almost irrelevant and very simple. Laura is preparing a cake for her husband's birthday. She is visited by her neighbour and then goes to a hotel to commit suicide but she returns to her family – for a while. During her whole day she is under the influence of *Mrs. Dalloway* and throughout the novel, of Virginia Woolf. In her mind she always tries to compare herself to Mrs. Woolf and lead her life accordingly. "She is fascinated by the idea of [...] a woman of such brilliance [...] She, Laura, likes to imagine [...] that she has a touch of brilliance herself" (Cunningham 42). As in all the three strands, the focus is not on the external action but on the internal one, the character's consciousness is examined.

Looking at the characters, similarities can be found again. But Cunningham often altered their relation to one another. Thus there are "simple"/direct correspondences and "complex"/non-direct character parallels. The simple parallels in characters are the easiest to discover and understand. Clarissa Dalloway is the perfect character for such investigation. Clarissa Vaughan's daughter, Julia, is also a direct derivation from Woolf's novel (*Elizabeth Dalloway*). But here, in this "category" we can mention Walter Hardy (Hugh Whitebread), Evan (Evelyn Whitbread), Louis Waters (Peter Walsh) and Mary Krull (Doris Kilman) as well. The obvious difference from *Mrs. Dalloway* is that they all lead a homosexual life or have same-sex affection. The non-directly applied characters are Sally and Richard. Sally bears the functions of two characters from *Mrs. Dalloway*, one is Sally Seton's, as the name suggests, and the other is the function of Clarissa's husband. In Cunningham's novel Clarissa Vaughan chooses to live with her desired one. In Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* Clarissa, even though she kisses her and has tender feelings for

her, is not supposed to live a life with Sally. "Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love? [...] Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone run with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down!" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 27-30). Above all, Richard is probably the most transformed and condensed character in *The Hours*. His name suggests a similarity with Richard Dalloway, but instead Cunningham poses him as a mixed parallel of Captain Warren Smith, Peter Walsh and Virginia Woolf herself. The connection is established by making Richard a demented writer suffering from AIDS. Woolf writes that Smith hears the sparrows as "they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 20) whilst Cunningham's Richard hears jellyfish singing in a foreign language, archaic Greek (Cunningham 59). The AIDS epidemic is also a continuing parallel between the novels. Both characters, Richard and Warren Smith, suffer from their contemporary phenomenon; shell shock (World War I) and the AIDS epidemic of 1990s in the USA. "The relationship between the two novels could be listed for so long but the relationship is impossible to simplify; Cunningham interweaves aspects of Woolf's life, her novel and her theories" (Young 38). Tory Young suggests the reader should explore all of them by simply reading both novels. All in all, Cunningham created an Americanised version of *Mrs. Dalloway* and more importantly, as Schiff says, Cunningham's text becomes "more accessible" than Woolf's because it is not as ambiguous as its predecessor; thus it can popularize the canonical Woolfian text ("Rewriting Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*" 369).

In her fourth novel Woolf applies the so-called stream-of-consciousness technique which

as a literary term [...] generally refers to the presentation of a character's thoughts, feelings, reactions, etc., on an approximated preverbal level and with little or no direct comment or explanation by the author [...] In general, the term "stream of consciousness" is used as the description of mental life at the borderline of conscious thought and is characterized by the devices of association, reiteration of word- or symbol-motifs, apparent incoherence, and the reduction or elimination of normal syntax and punctuation to simulate the free flow of the character's mental processes. (Benet 969)

"The movements between characters [...] also make it difficult for the reader to locate the source of any given thought or construction of 'reality' in the text" (Hanson 57). In Cunningham's text it is simplified and the text is made much more comprehensible by reducing the intertanglements. He uses third person narration, present tense. The confusing part of this technique can be sometimes that we are not sure if it is the narrator or a character speaking in third person singular. Otherwise, the narrative technique is far less complicated than Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique.

Woolfian themes are also transmitted into the latter novel, among which life and death play an essentially central role. In the novels "'existence' is cause for celebration" (Bishop 52). In both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* people celebrate living in the closing scene, although the party does not take place in the latter novel. But the novels also suggest that death can be a mode of communication, and a "transmission of the mystery and beauty of life" (Hughes 356). The party itself is another central theme that is carried on in all three plotlines of Cunningham's novel. Sexuality is extremely highlighted in *The Hours*, kisses are essentially mass-produced but they are mainly homosexual in nature. Time also plays its important role as *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the difference of objective and subjective time, which is an echo of Bergson's philosophy of clock-time vs. duration. But "it seems very unlikely that she [Virginia Woolf] had read him [Bergson's theory]" (Lee 111). Cunningham deliberately uses the ideas of Bergson: he gives words to charac-

ters – “I seem to have fallen out of time” (Cunningham 62) that fit this philosophy and he breaks linear time.

Another media has also got involved with *The Hours*; film industry reused Cunningham’s text and created its own “product.” David Hare wrote the screenplay under the same title in 2002. With the film adaptation of such a novel three questions arise: the question of the techniques by which novels written in the narrative technique of stream of consciousness can be adapted to screen, the techniques of creating intertextual relations on screen and the question of fidelity. Regarding the techniques, David Hare’s greatest achievement in the case of *The Hours* is the simple realisation that movies are made up from two particles: pictures and language (speech). To convey the inner monologues and memories he invented scenes and dialogues on the basis of his “tell, don’t show” principle. His other achievement is the rubbing out of the borders of chapters and cutting the three strands of the novel next to each other, which makes the film enjoyable. However, it can be said that *The Hours* does not represent the stream of consciousness technique as much as Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* does. “[In *Mrs. Dalloway*] We are given many streams of consciousness. This [...] is what Cunningham finds hardest to replicate. [...] Only in the present-day strand does Cunningham toy with multiple streams of consciousness” (Mullan). David Hare also adheres to the idea that fidelity does not mean an actual word by word translation of the book into images. This translation can be only approximated as mediation between two languages (Corrigan 31). Concerning fidelity, Linda Hutcheon remarks that it should not be “the criterion of judgement or the focus of analysis” (*A Theory of Adaptation* 6). She would rather put the emphasis on the original meaning of adaptation that is “to adjust, to alter, to make suitable” (7). In my opinion the last “meaning” of the word is the most valid one as the screenwriter’s and the director’s task is to transform the written material (the book, *The Hours*) into images, to make the text suitable for screen. In postmodern adaptation theory, film is considered to be an intertextual “relative” of the written text. “Intertextuality can help us move beyond the stark choice of ‘either ... or’ to a thoroughly open appreciation of arts” (Brooker 112). Robert Stam irrevocably bulldozes the question of fidelity by the idea of intertextual dialogism. This “undermines the hierarchies and prejudices” which distinguishes the “original” text as a higher degree work than its adaptation (Brooker 112). Thus, examination by the notions and characteristics of postmodernism and intertextuality is recommended, as it has been mentioned above.

Stephen Daldry’s *The Hours*, a variation on Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, can be understood in a hypertext-hypertext relation. The adaptation of the novel creates the new “product” with its own tools, while its main concern is to unify the three loosely connected strands. The film uses its techniques to convey the concerns of the novel and cinematicise the relation between the strands and characters through cutting. The characteristics are visualised and the backgrounds of the characters are told in the movie; instead of flashbacks new dialogues reveal the inner monologues. Thus the new production stands as an example of successful and valid adaptation for novels that are highly intertextual and are full of internal monologues. This thesis focuses on the investigation of the movie, *The Hours*, adapted from Cunningham’s novel. Utilising postmodern intertextuality, the cinematic adaptation plays an essential role in the chain of the productions: Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, Cunningham’s *The Hours* and Daldry’s *The Hours*. Cinematic techniques, used during the production, are mainly about to link the three loosely related strands of the novel. The literary techniques are translated into filmic devices that are supported with the very essence of such production, film score. With montage technique, *mise-en-scène* and cutting Daldry manages to link the three plotlines of the novel and give clues to relations between characters. His – and David Hare’s – fidelity to the “original” story seems to be completed with a view of unhappiness and lamentation

on decisions by filmic measures. Philip Glass's music also serves as a unifying element of the production, which also creates tension and establishes mood with his minimalist technique.

## 2. Postmodernism & Intertextuality

Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* as a rewrite based on Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is a highly intertextual piece of art that also bears the characteristics of postmodernism. Thus it is inevitable to examine the notions of postmodernism and intertextuality, to determine and describe the basic frame of reference in which the above-mentioned works are going to be analysed.

Postmodernism is a current cultural phenomenon. It is difficult to define as it is an era that we still live in/with. Some assume a tacit definition but "both the enemies of the postmodern [...] and its supporters have refused to define precisely what they mean by their usage of the term, because they find too many annoying contradictions in its usage" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 37). One of the most often-quoted experts on postmodernism is Ihab Hassan, who made a rough distinction between modern and postmodern in "Towards a Concept of Postmodernism," trying to identify the difference between the two by building up binary oppositions. It is important to note that he did not want to give a definition but a concept because "any definition of postmodernism calls upon a four-fold vision of complementarities" (4). However, this attempt clearly shows a contradiction in the name of the notion, as it is derived from modernism, with which postmodernism tries to break. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, criticises this method of describing this cultural phenomenon because the "either/or thinking suggests a resolution of what I [she] see[s] as the unresolvable contradictions within postmodernism" (49). At this point, she might have taken no notice that Hassan had remarked that this list of concepts (dichotomies) does not show clear-cut boundaries, they "remain insecure, equivocal" (6). Postmodern is an "uncouth" name for the period, as it contains the very enemy within itself and suggests continuity with modernism. One of its consequences is that later eras could be named post-postmodernism, etc. (e.g. Alan Kirby in his essay "The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond" [2006] christened that era digimodernism). Thus Hassan tried to avoid this notion and suggested another one for this period, which he called the "Age of Indeterminance." It is created from two words: indeterminacy and immanence (3). By indeterminacy, (or indeterminacies) he meant a "complex referent" that contains many concepts. Basically these concepts or notions are related to decentralisation, disintegration, fragmentation and uncertainty. Everything, "ideas of author, audience, reading, writing, book, genre, critical theory, and of literature itself, have all suddenly become questionable" (Hassan 7). The "other part" of the word is immanence, by which he meant to emphasise the inner and not transcendental origin of thoughts and actions. Many have also tried to appoint the beginning of postmodernism, but it turned out to be quite a challenging task. Some declare the assassination of J.F. Kennedy as the starting point of the postmodern era. Others tried to give a foggier but maybe closer-to-reality idea for the set-out of postmodernism. "Umberto Eco has suggested that postmodernism is born at the moment when we discover that the world has no fixed center [...]" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 86). This idea also reflects the loss of order, a decentralised world that has already been touched upon by Hassan in his notion of indeterminance. But "there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world – and that we create them all. [...] The point is not exactly that the world is meaningless but any meaning that exists is of our own creation" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 43). Although postmodernism is believed to break with the traditions



and thought of modernism, it does not entirely negate its ancestor. “What it does do is interpret it freely; it ‘critically’ reviews it for its glories and its errors” (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 30). The past is critically reviewed in relationship with the present; thus postmodernism and its very literary characteristic, intertextuality, gives an opportunity “to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context” (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 118).

Another concept that is going to play a significant role in Cunningham’s novel, *The Hours*, was proposed by Roland Barthes. In his essay “The Death of the Author” (1967), he claimed that it was not the author that is the ultimate god or goddess of the text. It was an erroneous concept to look for the meaning of the work through its author. In his view, it had always been the case that the author’s life, personality, passions, etc. were examined, and thus the text was deciphered on the basis of this background knowledge, the author and the piece were linked by these factors. But it is the language that speaks, not the author. There is no linear father-son time relation between them but the two exist at the same time “here and now”. He rejected the idea that if you “find” the author (by find, I mean the research made for the sake of background knowledge) you have the meaning and the explanation of the work. But not only was the status of the author shaken in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was also revealed that there was no such thing as originality, the text was “replaced” by the notion of corpus. This idea through many transformations and reconsiderations led to the concept of intertextuality (Barthes 54-59).

The final crucial characteristic of the postmodern era – as far as the purposes of this paper are concerned – is “playgarism,” a playful plagiarism, using others’ texts and fragments of texts to create a mixture of them. This idea of playful mixture of already written texts actually developed itself into a concept that is now widely accepted: intertextuality. The notion was introduced by Julia Kristeva in her book *Sémiotikè* (1969) on the basis of Bakhtin’s dialogue theory. She puts that intertextuality is the appearance of a text in another one (Kristeva 85). And then she adds „Every text is made up as a mosaic of citations, all texts are the absorption and transformation of another text”<sup>1</sup> (Kristeva 145). She also finds that intertextuality is as old as literature; it has always existed and would always exist in every text. Later Gérard Genette also approves the idea of intertextual relations but he remarks that, of course, their extent can and does vary from piece to piece.

In his book, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982)<sup>2</sup> Genette introduced a new notion into the field of textuality on the basis of Julia Kristeva’s idea of intertextuality. He called it transtextuality, a transtextual relation. He described his notion as a textual transcendence of a text; in other words, everything that relates a text overtly or covertly to other ones (Genette 82). Within it he differentiated five subcategories:

1. intertextuality: one text’s actual, but eidetic appearance in another one. It is a relation that springs from the coinstantaneous existence of two or more texts. It can be further divided into three practises: quotation, plagiarism, allusion.
2. paratextuality: prefaces, epilogues, subtitles, chapter titles, additional notes
3. metatextuality: the commentary on the text that links one to another but does not quote or invoke.
4. hypertextuality: a relation, which links a later B text (that is the hypertext) to an earlier A text (that is the hypotext). ‘B’ can be also called a “second degree” text as it is superimposed on A. This kind of textuality has two subcategories: derivation and transformation. Derivation is a case when a text is “talking” about another one

<sup>1</sup> Translation is mine from the original French text: “Tout texte se construit comme une mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d’un autre texte”

<sup>2</sup> cf. Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsestes*. Paris, Seuil. 1982: 7-17.

(Aristotle's *Poetics* about *Oedipus Rex*), while transformation is a kind of relation when B never mentions A, but without knowing the source or the "original" work it cannot be understood. But even transformations can vary. Genette presented it in the following example: the relation between Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*/Joyce's *Ulysses*. He calls Joyce's *Ulysses* a 'simple' or 'direct' transformation as the Homeric story is put into contemporary Dublin's society. At the same time, Virgil's piece is an indirect and more complex transformation because Virgil did not try to lob *Odyssey*'s story but used its genre characteristics to create his own work. In other words: Virgil "imitated" Homer. This imitation is of a higher degree than simple transformation, as it needs the prior creation of a competence model: the author must master the text and its properties that they have chosen to imitate. All in all, a hypertext is a text that was created by the simple or indirect transformation (called: imitation) of another one (88). These transformations can have different purposes or processes: they can be parody, travesty or pastiche. Parody obviously holds the meaning and purpose within itself, an ironic imitation.<sup>3</sup> Travesty is a hypertextual relation which emerges when the original subject matter is changed little but is transformed into something ridiculous through incongruous language and style. And pastiche is an imitation, but it is rather an homage-like rewrite.

5. architextuality: is a totally dumb relation. It can serve only as a paratextual sign of the genre of the piece. But according to Genette, it is not the task of the text itself to declare its genre but it is the task of the reader or critic or whomsoever to decide which genre the actual piece belongs to. He mentioned Dante's *Divina Commedia* as an example for the problem of categorization (85).
6. In Cunningham's work, several textual relations, layers – which are proposed by Genette – can be traced. Intertextuality is obvious as whole lines, almost pages are stitched into the *The Hours* from *Mrs. Dalloway*, especially in Mrs. Brown's strand as she reads the novel. The quoted sections are always in italics to remind us of the source material.

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

*For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges;*

Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

It is Los Angeles. It is 1949.

Laura Brown is trying to lose herself. (37)

The paratextual relation cannot be as overtly seen as the intertextuality of the texts. A relation between the two analyzed works is not existent in this sense as *Mrs. Dalloway* has no subtitles or any other indicators that Genette might consider to be a paratextual relation. But Cunningham's work alone stands as an example of this kind of textuality as he divides his novel into chapters whose titles are a character's name – "Mrs. Dalloway", "Mrs. Woolf" and "Mrs. Brown" –, indicating which strand we are in. He also attaches a "Prologue" to the novel – the death of Virginia Woolf. Cunningham's rewrite also operates on a metatextual level as *The Hours* – as a title – reflects on Woolf's working title of *Mrs. Dalloway*. The most abstract relation, that is architextuality, is rather important during the cinematization of *The Hours*. Genette explains that this (5<sup>th</sup>) type gives only a slight clue about the genre of a piece (when it is embedded in the title or mentioned under the title). But when it is dumb, as it is in our case, it might indicate that a work

<sup>3</sup> One must not forget that Linda Hutcheon says: "Parody, therefore, is a form of imitation, but imitation characterised by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (*A Theory of Parody* 6). Her definition includes the other two categories: travesty and pastiche as well.

wants to avoid any affiliation with a specific genre. David Hare stated that his adaptation is quite a “genre-less” film, which resonates with Genette’s idea of architextuality. Hypertextual relations between the two books have already been discussed and presented in the introduction. They clearly show that Cunningham’s rewrite is more likely a pastiche than a simple homage à Woolf. The Mrs. Dalloway strand expresses that the novel wishes to outgrow the simple homage-like repetition of its ancestor.

In the movie *The Hours*, all of the relations can be examined even if they are not apparent. As far as adaptation is concerned with intertextuality, the “most useful” textual relation will be hypertextuality, because adaptations are “now seen as hypertexts derived from pre-existing hypotexts, transformed by operations of selection, amplification, concretization, and actualization” (Stam 209). This given, in the case of *The Hours* there is a triple intertextual chain. The movie obviously could not be made directly from the book. First, it had to be transposed into a form that is suitable for adaptation – the screenplay – and only then were the crew able to adapt it for screen. So, we have intertextual relations between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, *The Hours* as a book and *The Hours* as a screenplay and also *The Hours* as a screenplay and as a movie. The primary source of the movie is the screenplay that recasts and transforms the book to the means and tools of film. Other textual relations, like the paratextual relation, are almost wiped out; the paratextual relation is only kept at the very beginning of the movie. Even there, it does not feature the original chapter titles as indicated in Cunningham’s book, but coordinating titles as “New York, 2001” or “Los Angeles 1951.” The architextual relation is totally missing; even David Hare remarked that the difficulty of Cunningham’s book (or rather one of them) is that it has no specific genre. If we take Genette’s idea then it is our task to decide the genre of this work. The whole production may also be understood in a metatextual relation as well, as it comments on Cunningham’s text leaving out, adding and transforming scenes.

### 3. A Cinematic Analysis of The Hours

Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* would seem an unlikely candidate for cinematic adaptation. As the story explores the states of interiority and perception – the external actions are often mundane – it was quite a challenge to adapt such a literary novel for screen. A question raised by Schiff is the ‘how:’ how was this literary novel adapted to screen (“Reading and Writing on Screen” 165). The crucial element of such production is the handling of the internal monologues. In order to make the book adaptable David Hare invented dialogues to bring the inner thoughts and doubts to the surface. Beside this transformation of the text several of the Woolfian motifs, topics and themes have been preserved – the kiss (as an expression of sexuality), water, the mirror and flowers but also new ones have been added to the movie, like monotonous actions (breaking eggs) to create the mood of the scenes.

The most difficult task might have been to unite the three loosely related narrative strands to create a sense of one production. The connection and continuity is provided by David Hare’s screenplay. He freely changed the order of events and erased the boundaries of the novel’s chapters to make it adaptable at all to screen. “True fidelity can only be achieved through lavish promiscuity” (Hare, *The Hours* ix). At the very beginning, the three strands are introduced: after the prologue scene we can see Laura’s husband arriving home, after a cut Sally gets home and finally we see Mr. Woolf returning home. After this sketching of the three time- and plotlines there are several attempts to at least create a connection (if not a union) between the three strands. First, a montage is given, a technique that is used in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. We witness the



first moments of a morning of the three women. The most obvious connection is made between Mrs. Woolf and Clarissa, as they start to wash their faces and each phase is shown by the other character. During this phase Laura is preparing for reading *Mrs. Dalloway*.



Figure 1 Connecting Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Woolf

In this sequence it can be observed that the mirror is showing Clarissa and Mrs. Woolf from opposite directions, creating a sense of reflexivity and an author-and-book relation. On the left there is the author and opposite her Clarissa, “the novel” itself she is writing. They are also united by the position of the camera, as Clarissa is shown from behind and after the cut Mrs. Woolf can be seen in side-face position. But as she reaches the “lavatory” and looks into the mirror (that is a new element in comparison with the Cunningham novel) she is shown in the same way as Clarissa but from the other side. Laura is captured from a high angle that is absolutely alien from the other angles, which may express the insignificance of Laura as the camera angle is to suggest a “commentary on the subject matter” (Giannetti 14).



Figure 2 Flower as a connecting element of strands

The final component of this montage is added with the appearance of the very symbol of *Mrs. Dalloway*: flowers. The images of flowers are cut after each other to create a feeling of a single, continuous movement.

After these parallels and jumps between the plotlines we are “stuck” in the Woolfian strand. The actual relation of the three plotlines to one another is expressed after the above mentioned scene when Mrs. Woolf goes back up into her room (ivory tower of the artist?), starts writing her novel, and tries out the first sentence aloud: “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (Hare, *The Hours* 9). After the cut we can see Laura Brown reading *Mrs. Dalloway* and reading out the first sentence: “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (Hare, *The Hours* 9).



Figure 3 “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” in the different strands

And last, Clarissa Vaughan (alias Mrs. Dalloway) speaks out the sentence as she is reading the checklist of her later party: “Sally, I think I’ll buy the flowers myself” (Hare, *The Hours* 9). Here is the writer, the reader and the agent.

Another kind of connecting element that bears the importance of being a connecting theme in Woolf’s novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, is also present: vehicles. In the thematically and functionally very dense exposition of the movie these elements are also built in, but they can be discovered later as well. Trying to connect the strands the vehicles represent each era: a van in the 1950s, a metro at the millennium and T-model-like cars in the 1920s feature as establishing shots. All of them as representatives connect the three stories, just like the thoughts are connected and shifted from one person to another in Woolf’s novel.



Figure 4 Vehicles as a connecting element and theme from *Mrs. Dalloway*

Not only strands but even characters are connected and related to each other by cutting. Cunningham in his novel had already established a scene in the Woolfian plotline where the boys (Julian and Quentin Bell) find a dying bird and they want to make a funeral for it. This reminds Mrs. Woolf of her own longing for death, “She would like to lie down in its [the bird’s] place” (Cunningham 121). She identifies with the bird, but suddenly she thinks of Clarissa’s fate, “Clarissa, she thinks, is not the bride of death after all. Clarissa is the bed in which the bride is laid” (Cunningham 121). In the movie it is turned into a scene with multiple connections. The bird itself can be seen as Clarissa on the catafalque surrounded by yellow roses. Right after that Mrs. Woolf lies down next to the little bird and Laura’s face can be seen as she’s lying in the bed. Reflexivity and not parallelism is shown again with the opposite position of the two characters.



Figure 5 Death: Woolf, Clarissa, Mrs. Brown

It evokes the mirror-like reflexivity that can be observed at the beginning of the film when the three women wake up and Mrs. Woolf and Clarissa are standing in their respective room thinking about the day that is coming: both are shown in side-face but from the opposite direction. It seems as if they were facing each other with a mirror between them.



Figure 6 Mirror effect as a connection

The kiss is a motif preserved from *Mrs. Dalloway* that appears in *The Hours* in all three strands. Oddly, Woolf's kiss with her sister is going to be totally changed in the film. It is described by Cunningham in his novel as follows:

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 pleasures. Vanessa returns the kiss. (154)

In the film the whole situation is changed: it is not a secret kiss and not even a "delicious" one. It is a kind of violent 8-second long kiss in front of Angelica and maybe Mr. Woolf, which is suggested by a later cut of his watching his wife. It can be also seen that this "pleasure" gives no happiness to Woolf. Her sorrow is expressed more strongly than in Cunningham's novel, as in the book we learn about her devastation and misery only through her action: leaving for the train station to go back to London.



Figure 7 Mrs. Woolf's kiss

The other two kisses are represented more or less “accurately.” Laura’s kiss with her neighbour, Kitty, is a totally straightforward adaptation of the words, but in Clarissa’s case the same cannot be stated. In Cunningham’s novel Clarissa and her partner Sally kiss throughout the story, whilst in the movie they kiss only once and that is after the scene of Clarissa’s conversation with Richard’s mother, Laura. Although they kiss only at this moment, it is an invention of the screenwriter: Cunningham’s text here does not mention a kiss, only one on Clarissa’s forehead. The motivation behind this shift can be a shift in emphasis. The loads of kisses in the novel make the whole gesture routine-like and plain, while in the film with this delay they push the kiss to the moment that bears the greatest tension. In all three cases the kiss is a turning point in one’s life: Woolf decides to leave Richmond, Laura decides to leave her life, and Clarissa can leave behind “Mrs. Dalloway.”

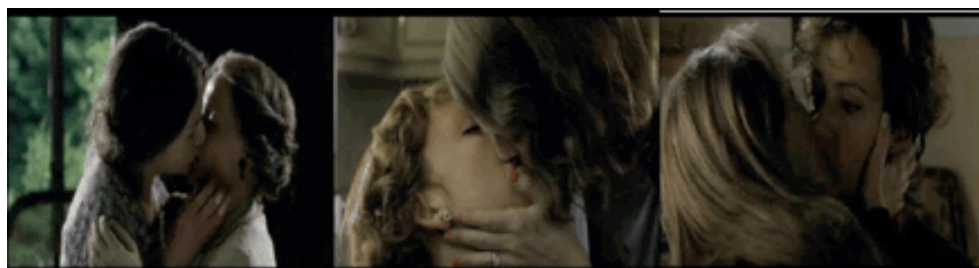


Figure 8 The three kisses

As a thematical background, the pattern of water is highlighted. It symbolises the flow of the thoughts and also (at least here) death. It also provides a frame for the movie that brings unity and harmony to the production that feels a whole and the water motif can serve as a background for the final invented thoughts of David Hare. Instead of “She hurries from the house, wearing a coat too heavy for the weather. It is 1941. Another war has begun” (Cunningham 3) the first shot is the river. For a closing Hare chose to use the water (river) again and sum up the idea of the movie. With a voice-over Virginia Woolf says the following:

Dear Leonard, to look life in the face, always to look life in the face,  
and to know what it is, to love it for what it is. At last to know it. To  
love it for what it is. And then put it away. Leonard, always the years  
between us, always the years, always the love. Always the hours.  
(Hare, *The Hours* 121-122)

Although water is an important motif of the movie, it appears only in two strands: in Woolf's and in Mrs. Brown's plotline. In the third strand (Mrs. Dalloway) this water motif cannot be detected so obviously. If we are to find "meaningful water" in Clarissa's story we might find that the emotional outbursts, cries are what water is transformed into. There are two cases in this storyline: first Clarissa breaks into tears and later, before his suicide, Richard's eyes brim with tears.

The flower and mirror themes are also carried on in the movie. They do not appear as emerging symbolic figures but as a permanent background material that is always on the surface. The clothes, the wallpaper, the jewellery all represent flowers with no denotation except for referring to femininity. Although mirrors appear physically in the movie as well, their most important role is to stand as a connecting element and a director of characters' position. The connections and switches made between the strands show these mirror-like counterparts.



Figure 9 Water as a connecting death motif

Virginia Woolf, as an almighty ruling goddess above the other characters (Clarissa, Laura, Richard) by her novel and thoughts is created by Hare and his script, mixing and cutting scenes after each other, in a way that in the Cunningham book cannot be carried out due to the strict chapter-based structure. In my opinion one of the best representations of such role is the sequence when Mrs. Woolf lets her husband know about her intentions with Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*:

Clarissa [...] will not die. She will be too much in love with life, with London. Virginia imagines someone else, [...] someone with a touch of genius, of poetry [...] a someone who is insane. (Cunningham 211)

Hare, to reveal Mrs. Woolf's intention, has to invent a conversation taking place between Mr. and Mrs. Woolf discussing the new novel.

LEONARD

And who will die?

VIRGINIA

The poet will die. The visionary. (*The Hours* 111)

After her sentence, it is made clear who will die: little Richie. Oddly, not the establishing shot of the 1950s follows Woolf's sentence but the shot of Richie. And this change in the order ultimately suggests that it is an important mixing up of the regular shot order to suggest the fate of Richie Brown.





Figure 10 Change in shot order

Hare and Daldry also played with rhythm and mood and pushed it to an extreme contrast. Death and life being the central topic of the movie they thought these two terms could be interpreted as a continuous circle. For this, they united the suicide scene of Richard and the birthday celebration of his father by cutting them next to each other. This might be a reflection on Mrs. Dalloway in Woolf's novel; she learns that a young man has committed suicide, goes into a little room but finally returns to the party, celebrating life. What is more bizarre is the following shot made right after Dan blows out the candles on the cake and Laura sits down. The shot made from the side is so perfectly set that it is almost just as 'annoying' as the scene when Laura finishes the washing up and everything is totally tidy, settled.

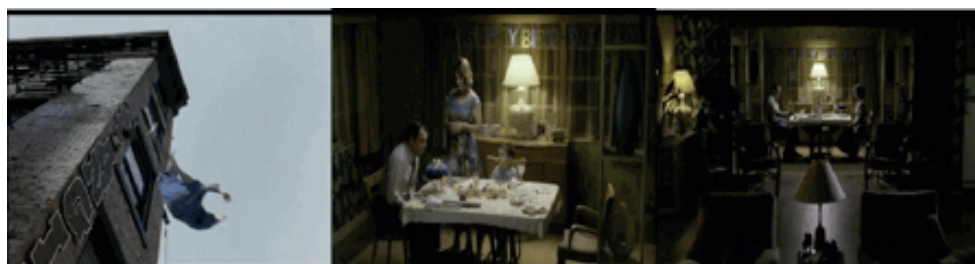


Figure 11 Circle of life

In Cunningham's novel creation plays an important role and this is also represented by the making of the cake. In *The Hours*, all three women are going to give a party and make preparations for that. Laura Brown's cake for her husband is not just a birthday cake, but the embodiment of her role as a woman. It exemplifies all her efforts to be an appropriate woman, wife and mother. Otherwise, it is only the surface, just like the party-giving for Clarissa. The real feelings are revealed by a beautiful shot in the movie, when Laura has finally made the perfect cake for Dan and has finished the cleaning up. The full shot of the kitchen and Laura shows that "this is she:" a bare personality (in this life) with the only thing that matters, the cake.



Figure 12 Mrs. Brown's emptiness

The perfect order and tidiness, however, is misleading. It is too much of order that becomes bizarrely odd and alien. Her whole life is empty in these conditions; she lives a life that she does not want. The window in the background can mean the escape from such a prison, as it serves Richard well later on. Earlier a connection is made and the denotation of the cake is revealed when the product of the first attempt is thrown out into the litter and after a cut there is Mr. Woolf making his prints (which will turn out to be imperfect as well). Representing such a process of creation is only characteristic for Cunningham.

Another distinctive feature of *The Hours*, cooking, as an embodiment of feminine creative activity, can be also traced along the three plotlines. It is similarly an essential symbol of creation and preparation for the party.



Figure 13 Cake as a symbol of creation

For two strands, there is a great opportunity to turn it into a creator of tension. In Mrs. Woolf's case, it is obvious that she has not got a good relationship with her servants and when she descends to discuss the daily menu and has a witty dialogue with Nelly the other servant is breaking eggs, which is quite annoying and intensifies the already established tension between the other two women.



Figure 14 Cooking and breaking eggs as a new element

In another case, it is Clarissa who is breaking the eggs while she is having conversation with an old friend, Louis Walters. They are recalling good old memories while Clarissa is breaking the eggs, but it is also symbolic here as the memories are also cracking her “husk,” her soul, and finally she bursts out in tears and says “I seem to be unravelling” (Hare, *The Hours* 68). There is another egg breaking-like effect at the beginning of the film when Laura’s husband opens all the doors of the cupboard and slams them back. This annoying action and sound reflects Laura’s conflict within herself: between her duties and desires as she is still in the bed.

The final scene in the movie is a masterpiece and a perfect example of how David Hare turned Cunningham’s discourse into adaptable dialogues for screen. In these shots, when two strands intertwine, Clarissa Vaughan and Laura Brown meet in Clarissa’s apartment. The twist of the adaptation is very clever because Cunningham’s text does not allow the filmmaker to reveal the history and motivation of Mrs. Brown:

So Laura Brown [...], the woman who fled her family [...] 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 the window onto a bed of broken glass. [...] Here is an old woman, a retired librarian from Toronto, wearing old woman’s shoes. (Cunningham 222-226)

David Hare again uses a technique of turning such discourse into a conversation.



Figure 15 Shots of the last conversation between Clarissa and Laura

The scene is thus prolonged and is given weight accordingly. The two women start to talk about Richard’s work as in Cunningham’s story but then Clarissa poses a question or rather a reproach and Laura starts to tell her history: “I left both my children. [...] I got a job in a library in Canada” (Hare, *The Hours* 118-119). The drama of these sentences is strengthened by the motionless camera. The harsh, straightforward words do not get relief, not even by a slight camera movement. During the whole conversation the camera

stays still, it is only the actors and words that create the drama. One can get the emotions of the characters as the camera shows both of them in increasingly closer close-ups.

I feel that the movie, although many have argued that it is about life, puts an emphasis on death and misery and escape as a solution. Concerning Clarissa's storyline it can be said that for her it has a relative "happy-end" because after Richard's death she is liberated and may lead the life that she wants to. She ceases to exist as Mrs. Dalloway and the burning question of "what if" does not apply any longer because the person (Richard) who nursed the fire is gone. In the other two characters' cases, such a "happy-end" cannot be seen – on the surface. Virginia Woolf kills herself and Laura Brown moves to Toronto, Canada. For Mrs. Brown life turned out to be something relatively good, at least she could leave the prison in which she lived with her husband and two children. However, a big price had to be paid for such absolution. She left her family behind her after the birth of the second child. We get to know that Dan Brown died of cancer, Richard's sister is dead and now the last family member has also died. But she justifies all that sacrifice: "It was death. I chose life" (Hare, *The Hours* 119). Regarding Mrs. Woolf, her suicide may seem to be an act of depression and despair, but in fact it serves again the character's happiness. David Hare justifies Woolf's last action in the railway station scene when Mr. and Mrs. Woolf are quarrelling. "I am dying in this town. [...] But if it is a choice between Richmond and death, I choose death" (*The Hours* 94-95). That is how death becomes a "welcoming friend" for Virginia Woolf at the very end of the movie. Although these deaths bring the three main characters tranquillity, it could be still very harsh for the audience to see and understand something else behind these extremely violent deeds.

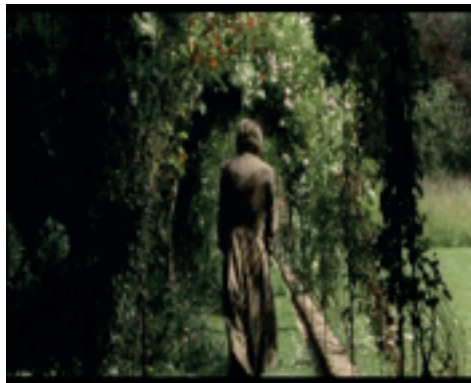


Figure 16 Reference to Woolf's writing technique

References to Virginia Woolf, her life and writing techniques, can also be observed. Some are built in the plot of her strand and some are just symbolic settings in the movie. The overt allusions are the place where she lives, near the River Ouse, the Hogarth Press House they established. But the covert references are much more to my interest. The most complex and "beautiful" implementation of such Woolfian references is the opening suicide scene. Within one frame the whole background technique and material is depicted when Woolf crosses arch trellis. The rambler is an echo from *Mrs. Dalloway* while the tunnel provided by the arch trellis serves as an allusion to Woolf's writing technique that she called a "tunnelling process." "I should say a good deal about *The Hours*, & my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; .... The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment" (Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* 60-61). Her personality is revealed through clever *mise-en-scène* and photography.

Turning her back on the camera shows a state of alienation from the world. The position of the camera helps us again to understand Woolf's character when she is having a walk thinking about Clarissa Dalloway's story. She sits on a bench and the camera is in three-quarter turn position first. This means "convey[ing] a character's unfriendly or antisocial feelings" (Giannaetti 74).

Her writing process is being filmed only in close-ups, nearly extreme ones "because the close-up magnifies the size of an object, it tends to elevate the importance of things, often suggesting a symbolic significance" (Giannetti 13). In this case, it gives more emphatic weight to the influence of her writing on other characters. The most intimate moment is shared with Mrs. Woolf, concerning shots and positions, in her last shots.



Figure 17 Mrs. Woolf writing the novel

The full front camera position makes the moment very intimate as Mrs. Woolf's voice-over tells the last thought as a conclusion. Such a majestic picture irrevocably strengthens her goddess-like role in the whole movie. Her voice-over throughout the whole production makes Woolf a puppet master pulling the strings of Laura and especially Clarissa.

Laura Brown's depiction is mainly centred on her motherhood, her relation with her son, Richie. It can be clearly read out of the story that Richie is always looking at her and because of this Laura feels uncomfortable. "He seems, almost always, to be waiting to see what she will do next [...] Alone with the child, though, she loses direction" (Cunningham 47). In the movie Richie's constant presence is demonstrated by the camera that shows Laura a bit from beneath as if it was Richie looking up on her. Although she is shot from beneath it is never a point-of-view shot. Laura's life and inner drives are depicted by Richie's play with his building blocks when he is left at Mrs. Latch's. The house that he builds represents Laura's "comfortable" home and by parking the car into it he "states" that she has driven into that life. But with one movement he destroys the building and that is the moment when Laura turns off the road to the hotel where she is going to commit suicide.



Figure 18 Richie's role as playing out Laura's life



This attempt of Laura's is linked to Mrs. Woolf's action. It is only a simple gesture but may serve as a link between the creator of *Mrs. Dalloway* and the creator of the perfect cake. When Laura occupies the hotel room and sits on the bed she is pictured from above and then removes her shoes. It is a close-up shot, just like the one when in the prologue Mrs. Woolf flows in the river and her shoe is got off. This sequence is shortly followed by the water motif pictured from a high angle making Laura insignificant and being directed from above/outside and not by herself. She is pictured almost in the same way as at the beginning of the film.



Figure 19 Mrs. Brown's suicide linked to Mrs. Woolf's

Regarding Laura's relation with *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is also clearly depicted and David Hare again very cleverly leaves out the voice-over of the silent readings of Laura. And when Laura is visited by Kitty, the neighbour, with an invention of a much more interesting dialogue than the one to be found in Cunningham's novel, Hare gives the words to Laura to sum up herself by the description of the novel she is reading. What is more grotesque is that on the surface we hear the story of Mrs. Dalloway but we suspect that it may be about Laura herself as well, and we must come to realise that these words summing up the plot become a perfect description of Kitty's state. With the bunch of yellow roses next to her the scene shows that we have here another Mrs. Dalloway. After her collapse as she tells Laura her problem, the fate-turning kiss occurs, which is as "sweet" as it is stated in the book.



Figure 20 New Mrs. Dalloway discovered, Laura's kiss

The strongest aspect of Richard Brown's story in the film is his relationship with her mother, Laura. We may learn about the connection between them quite late in the movie, right before Richard's suicide. The hatred of flashbacks can be observed again when shots of the two strands are cut after each other (Mrs. Dalloway's strand and Laura Brown's). After the jumps between the timelines we realise that the small guy, Richie, who is crying for her mother to come back, is actually the young Richard Brown. Hare

did not choose the flashback technique – as he “should have” – but instead he created this memory vision through “cutting”. But there is a minor sign that we are not in “real time” with the story being seen: Daldry slowed down the last few seconds of the travel of the car with Richard and Laura in it.

This sequence of shots holds so many symbolic and covert meanings that it is a must to examine it frame by frame. After the slow-motion pictures Laura’s wedding photo is shown, in which she is looking down as an unhappy bride (because that is what she is). The pills on the left and the slutty fingers can already ring the bell of whom we can expect to see and then it is, of course, revealed. But once again Richard is shown from behind, which means negligence – he has already decided that he will leave the world behind. The next shot represents his state brilliantly: the bars, reflected on the window, create a prison-like feeling from which he is about to escape. When he is a child the window serves again as a barrier, but at that moment it only blocks him from the mother. And finally, the mourning of the past “hours” that he lived appears on the screen. The decisions he has made and the “monster’s” – his mother’s – deeds have led to this moment. Before jumping out of the window he shows again an overt parallel with Septimus Warren Smith. Both of them were the clearest in mind before they committed suicide. Hare changes a bit Cunningham’s text and adds a few extra lines that link Richard’s final “step” with Woolf’s suicide, as he first paraphrases then quotes from Woolf’s suicide note: “You have been so good to me, Mrs. Dalloway. [...] I don’t think two people could have been happier than we’ve been” (Hare, *The Hours* 105-106).



Figure 21. Sequence shot of Richard non-flashback memories

Here, I agree with Henry Alley who in his essay “*Mrs. Dalloway* and Three of Its Contemporary Children” explains that by this action Roland Barthes’s idea of the death of the author is reflected in *The Hours* (417). Virginia Woolf’s death in Cunningham’s novel is quite odd and paradoxical but shows the postmodern attitude towards the floating “corpus.” The prologue is the scene when she drowns herself in the River Ouse. A few critics reviewed that such an opening does not fit in the story; it is not connected well enough. But I do think that such an opening shows a kind of framework in which the text can be understood or by which he refers to a postmodern idea. The death of Richard does not come as a great surprise, as he represents Septimus Warren Smith who has to die on the basis of Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. Up to this point there is nothing problematic about his suicide, but he happens to be the writer of poems and a novel in the *Mrs. Dalloway*

strand of *The Hours*. By the death of both authors in the novel I believe that the “criterion” for Barthes’s idea is fulfilled.

With this huge amount of cross-references, intertextual relations the movie tries to unify and bind the three strands together to prevent the production from falling into three separate entities. With the above images, it creates the sense of connections and of one, whole production. This attempt, however, is further strengthened by other means and aspects of the film. Notably, the soundtrack plays a crucial role in joining the plotlines.

## 4. Musical Contribution to the Motion Picture

The original soundtrack for the motion picture of *The Hours* proves to be an appropriate accompaniment. The score, written by Philip Glass, exploits the possibilities of using different themes of the movie and also tries to help to connect the seemingly loosely related plotlines. A genre-less movie, like *The Hours*, has special needs and the music of Glass seems to be quite a fitting pair with his classical minimal style. Annette Davison says in her article “High fidelity? Music in screen adaptations” that “in screen adaptation music is likely to play a significant role” (212). That is the case of *The Hours* as the score of Philip Glass does not simply unify the three strands but by different melodic themes he represents the main motifs and themes from the movie. It is very important to state that the composer’s source is not the text. His task is not to deliver the content and ideas of the source book, but to “chock up” the motion picture and the idea that it reflects.

The utmost task of the composer was to handle the three strands whose plots are set in three different eras. There could be two options:

1. The composer uses different styles of the periods or
2. He chooses a single uniting style that fits all the eras that the stories take place in.

Glass’s choice fell upon the latter but it could not be a big surprise as his previous works more or less had suggested a kind of uniting style. In general terms, the score can be analysed from three aspects: orchestration, rhythm and melody. The orchestration is quite a small-scaled one. The piano is a basic instrument for Glass in *The Hours*, which is completed with a string orchestra and a string quartet and he colours the music with harp, celesta and glockenspiel. This ensemble makes the orchestration quite a feminine one that emphasises the feminist reading of *The Hours* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. “[...] you can’t get more feminine than strings, piano and harp” says Lucy Davies (“Philip Glass *The Hours*: Original Soundtrack Review”). Regarding the rhythmic construction, the whole piece is very simple-structured, its score is clear as we are talking about American classical minimal style. – This is one of the major contemporary trends in the US. – This music is mostly constructed of patches, different fragments. It can be imagined as a piece of linen, spotted with different colours that refer to small different rhythmic and harmonic fragments of music, which sometimes collide. And this kind of music works well with movies according to Szabolcs Molnár (Bóka).

During my examination of the score the focus will fall upon the variations of orchestrations, rhythmic patterns, and the melody-harmony. Beside these, it is also very important to note where the music is placed. With the play of music-placement the composer and director can raise tension, emphasise a characteristic of a scene. Shots with or without music can gain and lose meaning. At the very beginning of the film, in the opening scene, when Virginia Woolf is going to commit suicide, a perfectly organised picture and music relation can be experienced. These very first shots of the movie take about one and a half minutes. During this sequence no music can be heard, which generates an uncomfortable and anxious atmosphere. One would expect a musical introduction as

the opening of the movie is the part when/where composers – just like in old time opera’s overtures – can make a statement, sum up the following 90 minutes or so and bring us into the movie at all. But silence is used very consciously and wisely. The sequence starts with a shot of the River Ouse which clearly states one of the thematic backgrounds. Then we see a woman (Virginia Woolf) getting dressed and leaving the house. Finally, Woolf reaches the bank of the river and says: “So I’m doing what seems to be the best thing to do” (Hare, *The Hours* 2). At this point finally music enters the film, which resolves the harsh tension that has been created by the silence. The Water Theme – as I call it – and a bit later the Death Theme will also appear. These two always go together. The higher strings and then the cellos start to play the triplet-rhythm theme: G-A-Bb.



Figure 22 The “plunge”

Connection is partly achieved by the single uniting style which arches over all the three plotlines as they are cut after each other under the (relatively) same music. Right after the prologue scene we see a truck turning into a street (which is also a reference to the linking role of cars in *Mrs. Dalloway*). We see Laura Brown’s husband coming home. We can hear the piano entering and the strings will enter a bit later. The piano plays a kind of alarm-melody and it is nice to observe the quavers in the bass, which provide the feeling of a clock that is silently ticking. As the strands are cut after each other we can observe a progression in music, the composer uses faster and faster rhythmic patterns: quavers, triplets, then semiquavers and sextuplets. Then suddenly the alarm clock is ringing and the piano’s trill imitates this sound, which is quite a playful moment of the score. When the three strands are dealt together; it is interesting to see how Glass and the crew created such a contradiction: the music reaches its climax when the three women get up suggesting a “plunge” into the day saying “What a lark!” but in fact none of them seems to be very joyful.

Virginia Woolf as a goddess-like puppet master figure is also represented in the music. By this emphatic step Glass can highlight the importance of writing this novel, and the novel itself as a directing force in others’ lives. Mrs. Woolf is writing *Mrs. Dalloway* in her own room and reveals the fate of Clarissa Dalloway then she is finally disturbed by Nelly, the servant. The musical offer for this smoothing-of-fates is simply that the quavers that are giving the harmonic foundations are “straightened:” they do not step up and down but the whole basic chord is played by them. This accompanies the Destiny Theme as I call it: A-F-G-C-D-G#.

Glass’s music is also capable of conveying the emotions and struggles of characters as it does in Laura’s case when she is going to make a cake for her husband as a birthday present. By revealing her inner conflicts Glass establishes the mood of the scene and the whole movie as well. The following music reflects the troubled soul of Laura Brown.



Figure 23 Mrs. Brown inside

We have to examine the two lines separately, as the upper melody is in a-minor and the bass is pulsing in F-major contrasting the expected women's task (that is expected from a wife) and Laura's own life and character. Musically this section (Laura's strand) might be the most complex due to the very carefully considered relations of the notes. Not only is her soul deciphered and presented by the music, but also an attempt is made to link the three plotlines. The harmonics that follow each other always have two common notes and the next chord is always connected to the previous one by these two notes. From bar 71, in the upper part (treble) there are rapidly played triplets of a-minor while in the bass the F-major is pulsing. Then from bar 75 a-minor switches into a harmony that can be understood as d-minor and parallelly the bass is transformed into A-major (that is suggested by the low C-sharp). And again, the music drives back to a-minor and F-major. The linkage between the chords is demonstrated as:

d-minor: D – F – A  
 F-major: F – A – C  
 a-minor: A – C – E

I have already mentioned a few so-called themes Glass uses in this masterpiece of his. In the next section I am going to present all the themes that are in relation with the investigation of the visual themes. The themes are actually in most of the cases harmonic fall-outs. Sometimes they really seem like a 'melody' but no great melodic theme can be found in the score, only one- or maximum two-bar-long harmonic steps. The water and the death theme appear first in the prologue.





Figure 24 The Water and Death Theme

They start the whole production that already suggests the mood of the film – if we take it seriously that the opening may serve as a hors d'œuvre harmonising with the succeeding material. These themes usually go together. They reappear at Richard's death and arch over the three plotlines. When it appears here, it is played in chords by the piano that gives relief. It is also relief for the first time but in the prologue we might hear it as a 'sad' death theme; by the end of the film we must realise that this death is anything but sad, that is why Glass may operate with the piano here, giving a kind of romantic mood for it.

Let me highlight two other very important themes: the Destiny Theme and the Memory Theme. The Destiny Theme is very often used: it accompanies us throughout the entire movie. Glass chose a-minor for this: A-F-G-C-D-G#. It is worth noting that he always leaves this sequence open at the end, never closes it with the tonic A.



Figure 25 The Water and Death themes in chords

This a-minor, in fact, is a very tactful choice: the minor always represents a lyrical, emotional sense/mood and the a-minor is especially a feminine, a “lighter,” a “brighter” key. It occurs many times during the film as I said: when Clarissa is going to leave Richard and Woolf’s voice-over is deciding Clarissa’s fate. Or it can be heard after the kiss between Laura Brown and her neighbour Kitty. After Kitty leaves, Laura struggles with her emotions and finally makes her decision of what to do next. And it is to make another cake that is perfect and then leave this world she lives in. When Virginia’s sister, Vanessa leaves Hogarth House the destiny theme is played again. Woolf asks “You think I may one day escape?” and Nessa replies “One day!” (Hare, *The Hours* 60-61). But it is clear from the situation and the expression of Vanessa’s face that it is never going to happen and thus Virginia’s fate is sealed as well.

The last theme that I want to present is the Memory Theme. This can be heard during kind of flashbacks. Fortunately, the film does not try to make the memories imaginary, the characters simply describe them. For this, Glass composed another theme, which appears again in a-minor as all the memories are related to women in the story. The a-minor is strengthened by the low-key A octave, if one were left in doubt as to what s/he hears. It is mainly concerned with the past of Clarissa and Richard. It first appears when the florist is wondering if it is Clarissa who is described in Richard’s book. Clarissa admits that it is based on their past, which Richard uses in his writing, and due to the exceptional acting of Meryl Streep it can be seen as good old memories burst onto the surface. But later – right before Richard commits suicide – the theme appears again when he asks Clarissa to tell him a story from her day. And Clarissa describes her morning and compares it with the one that they shared at the age of 18 at the beach in Wellfleet.

Intertextuality is a basis of my examinations (since adaptation is understood as a hypertext). However, intertextuality can be even more versatile. Not only can one text be embedded in another, but this can also happen to music. The phenomenon is called (by the analogy of intertextuality) intermusicality. In the ‘original’ soundtrack for the motion picture *The Hours* Philip Glass uses three of his previous works: *Satyagraha*, Act II, Scene 3: “Protest”, *Metamorphoses* no.2 and from the album *Glassworks* “Island.” It can be ironic that these are probably the most characteristic elements of the soundtracks. Glass kept them because he could not improve them or even replicate as they were done with inspiration that cannot be called up at will (Waldron). Daldry decided to ‘break’ Glass’s music when Clarissa meets Louis; at that point, Richard Strauss’s *The Four Last Songs* can be heard.

Philip Glass made a brilliant job uniting the three strands by his music. There have been a few negative expositions about his music and style but it is undoubtedly a masterpiece. His little orchestration, simple rhythmic and harmonic foundations provide a background that links the stories but he also emphasises the conceptual elements of the work. The one uniting style further strengthens the visual connections, his music creates the mood of the movie and the themes are also highlighted by his melody.

## 5. Conclusions

As James Schiff remarks “if there is no enhancement, then the exercise of adaptation would seem to have little meaning [...]” (“Reading and Writing” 165). The enhancement of this film adaptation is obviously the unification of the three plotlines by filmic devices.

Cunningham, in *The Hours*, uses literary tools to transform its hypotext, Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. He keeps the style and characteristics of the “original” novel but also makes it popular by reproducing it in a lighter mood. The “what if” dilemma is maintained in Cunningham’s novel but by combining characters from Woolf’s novel he shifts the

dilemma into a late twentieth-century environment, when characters live their lives as they would have wanted to in *Mrs. Dalloway* – seemingly. In the course of his novel, Cunningham explores all types of transtextual relations, which cannot always be separately investigated as Genette himself puts that they cannot be seen as separate entities and they often overlap (88).

The film adaptation can also be understood as a reproduction of Cunningham's novel - and not of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Taking intertextuality as a basis of the examination I could confront the different texts (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree) and compare them. As previously mentioned, not only novels can, could have transtextual relations, but film adaptations can also be interpreted in the context of their hypotext-hypertext relation to their source material, a novel. During the analysis of the movie, I could reveal the textual connections not only to the novel, *The Hours*, but also to Woolf's character and techniques.

To convey a novel full of inner monologues David Hare and Stephen Daldry had to create a new "language." Hare applied his "tell, don't show" method in the script and created connections and memories without flashbacks is the story. He also selects and creates scenes that bear great importance in the film, showing the emphasis on the reading of a novel that is about an unfulfilled life. He managed to unite the strands by cutting smaller sections from Cunningham's novel next to each other in a montage.

In Daldry's production, several techniques are present to connect the plotlines and to locate the strands' position to one another. His mirror positioning of characters is essential to reflect on the relations between the women in the film. With David Hare's previously created montage, he manages to connect the strands by the very symbols from *Mrs. Dalloway*, flowers and vehicles. In the movie, a few motifs have been slightly changed. The kiss has been transformed from innocent daily routine into a life-turning point in all the three women's life. The cooking motif was expanded: the significance of the egg-breaking procedure was added to it by Daldry. In all strands this procedure creates tension, not only because it is inconvenient for the characters but also because the monotonous, repeated breaks and cuttings make it frustrating. His pictorial aptitude and cuttings reveal the emotions of characters and create links between symbols like Mrs. Brown's cake and the proofs of Mr Woolf – which both turn out to be failures. David Hare and Stephen Daldry cleverly rubbed out the scenes that would have been ridiculous if they had been filmed, as in the case of Clarissa, when she descends to the dead body of Richard:

She would like to speak to him, but can't. [...] If she were able to speak she would say something – she can't tell what, exactly. [...] She would talk to him about how she herself, Clarissa, loved him [...] She would confess her desire to a relatively ordinary life [...] and to how much she wanted him to come to her party [...] She would ask for his forgiveness. (Cunningham 203)

They turned the inner monologues into actual dialogues, inventing new scenes that could be realised by the director.

Music also played its very important part in the production. Philip Glass's music provides further assurance for the unity of the movie with its single style for this genre-less novel and movie. Beside continuity and unity, his main concerns were also to create theme-motifs, melodies which can be tracked down in the novel – and in mainly the film as it is its primary source. He established this assistance on rhythmic patterns and harmonies, which are linked to each other.

By the end the production with its "outcome" style and Hare's "tell, don't show" philosophy the movie could provide a deeper and easier but critical and highly sophisticated version of *The Hours* (Hare, "Screenwriters On Screenwriting" 4-6).

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## 8. List of Illustrations

**Figure 1** Connecting Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Woolf

**Figure 2** Flower as a connecting element of strands

**Figure 3** "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" in the different strands

**Figure 4** Vehicles as a connecting element and theme from Mrs. Dalloway

**Figure 5** Death: Woolf, Clarissa, Mrs. Brown

**Figure 6** Mirror effect as a connection

**Figure 7** Mrs. Woolf's kiss

**Figure 8** The three kisses

**Figure 9** Water as a connecting death motif

**Figure 10** Change in shot order

**Figure 11** Circle of life

**Figure 12** Mrs. Brown's emptiness

**Figure 13** Cake as a symbol of creation

**Figure 14** Cooking and breaking eggs as a new element

**Figure 15** Shots of the last conversation between Clarissa

**Figure 16** Reference to Woolf's writing technique

**Figure 17** Mrs. Woolf writing the novel

**Figure 18** Richie's role as playing out Laura's life

**Figure 19** Mrs. Brown's suicide linked to Mrs. Woolf's

**Figure 20** New Mrs. Dalloway discovered, Laura's kiss

**Figure 21** Sequence shot of Richard's non-flashback memories

**Figure 22** The "plunge"

**Figure 23** Mrs. Brown inside

**Figure 24** The Water and Death theme

**Figure 25** The Water and Death themes in chords

**Figures 1-22** Daldry, Stephen, dir. *The Hours*. Paramount Pictures, 2002. Film.

**Figures 23-25** Glass, Philip. *The Hours*. Hal Leonard Corporation, 2003. Score.