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**The Depiction of Women and Their Mental Illness
in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours***

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Dedications

This dissertation is humbly dedicated to my dearest parents, whose unwavering love and support have shaped me to the person I am today. Your guidance, sacrifices, and endless encouragement have been the foundation upon which I've built my life.

Thank you for always believing in me, showering me with unconditional love. I am eternally grateful for your presence in my life. May Allah grant you a long life.

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Abstract

The portrayal of women from man point of view in literature has been a subject of controversy for centuries. Male authors have been portraying women as stereotypes, objectified them and limited their roles in society. The present research aims to investigate how feminist theories and approaches have evolved to address this issue and how it has impacted literature? Through exploring the strategies that feminist authors have employed to subvert or challenge male authors' problematic portrayal of women. The dissertation analyses the extent to which male authors have responded to feminist critique and whether their portrayal of women and their mental illness has changed over time or not. By examining the current study case, the investigator came to a conclusion that Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* has successfully portrayed women and their mental illnesses in different ways.

Keywords: Female Characters, Feminist Literature, Feminism, Mental Illness, Portrayal, The Hours.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Women's history, is a history full of challenges and difficulties, limitations and marginalization within society. Thus, the trajectory was nor easy to reach the circumstances women are living in today. However, the emergence of feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries ignited a powerful social movement that sought to dismantle the patriarchal structures that prevent women's progress and paved the way for several areas, especially literature.

Throughout history, literature has been very important in changing the stereotype of women in which it was and still since very long time the reflection of society. Feminists authors, made great use of literature to communicate their rights. By the emergence of women's writing through many phases female writers began to explore their unique lived experiences from their own point of view, unveiling the complexities of womanhood, and challenging the traditional narratives and stereotypes that confined them from male authors. Simultaneously, feminist literary criticism allows scholars to analyze and study these feminist literary works.

These advancements transformed the literary landscape included even the psychoanalytical literary criticism which played its significant role in shaping feminist literature and enhancing the comprehension of women's experiences by analysing the mental's thoughts, emotions and reactions within literature. psychoanalysis provided a framework to understand the psychological and emotional dimensions of women's lives. Through this interdisciplinary approach, feminist literature not only illuminated the external obstacles women encountered but also delved into the internal struggles and complexities of their individual psyches.

Prior to feminism's ascendancy, the portrayal of women in literature predominantly

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reflected the male authors' perspectives, often perpetuating narrow and stereotypical images. Women were frequently depicted as passive, subordinate, and confined to domestic roles. However, as feminism gained momentum, women authors and feminist literary critics began to challenge and subvert these one-dimensional portrayals. This shift marked a significant turning point in literature, transforming the portrayal of women from a narrow, often negative image, to a more nuanced, empowering, and authentic representation.

This research paper focused on whether the portrayal of women by male authors has changed by time or not. By examining the present work, the investigator intends to analyse and study the female elements in the novel by shedding lights on women's portrayal. The problematic raised can be summarized in three main questions:

- 1- How did male authors historically portray women in literature, and what are the typical stereotypes and restrictions imposed on female characters?
- 2- Did women's portrayal change over time? And what makes it change?
- 3- How are Women and their mental illness portrayed in Michael Cunningham's novel?

The previous questions proposed three hypotheses

- 1- Male authors portrayed women as stereotypes in literature.
- 2- Woman's Portrayal changed over time.
- 3- Michael Cunningham succeeded in portraying women and their mental illnesses in different ways.

In order to answer those questions and examine the validity of the hypotheses, the researcher finds it necessary to introduce two main chapters in the extended essay; the first chapter deals with literature review and theoretical framework within feminism.

General Introduction

While the second chapter focused on the literary analysis of Michael Cunningham's *the Hours*, stating his biography and an overview of the novel and a plot summary. emphasising on the portrayal of women and their mental illness in the novel.

Chapter One:

Theoretical Foundation

1.1 Introduction

Throughout history, women have been marginalized and oppressed by society for too long, but their struggles have led to the emergence of a powerful movement that fights for their rights and equality, namely "Feminism". The feminist movement has been one of the most important and influential social movements of the past century, that has spanned centuries and has impacted the lives of both women and men all over the world, from the earliest efforts to secure women's right to vote, to the more recent movements that aimed to end sexual harassment and assault against women.

Furthermore, the evolution of women's writing has been deeply intertwined with the progress and impact of the feminist movement. In the past, women faced numerous barriers that limited their opportunities to express themselves and share their perspectives through literature. However, with the emergence of feminism, women's writing began to challenge traditional norms and provide a platform for women's voices to be heard.

Hence, the subsequent chapter entitled "Theoretical Foundation", aims to give the reader a general idea about feminism as a concept by defining it from different perspectives and presenting its historical background and how it grows through time, until it got to where it is now. It also sets the stage for the theoretical approaches that was resulted from this movement, providing clear roadmap for the reader to understand the significance of Feminism on literature.

1.2. Definition of Feminism

While search in the topic of feminism, it is necessary to establish what this concept truly means. Feminism is a multifaceted ideology centers around the belief in gender equality, advocating for the social, political, and economic rights of all genders away from discrimination. With its roots tracing back to the 19th century, feminism has evolved over time to encompass various perspectives and movements. To gain a deeper understanding of the concept of feminism, it is important to analyze and examine the various perspectives in which it is demonstrated.

The word "feminism" is originally derived from the Latin word "femina," that means "woman" The term "féminisme" was first coined in the late 19th century and is often attributed to the French philosopher Charles Fourier, who used the term in his book "*Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales*" in 1837. While the first use of the word "feminist" was by Oxford English Dictionary in 1852, as "belief in the principle that women should have the same rights as men." This definition highlights the central aim of feminism, which is to achieve gender equality by addressing issues such as women's rights, representation, and social, economic, and political inequality.

Bell Hooks succinctly summarized the core goals of the feminist movement, by highlighting the fundamental aim of feminism, which is to eliminate gender-based discrimination and inequality, that can be exploited for economic or social gain. She writes, "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression,"(Hooks, 1984, p.108).

Hooks also emphasized the universal nature of the feminist struggle and its transformative potential to benefit everyone. This transformative approach recognizes that all

individuals are interconnected and that the liberation of one group is tied to the liberation of all.

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform society as a whole, to benefit everyone. (hooks, 2000. p.26).

1.3 The History of Feminism

Throughout history, women have fought for their rights, their voices, and their place in society. From the suffragettes of the early 20th century to the #MeToo movement of today, feminism has been a driving force for change and progress. But how did this movement begin? To answer to these questions, it must delve into the complex history of feminism, exploring the challenges, victories, and ongoing struggles of a movement that has transformed the lives of countless individuals around the world.

The emergence of feminism can be divided into waves, each representing a distinct period of activism and change, each raised distinct demands and got different results. The first wave, which began in the late 19th century, focused on women's suffrage and legal rights, paving the way for women's right to vote. The second wave, emerging in the 1960s and 70s, broadened the scope of feminist activism to include various issues such as challenging traditional gender roles, advocating for equal rights and opportunities, addressing workplace discrimination, and combating sexual violence. Additionally, the third wave, which emerged in the 1990s, was a response to criticisms, limitations, and perceived failures of the second wave.

Today, feminism is experiencing the rise of a fourth wave, driven by the power of social media and a renewed urgency to address persistent gender-based inequalities and combat sexual harassment.

1.3.1 The 1st Wave of Feminism

During a time of significant social and political change, women were systematically excluded from various areas of life, including politics, education, and employment, and were subjected to strict gender roles and expectations. The first wave of the feminist movement emerged as a response to these inequalities and gained momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The movement was initiated by a diverse group of women, including suffragettes, labor organizers, and social reformers, and was propelled by the historic women's rights convention held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. is said to be the first where women gathered together to demand their rights mainly, the right of voting by famous suffragettes Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who presented the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments Document. Newspapers at that time criticized the document and the meeting, calling it "the most shocking and unnatural event ever recorded in the history of womanity."

Thus establishing the beginning of the first wave feminist movement led by a diverse group of women, including suffragettes, labor organizers, and social reformers. Some key figures and organizations include Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and the Women's Trade Union League.

Mary Wollstonecraft's book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), played a pivotal role in inspiring feminist activism and became a foundational text for the first wave of feminism, advocating for women's education, political representation, and challenging gender stereotypes. According to Javeed Ahmad Raina " *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* can

be said to be the precursor for such suffragette movements". He added Mary Wollstoncraft , " is regarded as the foremother of British feminist criticism who provided insights to suffragettes to fight the battle for women's rights." (Javeed ,2017. p.3374)

The main demands of the first wave feminist movement focused on securing women's right to vote but also encompassed broader goals related to women's social, economic, and political rights, including access to education, employment, legal and political equality, and the eradication of discriminatory laws and practices.

The movement employed various methods and strategies such as lobbying, organizing rallies and demonstrations, and engaging in civil disobedience. Suffragettes notably utilised hunger strikes, picketing, and other forms of direct action. As a result, the first wave of feminism achieved significant victories, such as the passage of the 19th Amendment in the United States that granted women the right to vote. However, the movement faced criticism for its exclusion of women of color and working-class women, as well as its limited focus on women's economic and social rights.

Nonetheless, the first wave of feminism inspired a new generation of women to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations, leading to the demand for greater rights and opportunities. It also influenced various cultural and artistic expressions, including literature, music, and visual art, with writers like Virginia Woolf and Charlotte Perkins Gilman and artists like Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot exploring women's experiences and questioning societal norms.

1.3.2 The 2nd Wave of Feminism.

This wave occurred from the 1960s to the 1980s, with the peak of the movement in the 1970s. While the first wave of feminism focused on securing legal rights for women, such as the right to vote, the second wave sought to address broader issues of social and cultural inequality. This wave brought attention to another issues; including the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, access to abortion and birth control, the elimination of gender-based discrimination in the workplace, and the recognition of women's unpaid labor in the home.

Estelle Freedman (2002) compares first and second-wave feminism explaining that the first wave focused on getting women the right to vote and other legal rights for women, whereas the second wave focused on broader issues of gender equality, such as fighting against gender discrimination in various areas of life.

The second wave of feminism employed different strategies to achieve its goals, including consciousness-raising groups, lobbying efforts, protests, and civil disobedience, led by a number of influential figures such as; Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Angela Davis, and Audre Lorde.

The second wave of feminism saw the emergence of intersectional feminism, which highlighted the ways in which sexism intersected with other forms of oppression, such as racism, homophobia and ableism. For example, Black women faced both racism and sexism, and their experiences of discrimination are shaped by the intersection of these two identities.

Bell Hooks in her book "*Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*," describes how intersectionality allows us to better understand the experiences of women who face multiple forms of oppression. She writes:

"Looking at the black woman's experience of oppression, then, one sees not only the way race, class, and sex intersect to create a context of domination but also how they interact to create a specific kind of oppression" (hooks, 1981, p. 22).

The second wave of feminism saw the emergence of feminist literature and theories as a sign of success even if it wasn't enough, with writers such as; Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Germaine Greer challenging traditional notions of gender roles and social science approaches that ignored or marginalized women's experiences. Additionally, this wave brought a renewed effort to establish recognition for women's works and contributions. Universities started offering classes in women's history and literature, while publishing houses emerged with a specific focus on publishing overlooked works by women. More recently, the concept of intersectionality has gained prominence, encouraging the exploration of how race, gender, religion, and class intersect and emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the role of marginalized groups in literature.

1.3.3 The 3rd Wave of Feminism

The third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1990s, following the second wave of the 1960s and 70s. It was a continuation to the second wave failed demands and a response to the backlash against the movement. It arose in a context of second wave feminists were too focused on the experiences of white, middle-class women, and that it failed to address issues of race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and more. This wave sought to broaden the scope of feminism to include the experiences and perspectives of a more diverse range of women.

Intersectionality keeps to be present as one of the key features of the third wave feminist movement, Bell Hooks claimed that "The third wave of feminism is not just about rejecting the sexism of the past; it is about creating a new feminism that embraces diversity and is truly inclusive." (2000).

1.3.4 The 4th Wave of Feminism

This wave began in the period of 2008 and 2012 till now, and it is characterized by the use of social media and online activism that made it easier than ever for feminists to connect and organize politically across the world. Online platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have been used to raise awareness sexual harassment, assault and rape culture.

One of the key realizations of the fourth wave feminism is the #Me Too movement, which began in 2017 as a viral awareness campaign to empower gender and sexual violence survivors to speak up their stories about sexual abuse and make public allegations against the prominent (often male) perpetrators.

The fourth wave of feminism recognizes that women's struggles are connected across the globe, and advocates for global solidarity, including issues affecting women in developing countries, as well as acknowledging the impact of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization on women's lives.

1.4 Feminism in Literature

Literature has long served as a mirror of society, reflecting its values, beliefs, and aspirations. Within this vast area of storytelling, women's voices are often marginalized or overshadowed, and their experiences are relegated to the margins of literary discourse. Despite all odds, countless women authors persisted, forming a path that would redefine the literary canon and create spaces for their stories to be heard.

However, the emergence of feminist literary movements has changed the literary landscape by creating rich and diverse collections that challenges patriarchal norms and celebrate women's multifaceted identities. Feminist literary theory and criticism have emerged as powerful tools for analyzing and interpreting women's literature, offset by women's writing as a literary field that supports the feminist goals.

1.4.1 Women's writing

Women's writing has often been marginalized and overshadowed by men's dominated voices in literature. Women writers faced many obstacles in their quest for recognition and publishing. Societal norms and prejudices often refer women's writing to the margins, making them less important or relevant compared to the work of their male counterparts.

Women's writing was generally defined by scholars as a category of writing done by women. It is mainly defined as a discrete area of literary studies which supports the feminist goals by exploring women's unique perspectives, experiences, and voices. It encompasses various genres, including writings of fiction, non-fiction, novels, poetry, essays, and plays.

Virginia Woolf in her book *"A Room of One's Own"* argues that women's writing is influenced by the historical limitations placed upon women and their access to education and creative opportunities. Woolf suggests that women's writing represents a distinct perspective shaped by these experiences. She writes, "Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size ... whatever may be their use in civilised societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action" (Woolf, 1929. p. 35)

According to Elaine Showalter, women's writing is characterized by its focus on female experiences, the exploration of gender roles and identities, and the engagement with feminist concerns. Showalter states, "Women's writing aims to create a female tradition of writing, one

that makes women's history, subjectivity, and creativity central to the literary enterprise." (Showalter, 1977. p. 125).

Elaine Showalter in her book, "*A Literature of Their Own*" published in 1977 outlines a historical framework for women's writing, dividing it into four distinct stages. The initial stage, known as the "Feminine Stage" (1840-1880), is characterized by subordination and imitation, where women writers often emulated the established literary conventions and styles of dominant male authors. Their works, unfortunately, faced a degree of invisibility due to pervasive gender inequality " which pushed them to write under male pseudonyms (like Bradley held on under James Tiptree and Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin under George Sand). Otherwise, their works would never be published ". (Rezigue & Mouro, 2022. p. 468).

The second stage, referred to as the "Feminist Stage" (1880-1920), represents a period of protest and autonomy. During this stage, women writers started to break away from the male-dominated artistic norms and develop their own distinct voices. Rezigue & Mouro (2012) demonstrated "Women writers wrote independently to make their voices louder than before and in contention with male counterparts whose literary world expelled women writers as vivid entities epitomizing the women characters .

The "Female Stage" (1970-ongoing) is the third stage which characterized by autonomy. Women writers in this period shifted their attention to the search for a distinct female literary tradition by focusing on the female writing and the female experience. Writers did not aim to imitate or rebel instead; their primary emphasis lay on exploring their own inner beings.

This phase represents development in women's writing and literary criticism, there was a transition from the books written by men (androtxts) to publication of new writings by women (gynotxts) .

Elaine Showalter in her essay " *Toward a Feminist Poetics* " (1979) puts forward a strong argument for the necessity of developing a female-centered framework for the analysis of female literary tradition by creating a critical approach that focused on understanding and interpreting women's literature from a female perspective. She coins the term "gynocriticism" to describe this process, she wants to "construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories" (Showalter, 1985. p.131)

Gynocriticism centers its attention on three primary areas. Firstly, the position and contributions of women writers within the broader context of literary history, sought to resound their marginalized voices. Second, gynocriticism critically assesses the treatment and portrayal of women within literature. Finally, discovering a literary canon that celebrates the diverse range of works created by women. In short, gynocritics is a form of feminist literary criticism that aims to study and analyse women's writings from a feminist perspective, focusing on the unique experiences, perspectives, and literary achievements of women.

1.4.2 Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist criticism is a form of literary criticism that is informed by feminist theories, or more broadly by Feminism. It can be described as the application of feminist principles to critique literature dominated by male perspectives, effectively addressing the social, political, economic, and psychological oppression of women within literary works. According to Showalter, Feminist Literary Criticism is defined as "the critique of male texts by women writers and the critique of female texts by women critics" (Showalter, 1985, p. 136).

Feminist Theory seeks to identify and eliminate the underlying sexism present in mainstream literature. Additionally, the main goal of Feminist Literary Criticism aims to raise awareness about the dynamics of sexual politics and analyze the works of female writers from

a feminist perspective. Elaine Showalter summarized;

"Feminist criticism... is concerned with the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality, analyze the portrayal and representation of women in literature, and uncover the historical, social, and ideological conditions that have contributed to women's marginalization"

(Showalter, 1985, p. 17).

In the other hand, Showalter (1998) divided Feminist literary criticism into two waves. The first wave which emerged during the second wave of feminism, focused mainly on "recovery" and "rediscovery" of women's literature and the analysis of gender bias in canonical texts. The main goal was bringing attention to women writings and challenging the prevailing male-dominated literary canon. While the second wave continued in the achievement of the first wave to expand its analysis to "recover, historicise, interpret and re-evaluate women's writing" (Lorraine, 2000, p.496).

Women have been able to change their societal status thanks to their solidarity under the same movement known as feminism. This movement have also had an impact on literary texts, as women writers are inherently invested in literature since it directly reflects their status as recognised literary figures.

1.5 Feminism and Psychoanalysis

Feminism has impacted on various fields of study, including psychoanalysis, its emergence led to overall reconsideration of assumptions and limitations within psychoanalytic theory. Feminist scholars have challenged the male-centric perspective that had dominated

psychoanalysis, which often infected women and overlooked the complexities of their experiences. This has not only led to the development of feminist psychoanalysis but has also pushed for the integration of gender-sensitive approaches in psychoanalytic theory, for a better understanding of human behavior and mental health.

Psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, is a psychological theory and therapeutic approach that aims to understand the intricacies of the human mind and behavior. Moreover, psychoanalysis is the belief that our thoughts, emotions, and actions are influenced by unconscious processes, often rooted in early childhood experiences.

Psychoanalysis emerged in the late 19th. At the time, Western societies were grappling with social changes, including the erosion of traditional values, the rise of industrialization, and the emergence of feminism. However, it is important to acknowledge that early psychoanalysis was influenced by patriarchal society. Freud's theories often portrayed women as inferior or characterized them through stereotypes. Additionally, the case studies and research conducted by Freud and his early followers primarily focused on male patients, that limited the understanding of women's experience and mental illnesses to perpetuate gender inequalities within the field. Nevertheless, the emergence of psychoanalytic literary criticism expanded the understanding of gender women's experiences within the framework of psychoanalytic theory.

1.5.1 Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

Psychoanalytic literary criticism is a form of literary criticism that analyse and interpret literary works based on psychoanalytic theory in order to understand the mental conflicts through narratives or characters. As Rivkin and Ryan (1998) explain, "applies the concepts and methods of psychoanalysis to the reading and interpretation of literature, with the aim of

understanding how literature both reflects and explores the psychological depths of human experience" (p. 506).

The emergence of psychoanalytic literary criticism can be traced back to the mid-20th century when scholars began applying psychoanalytic theories and concepts to the analysis of literary works. Psychoanalytic literary criticism seeks to uncover unconscious conflicts, struggles and desires, shedding light on the psychological complexities of characters and the underlying themes explored by authors.

1.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has been mostly concerned with feminism and its historical context, to gain a comprehensive understanding of its evolution and the various waves that have shaped its trajectory. Additionally, this chapter has delved into key theoretical approaches within feminism, namely women's writing, feminist literary criticism, and psychoanalytic literary criticism.

Women's writing has emerged as a crucial framework that recognizes the experiences and perspectives of women writers, challenging the dominant male-centered literary canon. Feminist literary criticism that provides a lens through which literary works are analyzed, by interrogating the portrayal of female characters and gender roles within literary texts. On the other hand, the chapter has explored the role of psychoanalytic literary criticism within feminism, which examines the psychological dimensions of feminist literary texts to understand the rowing from psychoanalytic theories, this approach scrutinizes the unconscious desires, repressions, and conflicts that shape characters and narratives. It offers valuable insights into the ways in which gender identity and social expectations intersect with the psyche.

Chapter Two:
The Depiction of Women and
Their Mental Illness in Michael
Cunnigham's *The Hours*

Chapter Two: The Depiction of Women and Their Mental Illness in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*

2.1 Introduction:

Feminist literature has had its great impact on English literature. It has helped to expose the gender inequality that exists in society and has given women a voice in a traditionally male-dominated field. Feminist literature has also inspired new forms of writing and has encouraged writers to explore new themes and topics that changed somehow the prevailing stereotypes. It is characterised with quantum leap, from being literature written by women only to literature produced by men as well.

From this perceptive, the second chapter deals with Michael Cunningham' s novel "*The Hours* "in which the author has responded to the Portrayal of women issue. As a male author, he successfully depicts women in a different way in comparison with his male predecessors with a special touch based on both psychological approach and feminist literary critique, to make a new change in the feminist literature and the portrayal of women from males' point of view.

2.2 Biography of Michael Cunningham

Michael Cunningham, one of the most famous American postmodernism writers, he was born in November, 6th 1952 in Cincinnati, Ohio, and raised in California where he pursued his higher Education at Stanford University, receiving his B.A degree in English literature major. Later, he attended the University of Iowa, where he received a Michener Fellowship and completed a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative writing from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. During his time at Iowa, he had some of his short stories published in prestigious magazines such as *the Atlantic Monthly* and *the Paris Review*. One of his short stories, entitled "*White Angel*", became a chapter in his novel called *A Home at the End of the World*. This story was

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featured in *The Best American Short Stories, 1989*," which was published by Houghton Mifflin.

Cunningham displayed exceptional talent as a writer. His journey into the world of literature started with the release of his first novel *Golden States*, in 1984.

He has received several awards and fellowships throughout his career. In 1993, he was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship. Then, he was honored with a Whiting Writers Award. Additionally, he received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1998. He continued his writing career with subsequent works like *A Home at the End of the World*, *Flesh and Blood*, and his highly praised masterpiece, *The Hours*, which remains his most celebrated accomplishment to this day. Cunningham has shared his knowledge and expertise by teaching at the Fine Arts Work Center in Massachusetts, as well as in the creative writing M.F.A. program at Brooklyn. Currently, he holds the position of senior lecturer of creative writing at Yale University.

2.3 - About the Work

The Hours is a realistic novel written by Michael Cunningham in 1998. The book pays homage to Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. "The Hours" was the original drafting title that Virginia Woolf used for her novel before she called it *Mrs. Dalloway*. Cunningham skillfully adopts Woolf's narrative style characterized by the flow of thoughts and feelings, but he reimagines the characters and themes in a contemporary setting, making them with his own touch.

The Hours is a novel from the point of view of three different women from different settings. Each profoundly influenced by *Mrs. Dalloway* including a fictional version of Virginia Woolf herself while writing her novel "*Mrs. Dalloway*" in 1923, and suffering from mental

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illness. Laura Brown, an unhappy housewife in 1949 Los Angeles, reading Ms. Dalloway while preparing her husband birthday cake. Clarissa Vaughan is 52 years old, publisher in New York City, plans a party to celebrate her former boyfriend award, while he is dying of an AIDS-related illness. Each story tells "the experience of a particular woman during the course of one day " (Nogueira, 2009, p. 32)

All of the characters' lives are interlined in a way or another, "they are writer, reader, and character of the novel Mrs. Dalloway " (Saraswati, 2014, p.188). Each woman has closely related thoughts and struggle with her mental illness, striving for not only perfection, but also happiness in her life. They all grapple with the traumas of their respective generations, such as World War I, World War II, and the AIDS crisis. Additionally, they have all been affected by depression and mental illness which is the main themes of the novel, with "Mrs. Dalloway" as a common force in each of their lives. Through intertwining their narratives, the author, Michael Cunningham, allows to delve deep into the lives of these women and reveals their true extraordinariness. Till they all intertwined in the end of the story.

2.4 Plot Analysis and Critics

The novel opened with a prologue; The scene of the protagonist' s suicide. To be later followed by three essential chapters, Mrs. Dalloway' s section, Mrs. Woolf's section and Mrs. Brown's section, and just Like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Hours* follows the three women on a single day of their life.

Similar to Clarissa Dalloway in "Mrs. Dalloway," Clarissa Vaughan begins her day by buying flowers for a party she is hosting. The gathering serves the celebration of prestigious literary award given to her former lover who is dying from AIDS. Through her preparations for

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the party and her interactions with Richard and others, Clarissa reflects on her own life choices, regrets, and the complexities of her relationships.

Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, wakes up to face another day of struggling with writer's block. She was confined in the Richmond, because of her mental illness struggles. After exchanging morning greetings with her husband Leonard, she retreats to her room in an attempt to imagine a day in the life of her novel's protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway.

Meanwhile, Laura Brown, a housewife and a reader of "*Mrs. Dalloway*", Feeling trapped in a life she didn't want, in her role as a mother and wife, she spends her husband's birthday in bed, engrossed in the novel, until he departs for work. When Laura finally descends to the ground floor, she sees her husband, Dan, leave, leaving her alone at home to care for their three years old son, Richie. At the end, Laura contemplates left her family behind to pursue her own happiness.

In summary, Clarissa Vaughan, Virginia Woolf, and Laura Brown each navigate their respective daily routines with their own unique struggles and aspirations, reminiscent of the character Clarissa Dalloway. Their lives intersect through shared themes of personal limitations, longing, and the impact of societal challenges, which highlight the extraordinary nature of these seemingly ordinary women.

2.4.2 Critics:

Michael Cunningham's novel, *The Hours*, has garnered significant critical attention since its publication. The novel's narrative sparked thought-provoking discussions among literary critics who explored various aspects of the novel's themes, characters and literary techniques. Cunningham offers a profound exploration of time, mental illness and feminism, to

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become the most key themes raised by scholars and critics in response to *The Hours*, adopting two main theories; the Feminist Literary Theory and Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism.

One of the primary concerns raised by feminist critics is the representation of women in the novel. Although "*The Hours*" prominently features female characters and explores their lives, some critics argue that the novel ultimately reinforces traditional gender roles and fails to challenge them effectively in a different way as properly. They argue that the female characters in the novel are primarily defined in relation to their relationships with men, whether as wives, mothers, or lovers, and that their freedom and autonomy are often undermined.

Additionally, some feminist critics have taken issue with the portrayal of mental illness and its connection to female creativity in the novel. For Instance, the character of Virginia Woolf who is based on the real-life writer, is depicted as suffering from mental illness, which is linked to her artistic genius. Critics argue that this representation perpetuates harmful stereotypes that romanticise mental illness, particularly in relation to female artists.

It is important to note that not all feminist critics have the same views, and there are differing interpretations and analyses within feminist literary criticism and psychoanalytic literary criticism. Some critics may find value in the novel's portrayal of women's lives and their mental illness, while others may have more substantial concerns about its limitations and potential reinforcing of gender stereotypes in literature.

2.5 The Female characters portrayal

In storytelling, characters can be categorised as main and secondary characters. The main characters are the important ones in which the author build the story on, they carry a substantial burden of responsibility in the narrative. On the other hand, secondary characters serve an essential purpose in making the story more compelling and authentic. While they may not have

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as much prominence as the main characters, the writer relies on them to enhance the believability and realism of the story.

The Hours consists of three main female characters, or better to say three protagonists; Clarissa Vaughan, Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf.

2.5.1 Clarissa Vughan

Clarissa considered as the most contemporary character in the novel that represents the American independent woman in the new era. She is the least suicidal character but still the theme of suicide touches her through Richard, a character closely connected to her.

Cunningham quickly establishes a believable link between Clarissa Vaughan and Clarissa Dalloway. During their time as students at Columbia, Clarissa's close friend Richard bestowed her with a nickname;

"The name Mrs. Dalloway had been Richard's idea—a conceit tossed off one drunken dormitory night as he assured her that Vaughan was not the proper name for her. She should, he'd said, be named after a great figure in literature, and while she'd argued for Isabel Archer or Anna Karenina, Richard had insisted that Mrs. Dalloway was the singular and obvious choice".
(p.10)

In other words. Mrs. Dalloway who was only a "theory" or "words" during its first publication in 1925, became physically present woman in the late 20 century. (Rihane, 2015, p.09)

2.5.2 Virginia Woolf

The novel opens with Virginia Woolf's section, the famous English modernist writer. She is depicted as a fictionalised character "fictional but entirely plausible" (Wood, 1998). Thus,

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the portrayal of Virginia Woolf is based on historical facts, with Cunningham's own touch representing fictionalised elements as dialogue, thoughts, feelings, and impressions that cannot be examined as real part of the woman's life.

Virginia was portrayed as a very talented and intellectual writer, struggling with her mental health who lived with depression, nervous breakdown and bipolar disorder. Cunningham himself in an interview with The Guardian Book Club – Podcast (2011) expressed the view that depression "feels too mild" to capture the depth of Virginia Woolf's experiences, which made him worked hard to use the perfect imagery that may describe Virginia's worst periods;

She does not look directly into the oval mirror that hangs above the basin. She is aware of her reflected movements in the glass but does not permit herself to look. The mirror is dangerous; it sometimes shows her the dark manifestation of air that matches her body, takes her form, but stands behind, watching her, with porcine eyes and wet, hushed breathing" (p.30)

Virginia Woolf did not endure her struggle with the disease, which led her to commit suicide. She chose to end her emotional and mental problem instead of madness.

2.5.3 Laura Brown

Laura Brown seems like a typical American wife, prisoner of her husband and house duties " who had always been alone, to read" (Cunningham, 1991, p.40). Laura was reading Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway while she "should not be permitting herself to read [. . .] she should be out of bed, showered and dressed fixing breakfast for Dan and Richie" (p. 38).

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Laura was portrayed as unhappy wife who always struggled with the unfamiliar world around her domesticity, marriage and motherhood means prison she can't escape "Laura married because it is her duty [...] This is not what she really wants" (Saraswati, 2014, p. 190).

Just like the previous characters, Cunningham' portrayal gave the full right to his female characters to act towards self-liberation in order to "be happy, if not free" (Saraswati, 2014, p. 192). Laura makes an attempt to end her own life, but the final chapter of the novel was very surprising though, she appeared in the twenty centuries to meet Clarissa Vaughan to emphasise on the imagery of life over death.

within feminist literary criticism and psychoanalytic literary criticism. Some critics may find value in the novel's portrayal of women's lives and their mental illness, while others may have more substantial concerns about its limitations and potential reinforcing of gender stereotypes in literature.

2.6 Mental Illness Depiction and its impact on the Female characters

Mental illness is considered as one of the main themes in the novel in addition to feminism. The strongest symbols of the theme presence are Mrs. Woolf Virginia, and Mrs. Brown and her son Richard.

Michael Cunningham's portrayal of mental illness through the characters of Virginia, Laura, and Clarissa conveys the message that mental illness cannot be reduced to a single aspect or explanation. Instead, it is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon that affects individuals in various ways, influencing their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Cunningham's approach highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of mental

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health issues and promotes a more nuanced and compassionate view of those who struggle with them.

Virginia Woolf was a real character in the novel who struggled with mental illness for years, she was depicted in *The Hours* as a deeply troubled individual who suffered from depression and experiences periods of severe mental instability. Cunningham depicted her struggles through her thoughts, actions, and interactions especially with her husband, Leonard Woolf. By using the psychoanalytic literary criticism that led him to a better understanding of the unconscious mind.

The novel delves into her creative process and the challenges she faces in maintaining her sanity while attempting to write to escape her diseases. It portrays her as a highly sensitive and introspective person, often grappling with the weight of her own thoughts.

Dalsimer (2004) suggests that her symptoms align with what would now be recognized as bipolar disorder, which there were no successful treatments available during her lifetime. She attempted to end her life twice at least until Woolf suicided by drowning in the River Ouse at Lewes tragically at the age of 59 in 1941.

Laura's challenges are portrayed with a sense of ambiguity unlike any other character. On one hand, her immense frustration, depression, and tendencies towards self-harm evoke sympathy from the reader. However, an additional layer is introduced through her child, who appears to be sorrowful and lacking in affection due to Laura's personal struggles. The heartbreaking expression of Richie's love for his mother, coupled with Laura's inability to reciprocate and demonstrate her own love, creates a significant impact that diminishes the sympathy one would typically feel towards her.

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Laura is depicted as a woman who is not fitting into the conventional role of a stay-at-home housewife associated with the American Dream. Her awareness of this mismatch leads to guilt, frustration, and eventually thoughts of suicide. Her temporary escape to a hotel room, where she contemplates suicide as a means of liberation, foreshadows her later decision to abandon her family and her actual suicide attempt;

"She could decide to die. It is an abstract, shimmering notion, not particularly morbid...By going to a hotel, she sees, you leave the particulars of your own life and enter a neutral zone, a clean white room, where dying does not seem too strange."

(Cunningham, 1991, p.151).

Richard is a homosexual poet in New York during the 1990s who is suffering from AIDS, his struggles are primarily conveyed through the perspective of Clarissa Vaughan. This is achieved through their dialogues, as well as Clarissa's own introspective musings and memories. Richard's mental illness is revealed to Clarissa through two conversations they have, where he openly discusses his hallucinations in vivid detail;

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

(Cunningham, 1991, p. 59).

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3.8 Conclusion

The Second Chapter dealt with the analysis of Michael *Cunningham's Hours*, it contains a biography of the author, an overview of the novel in general, and the most important how the author portrayed women and their mental illness within the novel. This chapter was based on the feminist literary criticism and psychoanalytic literary theory in order to give a better understanding of the novel's aspects.

After examining and analysing the work, the readers will notice that the women's portrayal changed over time and Michael Cunningham's succeed in portraying women and their mental illness in such a different way. Therefore, putting his name within the feminist literature.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion :

The previous centuries acknowledged the difficulties women had to overcome to achieve the progress they are achieving today thanks to feminism. The challenges and marginalisation faced by women was very racist and unfair. Feminism did not stop with societal change but it expanded to establish all the fields.

Literature is considered as the most important field that feminism touched at its core. The portrayal of women in literary texts was the main issue that feminist literary criticism addressed. women's experiences and perspectives are brought to the forefront with the aid of psychoanalytical approach, authors started to understand women's psychology and the amount of pressure exerted on them.

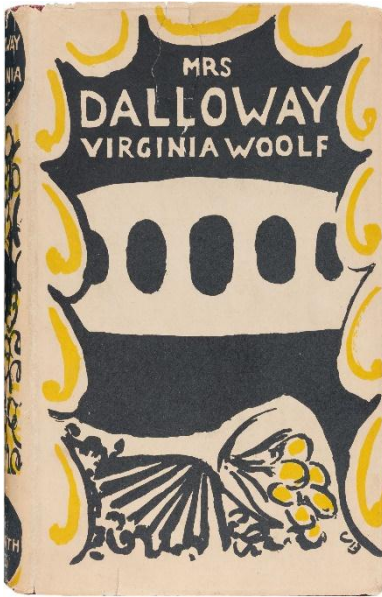
Through the analytic study of the novel, Cunningham critically examines the impact of societal expectations and pressure on women's mental health, the sacrifices they make, and the resilience they demonstrate in the pursuit of self-fulfillment. Additionally, he portrayed their real state of mind. Thus, he indirectly pushed the readers to question the traditional roles assigned to women.

After the reading of Michael Cunningham's, *The Hours* the researcher came to the conclusion that the author succeeded in portraying women and their mental illness in completely different ways than it was used by the previous male authors. It can be said that Cunningham is one of the first writers who carved his way towards change which led to the creation of new descriptions from a male perspective.

Appendices

Appendices :

Mrs. Dalloway Overview



"*Mrs. Dalloway*" is a novel written by **Virginia Woolf** published in 1925. It is considered one of Woolf's most famous and influential works, known for its innovative narrative style and exploration of the inner lives of its characters (stream of consciousness).

The novel takes place over the course of a single day in June 1923 in London and follows the thoughts and experiences of its central character, Clarissa Dalloway; a fictional upper-class woman in interwar time

Plot Summary:

Clarissa Dalloway prepares to host an evening party in London. The pleasant weather leads her to question her decision to marry Richard Dalloway instead of the more mysterious Peter Walsh. She also reflects on the missed opportunity of pursuing a romantic relationship with Sally Seton, a woman. Peter's visit reintroduces these conflicts into her thoughts.

Meanwhile, Septimus Warren Smith, a war veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, spends the day in the park with his wife Lucrezia. Peter Walsh observes them and witnesses Septimus experiencing frequent and incomprehensible hallucinations, often involving his deceased friend Evans from the war. Later, after being advised to undergo involuntary psychiatric treatment, Septimus tragically takes his own life by jumping out of a window.

In the evening, Clarissa's party takes place, gradually becoming a success. Many characters she has encountered throughout the story attend, including individuals from her past. During the event, Clarissa learns about Septimus' suicide and begins to admire his act, seeing it as a courageous attempt to preserve the purity of his own happiness.

Appendices :

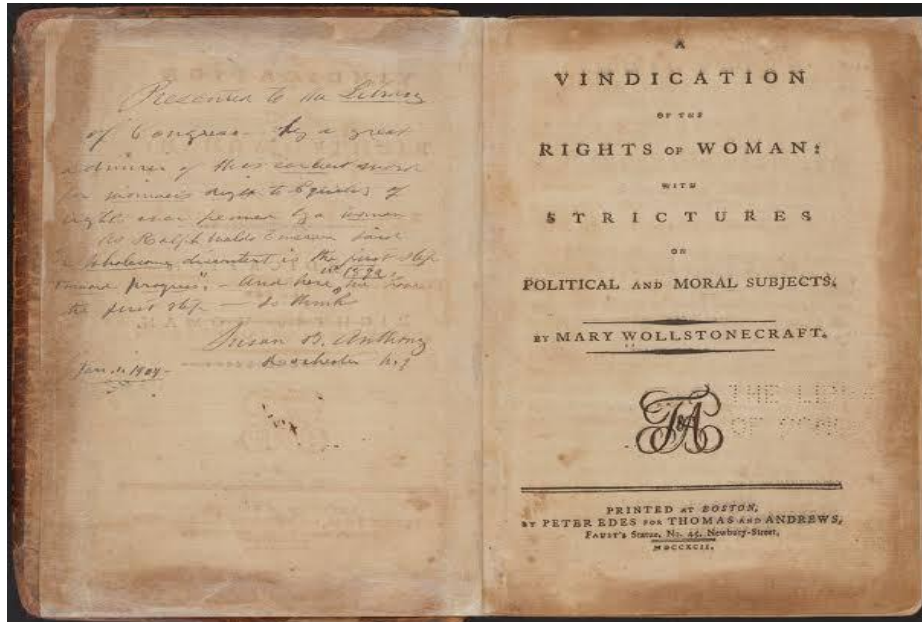
Examples of Famous Pioneers of Feminism :

Figure 01: Mary Wollstonecraft



Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) British writer and political philosopher. She is considered as the first woman who advocated for women's rights. Her analysis of women's status in society, which she presented in her pioneering feminist work "*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" (1792). The book is considered one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy and argues for women's equality and

rights in society. It also criticised the social and cultural expectations placed on women, including their limited roles in marriage and domesticity. Wollstonecraft argues for the need to dismantle oppressive social structures that restrict women's autonomy and perpetuate inequality.

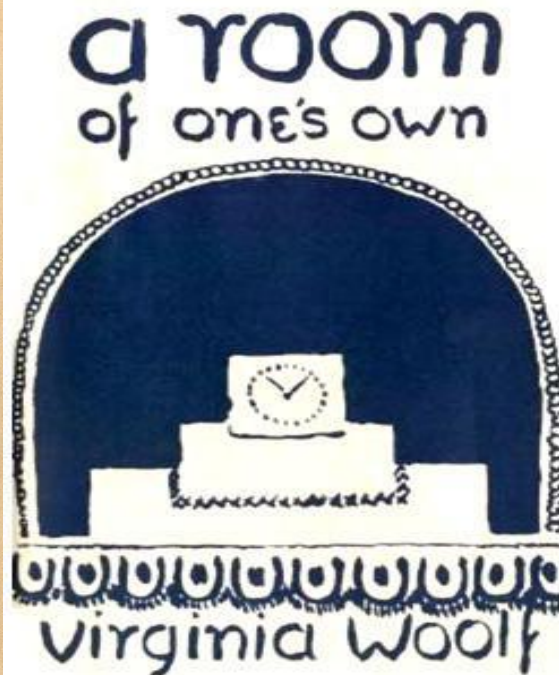
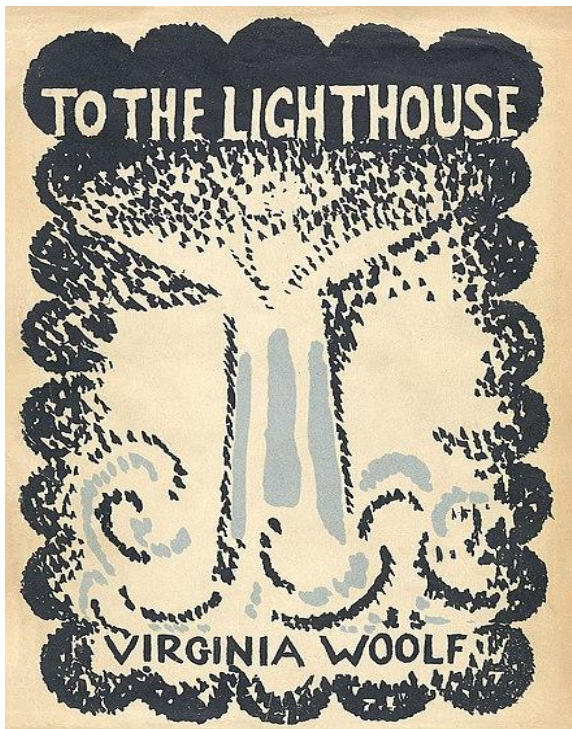


Appendices :

Figure 02: Virginia Woolf



Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) English modernist writer of the 20th century, known for her novels "*To the Lighthouse*" (1927) and "*A Room of One's Own*" (1929) Her vast body of work includes essays, diaries, letters, and biographies. Woolf's writings reflect the rapidly changing world she lived in, focusing on themes like shifting gender roles, sexuality, and the emergence of new technologies like cars, airplanes, and cinema. She explores key aspects of modernism, such as the subconscious, time, perception, urban life, and the impact of war. Woolf is a pioneer in the use of "stream of consciousness" technique, she delves into the inner lives of her characters, capturing the mosaic-like nature of memory.



The First Edition Covers

Figure 03: Elaine Showalter



Elaine Showalter is an influential American literary critic, feminist scholar, and writer. She is best known for coining the term "**gynocriticism**" and has extensively explored the intersection of gender, literature, and culture. Showalter has examined the works of notable female authors such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath, highlighting the historical marginalisation and exclusion of women writers from the literary canon. Her work advocates for the inclusion and recognition of women's voices and perspectives in literary studies.

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