AN AGE-OLD DEBATE:

COMPARING REPRESENTATIONS OF AGING IN *MRS. DALLOWAY* AND *THE HOURS*

by

JULIE LEIGH BOSTON

(Under the Direction of Leara Rhodes)

ABSTRACT

In recent years the media have bombarded the public, especially women, with the "age issue." From plastic surgery to Botox® to anti-wrinkle cream to celebrity endorsements, the public domain has been inundated with references on aging and prevention. With this anti-aging boom, scholarly literature has tended to focus attention toward the cosmetic/physical side of aging in evaluating popular magazines, films, and television shows. However, these critical assessments have not included the representations of aging and women in popular novels. Through textual analysis, this study examines the representations of aging and women in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours.* Drawing on Kolmar and Bartkowski's collection of feminist theory and Bernard's concept of challenging age myths, this paper is driven by feminist insight that suggests a need to reevaluate the aging process in terms of woman's knowledge of herself and her body. Using Miller's inquiry on the importance of literature, this paper also explores the value found in studying literature and its impact on the human condition.

INDEX WORDS: Media, women, age, representations, feminist theory, textual analysis, literature, Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*

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To my parents,

Wayne and Susan Boston,

whose continued support, faith, and love

have enabled me to believe in myself and my accomplishments.

To my grandmother,

Thelma Pender Pittman,

who taught me that true beauty exists at any age.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

This study examines the representations of aging and women in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*. Both novels provide rich evidence of women's relationship with aging. I will use textual analysis to discover meaning and uncover patterns in the texts using my research questions as guides: How are aging and women represented in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*? How is the aging process represented in the novels? Driven by feminist insight that suggests a need to reevaluate the aging process in terms of woman's knowledge of herself and her body, this study suggests the oppression of women magnified by a youth obsession.

The findings of this study will provide insight into the aging process for women, into the importance of literature and reading, and into the value of studying literature. As a communications scholar, I hope to draw attention to the effects of a youth obsessed media and offer a qualitative understanding of aging found in the novels.

Yes, Clarissa thinks, it's time for the day to be over. We throw our parties; we abandon our families to live alone in Canada; we struggle to write books that do not change the world, despite our gifts and our unstinting efforts, our most extravagant hopes. We live our lives, do whatever we do, and then we sleep—it's as simple and ordinary as that. A few jump out of windows or drown themselves or take pills; more die by accident; and most of us, the vast majority, are slowly devoured by some disease or, if we're very fortunate, by time itself. There's just this for consolation: an hour here or there when our lives seem, against all odds and expectations, to burst open and give us everything we've ever imagined, though everyone but children (and perhaps even they) knows these hours will inevitably be followed by others, far darker and more difficult. Still, we cherish the city, the morning; we hope, more than anything, for more. (Cunningham, 1998, p. 225)

Woolf's World

She was "like her mother, Julia Stephen, 'always beautiful, but never pretty'" (Nicolson, 2000, p. 5). Yet, she wrote in the loveliest manner and created the most attractive characters the world has ever seen. Virginia Adeline Stephen Woolf was born on January 25, 1882, at No. 22 Hyde Park Gate, which still stands and bears her father's name (Bell, 1972). Coming from an upper-middle class family, Woolf was educated at home by family tutors, including her father, "a literary critic and historian who created the *Dictionary of National Biography*" (Cawley, 2002, p. 90).

Encouraged to read the classics (Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Hawthorne), she began writing at a young age, keeping a diary where she practiced various styles and played with a mixture of themes (Bell, 1972). Here, Woolf was most comfortable using her diary as a launch pad for ideas or an escape from her troubled life. She was sexually abused (although this is never fully admitted) by her step brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth, for much of her childhood. Suffering several mental breakdowns (the first occurred at 13 years old when her mother died), Woolf oscillated between reality and madness for much of her life. Finally succumbing to her illness, she loaded her coat pockets with stones and drowned herself in the River Ouse near her Sussex home on March 28, 1941 (Ibid).

Woolf left behind a brilliant résumé packed with unforgettable characters. Clarissa Dalloway is one such character. A radical shift in the art of storytelling, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, published in 1925, depicts the hours of one woman's life. Indulging in the bittersweet reverie of Clarissa, Woolf rejects the traditional novel's form and shifts toward stream-of-consciousness. "The focus now is on the internal atmosphere of her characters, whose lives are dramatized for the reader through a series of interior monologues of their remembered past; and the novel moves forward through successive moments of condensed experience" (Leaska, 1984, p. 43). Woolf, an innovative artist, paints the narrative of Clarissa, a conventional housewife on the brink of creation and madness.

Cunningham's World

Michael Cunningham attempted to recreate Woolf's genius in 1998 with *The Hours.* In an interview with Barnes & Noble.com (2002), Cunningham described his first encounter with Woolf and *Mrs. Dalloway*. When he was fifteen years old, he was trying to impress a girl on whom he had a crush. She threw a book at him and told him something like, "Why don't you read this and try to be less stupid?" The book was *Mrs. Dalloway*. Cunningham read it and was inspired. "I hadn't known, until then, that you—that anyone—could do such things with language; I'd never seen sentences of such complexity, musicality, density, and beauty. I remember thinking, 'Hey, she was doing with language something like what Jimi Hendrix does with a guitar.' *Mrs. Dalloway* made me into a reader, and it was only a matter of time until I became a writer."[1]

Cunningham, born in Cincinnati, Ohio on November 6, 1952, studied literature at Stanford University. He received his master's in fine arts from the University of Iowa and was

[1] Meet the writers: Michael Cunningham. (2002, Fall). *Barnes & Noble.com.* Retrieved November 2, 2003, from www.barnesandnoble.com/writers/writerdetails.asp?userid=ZYw19DSQgD&cid=1015986#interview.

awarded several grants toward his work. A man of promising talent, Cunningham's 1990 novel, *A Home at the End of the World*, astounded critics with its account of the nontraditional family of the 90s; he had written a previous novel, *Golden States* in 1984, but few noticed.[2] *A Home at the End of the World* was followed by his third novel, *Flesh and Blood* in 1995.[3]

Paying homage to his divine inspiration—Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway—The Hours* picks up where Woolf left off. Echoing *Mrs. Dalloway's* underlying themes of creation, insanity, love, and life, Cunningham propels his story with the power of three women: Woolf writing *Mrs. Dalloway* in the 1920s, Laura Brown reading the novel in the 1950s, and Clarissa Vaughn simulating a modern-day Clarissa Dalloway in the 1990s. As Allen (1999) notes:

> "[Cunningham] attacks the questions raised in Mrs. Dalloway with thought and originality: *The Hours*, like its predecessor, is a meditation on age and decay, on sanity and insanity, on the nature of the creative act, on the ineradicable love for life that continues even in the face of a longing for death. Cunningham's thoughts on these subjects respond to Woolf's, but diverge from hers in provocative ways." (p. 80)

Many similarities exist between the novels. Below is a list of parallels Cunningham develops from *Mrs. Dalloway*. The importance of highlighting such relationships is to outline the basic framework of *The Hours* and to reveal Cunningham's dedication as a writer and true Woolf fan.

1. **Title**. Called among other things ("At Home" and "The Party") *The Hours* was the primary working title Woolf used for what we know as *Mrs. Dalloway* (Wussow, 1997).
2. **Time/Setting**. All three stories in *The Hours*, like *Mrs. Dalloway*, take place on a single day in June with the characters in preparation for a party. (Laura Brown is baking a cake

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[2] Adato, A. & Hamm, L. (2003, February 10). Man of the hours. *People Magazine* 59 (5). 105-106.

[3] Meet the writers: Michael Cunningham. (2002, Fall). *Barnes & Noble.com.* Retrieved November 2, 2003, from www.barnesandnoble.com/writers/writerdetails.asp?userid=ZYw19DSQgD&cid=1015986#interview.

for her husband's birthday. Clarissa Vaughn is planning a party for her poet-friend, Richard.)

3. **Major Characters**. After reading most if not all of Woolf's letters and diaries, Cunningham accurately portrays the frequently unstable Virginia Woolf at one of the most crucial times in her life, painstakingly writing *Mrs. Dalloway*.

   Laura Brown, based on a character from Woolf's essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and also on Cunningham's mother, represents women in the 50s: a suburban housewife despairingly fed up with the humdrum of daily life; or, as Friedan (1963) coins it in *The Feminine Mystique*, "the problem that has no name" (as cited in Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2000, p. 164).

   Clarissa Vaughn reflects Woolf's heroine in modern-day New York City, mirroring Clarissa Dalloway: buying flowers, planning a party, walking down a busy street, thinking, reflecting, etc. Yet, her uniqueness, and Cunningham's overwhelming genius, is the fact that Vaughn exists in the 90s; she is as convincing a character in the modern world as she was in the postwar world of the 1920s. He rewrites Woolf's central character and introduces her to a new generation, proving that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

This list serves simply to introduce the surface comparisons between the novels. In the analysis, however, the textual connections will be explained in more detail.

JUSTIFICATION

The Age Issue

A photo of a plucked chicken from the neck up with a sharp, pointed beak, small, narrowed eyes, and rough uneven scales appears in an article. A few hairs remain on the naked

fowl leaving a scattered path of whiskers from the top of the head to the middle of the neck. Adjacent to this startling photo reads a bold headline with a brief introduction: "Going to pieces. In an era of collagen-plumping lasers, endoscopic lifts, and $1,000 miracle creams, it may not be your face that's betraying you. Your neck, hands—even elbows—are the new enemies in the war against age."[4]

It is an age-old issue, this age issue, which preoccupies America, especially American women. Instead of appreciating the body for every wrinkle gained from another year of living, we seek to erase the lines, injecting a foreign agent in hopes of disguising our imperfections. We want to be line-free. We want to be smooth and pretty. We want to be young—always.

In fact, we want to be young so badly that a recent CNN documentary, "In Search of the Fountain of Youth," reported that in the last decade, face lifts have risen 84 percent; forehead lifts 176 percent; and eye lifts 91 percent.[5] Who's undergoing these procedures? According to The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), the number of surgical and nonsurgical cosmetic procedures increased by 20 percent in 2003 to a total of nearly 8.3 million. Of these cosmetic procedures, women had 87 percent, and the "number of procedures performed on women was nearly 7.2 million, an increase of 16 percent from 2002."[6]

I believe the media drives this obsession with youth. The "plucked chicken" article appeared in *Vogue Magazine*, a top-selling fashion publication. Sarah Jessica Parker posed on the cover and beside her pink, corseted, size-two silhouette the headline read: "The Age Issue." Ironic, yes, because Parker isn't old, at least not yet. Other tag lines included: "How old do you

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[4]Going to pieces. (2003, August). *Vogue Magazine*. 294-297.
[5] CNN Presents: 'In Search of the Fountain of Youth.' (2003, November 9). Transcript available from www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0311/09/cp.00.html.
[6] 2003 ASAPS statistics—8.3 million cosmetic procedures: American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reports 20 percent increase. (2004, February 18). Retrieved March 24, 2004, from http://www.surgery.org/press/news-release.php?iid=325.

look?" "Figure of Youth: Reclaiming Your Teenage Body" and "The Quick-Fix Facelift." It's no wonder that American women are fixated on looking young because apparently no one wants to look *old*—whatever that means.

In this study, I view communication as the circulation of meaning. It is a "process that involves the transmission of messages from senders to receivers" (Berger, 2000, p. 270). The media is communicating to us that we should stay young as long as possible. We should reject our physical signs of aging and embrace the technological advances that will enable us to combat aging. We should never look old.

More than the Physical

The age-issue should not be limited to the mere physical signs of aging. Aging is not a singular process; we have to consider the bodies' relations with the world around us. We age biologically, psychologically, and sociologically, hence "the aging experience is determined by the unique interactions between these various clocks."[7]

Gullette (2004), an "age critic" and author of *Aged by Culture*, believes that aging in America is similar to a time machine that "makes human aging entirely bodily, predictable, and inescapably awful in its concept of decline" (as cited in Gardner, 2004, p. 16). She challenges the notion that physical decline is the only truth of aging. "We are more aged by culture than by chromosomes," she states (Ibid, p. 16).

Kramer (1999), a columnist for the Washington, D. C. Gazette Newspapers, agrees with the cultural implications placed on aging persons, especially women. In her column "Midlife Spices," she discusses her frustration with the magazine industry's continuous exploitation of the

[7] Kearl, M. C. (1996, February 1). Social gerontology and the aging revolution. Retrieved March 24, 2004, from http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/geron.html.

aging woman in advertisements and editorial content. Here is a sample from her humorous and rather enlightening column on the issue:

> It came to me in a brilliant flash of insight while I was in the checkout line of my grocery store, starting at the magazines strategically placed to show me 10 of the sexiest, most beautiful, most successful young women in the world today. Not only am I not they, but they are not me. I don't want what they have and they don't have what I want.
>
> There is nothing on those racks for or about me. No positive advertising is aimed at me. Few articles are focused on me. I abhor the diaper and denture ads that have been affixed to me by Madison Avenue because I am over 50.
>
> Doesn't Madison Avenue see the demographic bulge that is coming? The vast numbers of working women with disposable income who are approaching and moving beyond their fifth decade? Energetic women who have health consciously buffed their bodies and vitamined themselves into amazing productivity at work and at home? Who have honed their minds and ambitions on sterner stuff than their mother could?
>
> Let's have a magazine that caters specifically to this group….We have earned the badges of aging. (Ibid, pp. 4-5)

Kramer goes on to challenge popular magazines "to stop demeaning aging women by omission" (Ibid, p. 5). Aging women are here and they are aware; they cannot be erased or ignored. After all, women in their fifties use makeup, need shampoo, and wear clothing the same as women in their twenties.

The aging experience extends beyond biological change. After all, aging is more than wrinkles and dentures. A Web site on social gerontology, a field that seeks to understand the "complex interactions between biological, psychological, sociological, and cultural processes," reports:

> Generations now alive are among the first in history to be raised with the expectation of old age, forerunners of a longevity revolution that will be felt for centuries to come. Some twenty percent of all humans who have ever lived past the age of 65 are now alive. So profound is this demographic revolution that every aspect of social life and society is affected. A late 1980s Census Bureau study noted that "rapidly expanding numbers of older people represents a social

> phenomenon without historical precedent...[that] has various economic implications for individuals, families, public policy-makers." Those now old—420 million world-wide as of 2001—are literally pioneers of a new stage of the lifespan and the life course they're trailblazing will determine, in part, our own passages through time.[8]

We are living in an aging world and aging people are becoming the majority. Now, more than ever, research is needed to not only understand this process from an economic and medical standpoint, but also from the realm of communication studies. If every aspect of social life and society is affected by this aging phenomenon, then one responsibility of media critics is to question and observe how aging is represented in our culture, how it is affecting our environment, and most importantly what is it suggesting to women.

Arron Brown, the anchor of the CNN documentary, "In Search of the Fountain of Youth," closes with this statement:

> By the middle of this century, there are expected to be more people in the developed world above the age of 50, then below. And that would be a first. And we appear to be heading right toward it. So the question becomes, will future generations continue to worship youth, or will they, we, seek a healthy happy old age with a focus on aging well, instead of not aging at all.[9]

Culture and the Mass Media

Going back to Gullete's comment that "we are more aged by culture than by chromosomes," it is necessary to highlight important aspects of this anti-aging cultural trend (as cited in Gardner, 2004, p. 16).

Culture, according to McQuail (2000), "has a primary reference to the symbolic artifacts produced by media industries, but it also has a wider reference to customs, practices and

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[8] Ibid.
[9] CNN Presents: 'In Search of the Fountain of Youth.' (2003, November 9). Transcript available from www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0311/09/cp.00.html.

meanings associated with the mass communication process (production and reception). It is sometimes used to refer to the wider framework of beliefs, ideology etc. of society that provides the context of media operation" (p. 494). Culture, in this sense, refers to the wider framework of a youth obsessed society (reception), which fuels the media's anti-aging policies (production). In other words, we as a society want to be young and the media reinforces this ideal.

Berger (2000) defines cultural studies as "a multidisciplinary approach (using concepts from literary theory, semiotic theory, sociology, psychoanalytic theory, political theory, and other social sciences and humanities) to analyze and interpret phenomena such as the media, popular culture, literature, social movements, and related matters" (pp. 272-273). Thus, by doing cultural studies we are basically asking questions about culture and translating their meanings into acceptable reasons and/or theories.

One more point I would like to address comes from Carey (1989) and his study, "Mass communication and cultural studies" (as cited in Boyd-Barrett & Newbold, 1995, p. 365). He writes:

> [Cultural studies] does not seek to explain human behaviour in terms of the laws that govern it or to dissolve it into the structures that underlie it. Cultural studies does not attempt to predict human behaviour; rather, it attempts to diagnose human meanings… The goals of communications conceived as a cultural science are therefore more modest but also more human, at least in the sense of attempting to be truer to human nature and experience as it ordinarily is encountered.
>
> […]
>
> A cultural science of communication views human behaviour—or, more accurately, human action—as a text. Our task is to construct a 'reading' of the text. The text itself is a sequence of symbols—speech, writing, gesture—that contain interpretations. Our task, like that of a literary critic, is to interpret the interpretations. […] (Ibid, p. 371)

In this study, I construct a reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, and interpret from that reading the patterns of signs/symbols that contain various interpretations on aging and women. The goal is to diagnose meanings from the texts on representations of aging and women as it relates to human nature, human experience, and the human condition.

STUDYING LITERATURE

What is Literature?

We have all heard the word "literature" throughout our lives and it may seem a rather elementary and mundane question, yet it is important to this analysis. At the outset, there is the dictionary definition to consider. Merriam-Webster™ defines *literature* in four ways:

1. *archaic*: literary culture
2. the production of literary work esp. as an occupation
3. (1): writings in prose or verse; esp. : writings having excellence of form or expressions and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest (2): an example of such writings <what came out, though rarely ~, was always a roaring good story—*People*>

   b. the body of written works produced in a particular language/country/age

   c. the body of writings on a particular subject <scientific ~>

   d. printed matter (as leaflets or circulars) <campaign ~>
4. the aggregate of a usu. specified type of musical compositions[10]

Here, the term is spelled out in its most operational context. However, there are other definitions to ponder. For example, Miller (2002) states that "Western literature belongs to the age of the printed book and of other print forms like newspapers, magazines, and periodicals generally" (p. 2). This is the definition that most mass communication scholars agree with and employ. With the appearance of the modern research university this concept of literature became known (Ibid).

[10] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate® Dictionary, Tenth Edition*. (2001). Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

Thus, our sense of the term was strongly shaped by university-trained writers such as Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Matthew Arnold.

Miller further describes literature's significant features and its impact on Western society in four distinct ways:

1. **Freedom of speech**. This is the freedom to say, write, or publish more or less anything. Free speech allows everyone to criticize everything, to question everything.
2. **Freedom to say anything**. Even though democratic freedom of speech in principle allows anyone to say anything, that freedom has always been severely curtailed, in various ways.
3. **Modern sense of self**. From Descartes and Locke—the I or ego—has been the invention of our modern sense of self, which can be held liable for what it says, thinks, or does, including what it does in the way of writing works of literature.
4. **Author and authorship**. Legalized in modern copyright laws, all the salient forms and techniques of literature have exploited the new sense of selfhood (i.e. presentation of interiority characteristics in the seventeenth century to stream of consciousness in the twentieth century.). (Ibid, pp. 4-5)

All of these factors have played a vital role in our understanding of literature. The freedom of speech, the freedom to say anything, the modern sense of self, and the author and authorship battle are key factors in our assumptions about literature and how we, as a modern democratic society, define it.

Why Study Literature?

Transcendentalist founder, Ralph Waldo Emerson (Bode, 1981), sums up this question in one sentence: "The theory of books is noble" (p. 55). In his famous oration, "The American

Scholar," delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge on August 31, 1837, Emerson says "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst….They are for nothing but to inspire" (Ibid, p. 56).

Emerson's point is simple: read books. Books help us to understand the past and therefore, to prepare, or attempt to prepare, for the future. We should study them because they are noble; they are a dignified and decent medium for scholarship and the best of things for inspiration, creation, and fulfillment.

Likewise, in the introduction to studying William Shakespeare, Wells and Orlin (2003) agree with the value found in literature. Even though their assessments are based solely on the works of Shakespeare, they can apply to literature in any age. Wells and Orlin believe that Shakespeare is worth studying because his plays and other works can enrich our lives in numerous ways:

> [B]y making us more sensitive to language and therefore more capable of expressing ourselves and of responding to experience; by involving us in the ethical dilemmas of the characters in the plays and thus increasing our moral sensibility; by allowing us entry to states of mind different from our own and thus enlarging our imaginative experience; by showing us, too that other people may experience emotions that we find in ourselves, and thus giving us a sense of shared humanity. (Ibid, p. 3)

In literature, we can find reasons for our emotions however distant they may seem from our personal experience. From Emerson to Shakespeare or Woolf to Cunningham, literature has the power to stimulate thought about "humankind's relationship to society and to the universe" (Ibid, p. 3).

Why Study These Novels?

To be completely fair and honest, I chose to focus on *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* for three reasons: (1) I admire Virginia Woolf and her talent for writing. She is the true definition of

genius, in my mind, not so much for her extensive library of literary achievements, but more for the passion she possessed in creating that genius. She challenged herself, her family, and her world to see the unique in the everyday; (2) I respect Michael Cunningham and his gift of language. What he did in *The Hours* is extraordinary; and (3) I genuinely love literature, language, words, and writing, and I firmly believe that society today has lost interest in such. Each time I reread *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Hours*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Joy Luck Club*, and so on, I discover something I hadn't seen first time I read it. I learn something new on each reading. And, that's the power I find in literature, language, words, and writing—the ability to open one's eyes over and over again.

But, if I asked to give one primary reason for this study and choosing these novels, I would agree with Cunningham. In an interview he was asked, "Who are your favorite writers, and what makes their writing special?" He replied:

> I'd say I'm particularly interested in writers who focus on the ostensibly small and discover the enormous in it. For instance, I seem to prefer Flaubert, and his insistence on the importance of Emma Bovary and her provincial French life, to Tolstoy with his huge canvases; I prefer *Mrs. Dalloway*, with its focus on a single day in the life of an outwardly unexceptional woman, to Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is also set in a single day but ties it to Homer, to myth. I don't dislike Tolstoy or Joyce. I don't dispute their greatness, I just seem to be more immediately drawn to writers who honor the ordinary, and tell the world through their work that there is no such thing as the ordinary.[11]

I wholeheartedly, sincerely, and genuinely agree. Moreover, as a media and literary scholar and as a feminist, I see a dangerous cultural preoccupation with youth that is particularly oppressive to women. I believe that literature has the power to play a role in our cultural understandings of aging and what it means to *age*. These texts offer insight into the complexities of aging, especially for women.

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[11] Cunningham, M. (2003, November 2). Meet the writers: Michael Cunningham. *Barnes & Noble.com.* www.barnesandnoble.com/writers/writerdetails.

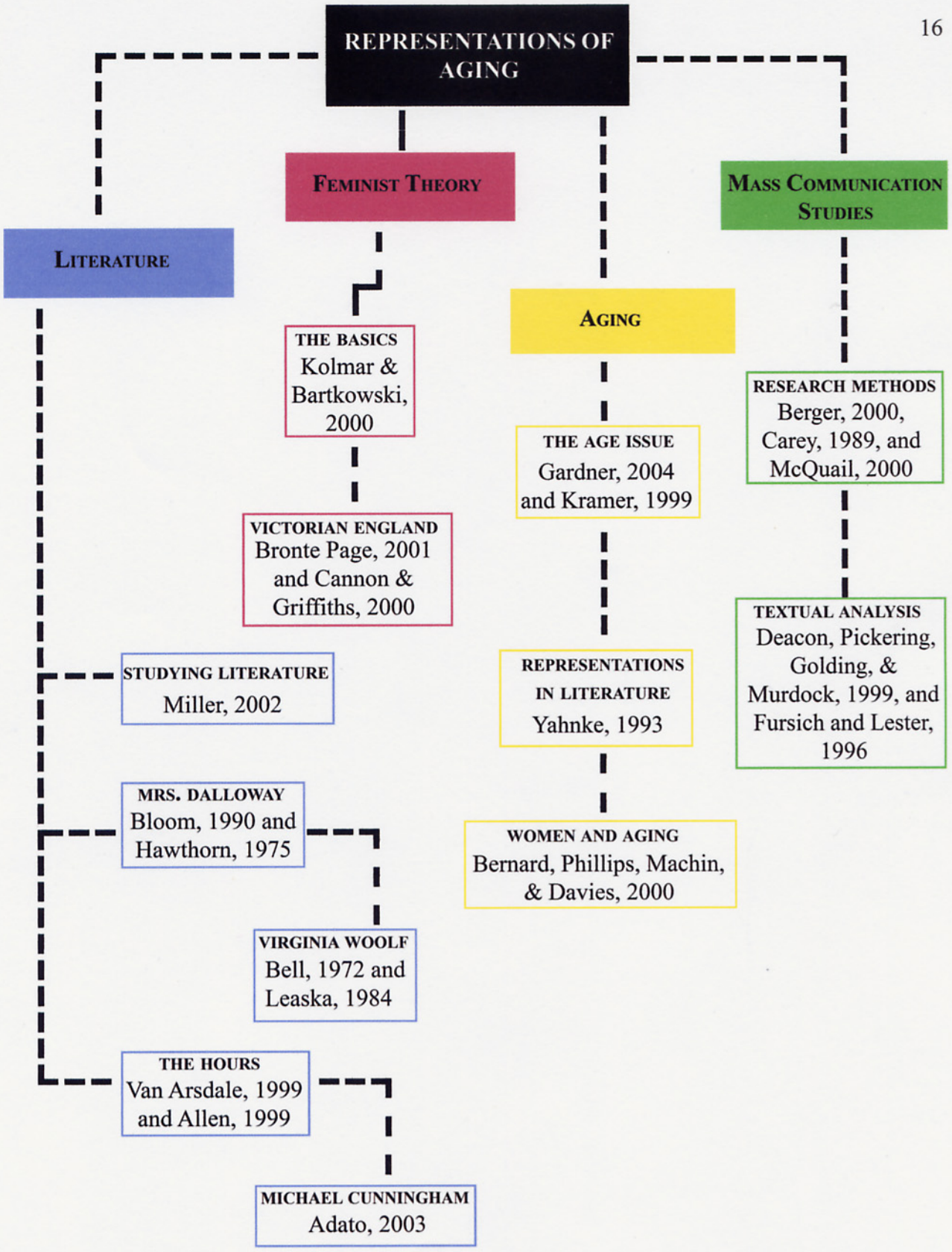
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature Map

According to Creswell (2003), the literature review "provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing results of a study with other findings" (p. 30). A literature map is a useful tool in organizing the literature available on a certain topic. It is beneficial for the researcher to "build a visual picture of existing research about a topic," and help others "visualize how the study relates to the larger literature on the topic" (Ibid, p. 31).

In my literature map on the next page, I have created a visual picture of my study. I have divided the map into four separate components: literature, aging, mass communication studies, and feminist theory. Under these divisions are subdivisions each with a particular focus and relevant article/study that relates to the specified subject matter. To note, the review of literature on feminist theory will be discussed in the next chapter.


REPRESENTATIONS OF AGING
FEMINIST THEORY
MASS COMMUNICATION STUDIES
LITERATURE
AGING
THE BASICS
Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2000
RESEARCH METHODS
Berger, 2000, Carey, 1989, and McQuail, 2000
THE AGE ISSUE
Gardner, 2004 and Kramer, 1999
VICTORIAN ENGLAND
Bronte Page, 2001 and Cannon & Griffiths, 2000
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS
Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999, and Fursich and Lester, 1996
STUDYING LITERATURE
Miller, 2002
REPRESENTATIONS IN LITERATURE
Yahnke, 1993
MRS. DALLOWAY
Bloom, 1990 and Hawthorn, 1975
WOMEN AND AGING
Bernard, Phillips, Machin, & Davies, 2000
VIRGINIA WOOLF
Bell, 1972 and Leaska, 1984
THE HOURS
Van Arsdale, 1999 and Allen, 1999
MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM
Adato, 2003

I will explain each section of the diagram and its relation to this study, indicating the need for more research in particular sections.

LITERATURE

In Miller's *On Literature* (2000) crucial questions are discussed on the topic of literature. What is literature? Why read it? Why does it have such an authority over us? In answering these questions, among others, Miller describes literature's significant features and its impact on Western society. He also convincingly debates the possibility of literature's end due to the success and availability of the Internet and other technological advances. Yet, Miller's most promising and helpful insight is the purpose of his book: to read and care about literature. He believes that in literature we can find solace for the human condition.

Bode's *The Portable Emerson* (1981) and Wells and Orlin's *Oxford Guide to William Shakespeare* (2003) were also crucial sources in studying literature. Each book offers insight into the great minds of Emerson and Shakespeare and presents a strong defense to the act of studying literature. Moreover, in supporting such an act, no matter what field of study, it is paramount to mention the classics and the trailblazers.

Virginia Woolf and *Mrs. Dalloway*

A plethora of literature exists on Virginia Woolf and *Mrs. Dalloway* (Bell, 1972; Bloom, 1990; Hawthorn, 1975; Lee, 1997; Lehmann, 1975; Nicolson, 2000; Prose, 2003). While the majority of these studies focus on character criticisms and various literary themes, none of them discuss representations of women and aging in the novel. However, these studies were useful in analyzing Woolf, her personality, and her genius in creating *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Harold Bloom (1990) analyzes the character of Clarissa Dalloway in relation to Woolf's personality and/or conscious.

> Virginia Woolf conceived of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a pattern in which 'every scene would build up the idea of Clarissa's character.' Since Clarissa Dalloway, in subtle ways, is founded upon Woolf's sense of her own consciousness, we would have a kind of psychic self-portrait except for Woolf's intense aesthetic wariness. That wariness works so as to universalize certain aspects of Clarissa's character, which is implicitly presented as a study in a woman's developments, rather than a great woman writer's unfolding. (Ibid, p. 1)

John Mepham (1992) argues that Woolf's creative consciousness is a writer unfolding, a woman discovering her boundaries within language. "In Woolf's work, the search for transcendent meaning becomes the great mythic theme, which is enacted in each of her works. They exhibit a common pattern, a common movement from anxiety of entrapment to a transcendent moment of freedom" (p. 90).

O.P. Sharma (1975) cites excerpts from Woolf's diary in which she was attempting the central focus of *Mrs. Dalloway*:

> It is to be a most complicated, spirited, solid piece, knitting together everything and ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, *each saying something to sum up Clarissa*….Now I do think that this might be the best of my endings…[Italics are Sharma's.] (Ibid, p. 63)

Sharma utilizes Woolf's diary entries in her study of *Mrs. Dalloway*. The article offers historical insight into the novel's conception and into the conception of Clarissa Dalloway as a literary heroine.

Jeremy Hawthorn (1975) utilizes the major thematic elements in the novel to create his study, *Virginia Woolf's* <u>*Mrs. Dalloway*</u>*: A Study in Alienation*. Hawthorn's work proved helpful in observing other factors in the novel, which included "the chartered street" (p. 64) and "party going" (p. 80). These sub-titles suggest that in the London streets and in the "party consciousness" alienation resounds. Hawthorn's thesis, to call it that, is more of an outlined

criticism, focusing on particular themes, then relating it to Woolf's life, and ultimately to the study of alienation.

Michael Cunningham and *The Hours*

Few scholarly studies exist on either Michael Cunningham or *The Hours*. Book reviews and movie reviews are the only literature available to date (Adato, 2003; Allen, 1999; Guthman, 1998; Maryles, 2003; Plunket, 1998; Ross, 2003; Russell, 1999; Van Arsdale, 1999). While I cite the popular press throughout this analysis, I firmly believe that this novel, and author for that matter, deserves to be recognized in the realm of academic research. Hopefully, this study will fuel a cause.

AGING

Vogue Magazine and CNN's documentary, "In Search of the Fountain of Youth," serve as the primary justification for this study. (They also function as an inspiration for this project; I wanted to know more about aging, and I wanted to understand why the age issue was receiving so much coverage.) Coming from two separate media genres, print journalism and telecommunications, these sources illustrate the broad distribution of the age issue. They raise concern of not only a youth-obsessed media, but also a youth-infatuated society.

Furthermore, in hopes of justifying my study beyond the physical signs of aging, I turned to another field of academic analysis. For instance, I mention a Web site devoted to the study of social gerontology, which views the age issue from an anthropological perspective. Statistical estimations from the Census Bureau report an increase of aging persons in society. In fact, this increase is "so profound…that every aspect of social life and society is affected."[1] Hence, the

[1] Kearl, M. C. (1996, February 1). Social gerontology and the aging revolution. Retrieved March 24, 2004, from http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/geron.html

need for social gerontology research on the awareness and education of aging persons and their impact on society.

Gardner (2004), an age-critic, and Kramer (1999), an angry columnist, illustrate aging and its impact on culture and identity. These examples demonstrate the reality of the age issue—critics are writing books about it and journalists are complaining about the media's representation of it.

Yahnke's (1993) "Representations of aging in contemporary literary works" was the key article utilized in this study. Yahnke believes that "literary works offer a point of entry for readers who are interested in expanding their understanding of old age. Through literature, readers come to know the untranslated, uninterpreted experience of the old" (p. 84). Framing his study on the representations of aging, Yahnke's study highlights specific thematic elements found in contemporary literature.

MASS COMMUNICATION STUDIES

McQuail's (2000) *Mass Communication Theory*, Berger's (2000) *Media and Communications Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, and Carey's (1989) "Mass communication and cultural studies" (as cited in Boyd-Barrett & Newbold, 1995, p. 365) worked together in this analysis to not only emphasize particular aspects of mass communication studies, but also to implement certain features of putting them into practice.

Furthermore, through *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis* (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999), I was able to discern important media concepts, such as the vast realm of cultural studies and the complex methods of research and inquiry that follow. Yet, this source proved most helpful in the overall

explanation of textual analysis, meaning, and representation—all key research principles in my study.

Fürsich's and Lester's (1996) "Science Journalism under Scrutiny: A Textual Analysis of 'Science Times'" was helpful in understanding textual analysis. Studying *The New York Times'* column, "Scientist at Work," the article gives thorough explanations of communication, culture, and critical studies. It also gives detailed insight into Stuart Hall and the epistemological differences between content and textual analyses.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is driven by feminist insight that suggests a need to reevaluate the aging process in terms of women's knowledge of herself and her body. Examining the representations of aging in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* suggests the oppression of women magnified by a youth obsession. These novels participate in the creation of the feminine ideal because they "affirm the contradictions, complexity, and uncertainty that lie at the heart of the experience of aging" (Yahnke, 1993, p. 84).

The fundamental issue that has concerned feminist theory, according to Kolmar and Bartkowski (2000), is "women's inequality, subordination, or domination by men" (p. 2). Furthermore, in the most straightforward and simple context, "feminist theory is a body of writing that attempts to describe, explain, and analyze the conditions of women's lives" (p. 2). In other words, feminist theory "is grounded in a concern about, and desire to effect change in, the subjugated status of women" (Cirkensa & Cuklanz, 1992, p. 18).

This concern requires a reexamination of women's roles of the nineteenth century, highlighting the subjugated status of women during the Victorian era.

Victorian Angels

A feminist perspective works best in analyzing oppressed women of the strict Victorian lifestyle in the nineteenth century. Queen Victoria (1819-1901) took the throne in 1837; she was only 18-years-old (Cannon & Griffiths, 2000). As a child, Victoria lived a very sheltered life and had little contact with other children (Ibid). At 9-years-old, her mother, The Duchess of

Kent, married and moved to Germany leaving the young princess "alone in a world of grown-ups, seeking solace with her dolls. She grew up with social accomplishments, but short of intellectual stimulus" (Ibid, p. 550).

So short, in fact, that despite London's educational, industrial, and political growth during Victoria's reign, she "greatly disapproved of the campaign for Women's Rights" (Ibid, p. 568). She wrote, "It was dangerous, unchristian and unnatural, this mad, wicked folly" and a subject "on which the queen could not contain herself" (Ibid, p. 568). Queen Victoria vehemently believed, which is apparent in her marriage to Prince Albert that a woman's role was to serve her husband and to focus on her household duties.

Yet, during this time of great expansion in wealth, power, and culture, people began to question religion, politics, and their place in the world. One of the most interesting ideologies created in this late, industrial era of Britain was that of "separate spheres" ("Victorian England," 2003). These detached orbs of humanity assigned certain tasks and responsibilities to its specific members. For example, the "private sphere" was assigned to the women and the "public sphere of business, commerce, and politics [was assigned] to the man" (Ibid).

The private sphere contained "the home, [which] was regarded as a haven from the busy and chaotic public world of politics and business, and from the grubby world of the factory. Those who could afford to, created cozy domestic interiors with plush fabrics, heavy curtains and fussy furnishings which effectively cocooned the inhabitants from the world outside. The middle-class household contained concrete expressions of domesticity in the form of servants, décor, furnishings, entertainment, and clothing. The female body was dressed to emphasize a woman's separation from the world of work" (Ibid). Thus, the "angel of the house" was born.

Rejecting the Angel

Virginia Woolf grew up in this time of austere domesticity, and eventually rejected the "Victorian phantom known as the Angel in the House" (Leaska, 1984, p. 276). The phrase "Angel in the House" comes from poet Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) who believed his wife Emily to be the ideal Victorian wife ("Bronte Page," 2001). An excerpt of the poem illustrates this domestic Angel and also the relationship between husband and wife:

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
> Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
> Of his condoled necessities
> She casts her best, she flings herself,
> How often flings for nought, and yokes
> Her heart to an icicle or whim,
> Whose each impatient word provokes
> Another, not from her, but him;
> While she, too gentle even to force
> His penitence by kind replies,
> Waits by, expecting his remorse,
> With pardon in her pitying eyes
> And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
> A comfortable word confers,
> She leans and weeps against his breast,
> And seems to think the sin was hers;
> Or any eye to see her charms,
> At any time, she's still his wife,
> Dearly devoted to his arms;
> She loves with love that cannot tire;
> And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
> Through passionate duty love springs higher,
> As grass grows taller round a stone. (Ibid)

Originally, this ideal expressed the values of the middle classes. However, as mentioned above, with Queen Victoria's marriage to Prince Albert and her extreme devotion to a domestic life, "the ideal spread throughout nineteenth century society" (Ibid).

Julia Stephen, Woolf's mother, accepted this ideal and in raising her four children, inadvertently plunged the angel upon both daughters (Vanessa and Virginia). Julia's Victorian

matriarchal manner (Curtis, 2002) led to an inherited way of behaving that could be very useful to Woolf "because she enjoyed knowing how to act socially and how to recreate the dignified, comforting rituals of afternoon tea and polite conversation" (p. 19). Then again, it also "became a useful mantle for her to hide behind when necessary. It was what made the 'Angel in the House' such a difficult phantom to kill, for it represented Virginia's less attractive qualities of suppression, deceit, self-deprecation, guilt and superficiality" (Ibid, p. 19).

In *Professions for Women* (1937)—a speech Woolf delivered before the National Society for Women's Service on January 21, 1931—Woolf spoke of the dreaded angel:

> You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her—you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. (as cited in Leaska, 1984, p. 278)

Woolf rejects the angel, and in her conception of *Mrs. Dalloway* "the sociological and political frontiers have been scaled and left behind; new aesthetic and imaginative horizons have been opened out for the sensibility and soul of the new woman" (Sharma, 1975, p. 64). Ultimately, Woolf challenged women's role in post-Victorian England.

Feminist Theory, Language, and Literature

"Language," according to Kolmar and Bartkowski (2000), "constructs assumptions about gender along with other cultural understandings" (p. 42). Consequently, critical linguists have played a pivotal role in feminist analysis. For instance, "the most basic objections about forms of address, formal ('Miss,' 'Mrs.,' 'Ms.') and informal ('baby,' 'chick,' 'bitch,' 'honey'); the use of the generic 'man'; and challenges to religious systems in which 'God the Father' is the primary way of designating the sacred" are all examples of linguistic challenges that feminist

analysts' face (Ibid, p. 42). Women writers, wanting to express women's knowledge or experience, have suspected language to be burdened with patriarchy, hence making it problematic to write for *or* about women.

Nineteenth-century feminists disputed women's "public silence—their culture told them that the very acts of speaking and writing were unwomanly. In order to write novels or poetry or to speak or write publicly about politics, suffrage, or birth control, women had first to assert their right of access to language and then to claim for themselves the name of 'author' or 'citizen'" (Ibid, p. 42). In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), considered "the classic essay on feminism," Virginia Woolf imagines a world where women may claim their language and authorship free from social arrangement and sexual polarization (as cited in Leaska, 1984, p. 168).

Arguing the platform of equal rights to education for both men and women, Woolf creates a fictitious university—Oxbridge, coming from Oxford and Cambridge—where "male power has its sovereignty" (p. 168). The male population, "over the centuries, has bestowed its great wealth upon already wealthy universities. And that wealth has done everything to keep women outside the sturdy walls of learning" (Ibid, p. 168). Therefore, in order for women to write "they must be free of the hatred and bitterness that originate in the human injustice of sexual politics—free to express a larger, more comprehensive sympathy, which embraces the feelings of both women and men; a sympathy that encourages sexual unity" (Ibid, p. 169). Woolf believed:

> Great artists are androgynous. Their minds are unimpeded and their imaginations incandescent. But androgyny can flourish only when one has intellectual freedom, and that freedom depends upon certain material comforts, the most fundamental of which are five hundred pounds a year and a room of one's own. (Ibid, p. 169)

She valued education and understood that the only way women could advance in society was to demand their inalienable rights as human beings, citizens, and artists. With five hundred pounds and a room of one's own in which to create, the female writer could inspire certain texts that challenge the authoritarian patriarchal society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Feminist Theory, Women, and Aging

In today's world, it seems that we are constantly reminded about aging. Women, in particular, encounter a constant stream of media images and products promising to conceal our age. Kaye (1999) reports that "both the popular and academic press frequently carry articles about the impact of our ageing population on the economy, on health and welfare services and on intergenerational relations" (as cited in Bernard, Phillips, Machin, & Davies, 2000, p. 2). Yet, little is known, or written, about our aging complexities, about our daily run-ins with aging in a society that rejects the word. "The way society is constructed, alongside myths and notions about women's natural roles and predispositions as careers and mothers in particular, sets up tensions and ambiguities in thinking about, and reflecting upon, these issues" (Bernard et. al, 2000, p. 2).

Therefore, in this analysis, I hope to raise these issues along with others in an effort to explain the aging process for women. Brown (1998: 269-270) remarks:

> Aging women, demanding corrections to ageist and sexist myths, are insisting that their voices be heard and respected rather than ignored or patronized. (as cited in Bernard et. al, 2000, p. 3)

I hope to let these voices be heard. Through literature, I hope to inform this youth infatuated society on the topic of women aging. In closing, I leave with Browne's (1998) statement concerning all women regardless of class distinction, religion, race, sexual orientation, etc.:

> We need, therefore, to be aware of the dimensions which bind us all together as women, but also alert and sensitive to the rich variety of differences and experiences among us. (as cited in Bernard et. al, 2000, pp. 2-3)

METHOD: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Using textual analysis, this study examines the representations of women and aging in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours.* The foundation of textual analysis is interpretation allowing the researcher to "discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns and emphases of text" (Fürsich & Lester, 1996, p. 29). By the term interpretation, the concern is "not with establishing relations of cause and effect but with exploring the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings through language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals" (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999, p. 6).

If meaning is a social production, then we as consumers of a text (in this case, literature) receive ideological assumptions about culture. Grossberg (1986) writes: "Culture is never merely a set of practices, technologies or messages, objects whose meaning and identity can be guaranteed by their origin or their intrinsic essences" (as cited in Morley & Chen, 1996, p. 157). In other words, there is not one true text, but a multitude of texts influenced and altered by societal codes. Therefore, "the meaning is not in the text itself but is the active product of the text's social articulation, of the web of connotations and codes into which it is inserted" (Ibid, p. 157).

My argument concerns how the textual construction itself works and how the text's social articulation signifies meaning. Throughout the analysis, the objective is to answer the two research questions (How are aging and women represented in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*? How is the aging process represented in the novels?) and to observe the text's meaning on the representations of aging and women.

To restate, in communications research the term *text* includes "any cultural product whose meaning we are trying to puzzle out" (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1999, p. 17). In this case, I am trying to puzzle out the representations of aging and women and the similarities and differences among the characters' aging processes in the texts, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*. The two research questions are used as a guide enabling me to uncover certain patterns, signs, and/or codes. These together will hopefully facilitate the meaning in the texts.

Representation

Meanings are embodied in language and representation applies to the manner in which those meanings are embodied. Deacon (et. al, 1999) presents a fuller definition:

> Representation is a more specific sense of the term which is critical for media studies, covering the meanings attached to particular views of given social groups or categories where these mediate public understanding of the actual groups of categories. This entails processes of 'speaking for' or 'speaking of' those who are represented, in images, characterizations, descriptions, and so on, processes which raise important issues not only about the content and form of media representations but also about those producing them… Representation thus simultaneously brings into critical question both the mode and degree of typification and representativeness in media texts and images—covering under-representation, over-representation and misrepresentation… Representations are built around group conceptions of other groups; they invariably have 'us' and 'them' implications, and in this way they function as vehicles of ideological transmission. (Ibid, p. 397)

The reason I included the majority of Deacon's definition is to spell out the term in its complete form as it relates to critical media studies. Moreover, it is crucial in this analysis to clarify the terms with which I am working. Here, representation concerns itself with meaning, language, and culture, which lead to particular ideological constructs. In examining the representations of aging and women in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, I am discerning meaning in the texts. I am locating patterns and various signs that will enable me to interpret the texts' implications, codes, webs/connotations that influence or drive ideologies.

Major Characters

The following list includes the major characters from both novels that play a vital role in this analysis. A brief summary of their personalities is given. They are listed in no particular order of importance to the novels, and in no way does this order influence the study. The letters in parentheses are the characters' initials and will be used in substitution of the names after the first reference.

Mrs. Dalloway (1925)

Clarissa Dalloway (CD)—the heroine of the novel. She is a 52-year-old angel in the house who loves more than anything to host parties. A deep character and seen by all angles throughout the novel, Clarissa is constantly looking back and reflecting on places she has been and people she has met. Everything affects her.

Richard Dalloway (RD)—Clarissa's husband. He works for the government, and thus is always busy with meetings, committees, etc. He is in love with Clarissa, but feels rather uncomfortable showing his affection.

Elizabeth Dalloway (ED)—Clarissa and Richard's daughter who is not too concerned with suitors. She is a lover of animals and would rather spend time with them than looking for a proper husband.

Peter Walsh (PW)—Clarissa's love before Richard. In the novel, he returns to London to visit Clarissa. He has been in India where he married, separated, and then fell in love again with a certain woman.

Sally Seton/Lady Rosseter (SS/LR)—Clarissa's best friend from childhood. She is extremely outgoing and boisterous; a true rebellious, but good-hearted spirit. She represents Clarissa's true but unfulfilled love.

Septimus Warren Smith (SWS)—Clarissa's "other." A shell-shocked war veteran, Smith represents the insane and madness of 1920s London.

Lucrezia Warren Smith (LWS)—Septimus' wife who is extremely unhappy and constantly wishes to return to her home in Italy. She becomes embarrassed when Septimus succumbs to his illness and insanity.

Lady Bruton (Lady B.)—an extreme socialite; she represents Clarissa in old age. When she doesn't invite Clarissa to her famous lunch parties, Clarissa feels old, useless, and vulnerable.

The old woman—Clarissa's neighbor. Clarissa often looks out her window to see what the old woman is doing; yet, she remains a mystery.

The Hours (1998)

Clarrissa Vaughn (CV)—the modern-day version of Clarissa Dalloway. She is a 52-year-old, lesbian, book editor living in New York City. She divides her time between work, family, and caring for her novelist-poet friend, Richard, who is dying of AIDS.

Richard Brown (RB)—Clarissa's novelist-poet friend who is dying of AIDS. He coined her nickname, Mrs. Dalloway, because he sees the same tragic and loving characteristics in her. He eventually commits suicide by throwing himself out the window.

Sally—Clarissa's live-in girlfriend. She love Clarissa and tries her best to understand the twisted relationship between Clarissa and Richard.

Julia Vaughn (JV)—Clarissa's daughter. She does not play a huge role in the novel; however, her name is worth mentioning due to the fact that she is a parallel to Elizabeth Dalloway.

Laura Brown (LB)—a young, wife and mother who is reading the book, *Mrs. Dalloway*, in 1949, suburban Los Angeles. She appears depressed, but is more in a state of constant despair taking care of her needy three-year-old son and performing her household "duties."

Dan Brown (DB)—Laura's husband. He is a good man, considered a "war hero" of some sort, but lacks the emotional brainpower to truly understand how isolated his wife feels. On the day of the novel, it is his birthday.

Richie Brown (Richie)—Laura and Dan's three-year-old son. He is hopelessly and tragically in love with his mother.

Kitty—Laura's friend and neighbor who is suffering from growth in her uterus. She is paralleled with Clarissa Dalloway's true but unfulfilled love Sally Seton.

Virginia Woolf (VW)—the writer and genius herself in 1923 suburban London writing the book, *Mrs. Dalloway*. She suffers from extreme episodes of headaches, hearing voices, starvation, madness, and suicide.

Leonard Woolf (LW)—Virginia's loving husband who does all he can to help his wife with her episodes of sickness and insanity.

Vanessa Bell (VB)—Virginia's sister. She has three children and lives in the city of London. She often visits Virginia and truly cares for her well-being.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Representations of Aging and Women

The first research question concerns itself with the representations of aging and women in the novels. In keeping well aware of the texts' meaning as a social production and the interpretation of that meaning as it relates to feminist theory, I have compiled four key areas on the representations of aging and women for both novels. They include:

1. Aging as love's paradox,
2. Aging as time and space,
3. Aging as a body declines, and
4. Aging as despair and death.

For each reason, I provide four examples, two from *Mrs. Dalloway* and two from *The Hours*. The goal here is to examine how the representations of women and aging construct a reality in the characters' lives. From this point on, the analysis will move in numerical order of the list above. After that, the second research question (How is the aging process represented in the novels?) will be introduced and discussed.

Aging As Love's Paradox

Hawthorn (1975) believes that "for many of the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, love, in different forms, appears both as a threat and as salvation; like so many other things in the novel its nature is seen to be two-edged and complex… To love someone is to recognise their distinctness, their separateness from us, but the act of loving can, paradoxically, bring the loved one closer" (p. 45). The idea of love, in different forms and in both novels, represents complicated choices—to pursue a certain love and form a union (i.e. marriage) or to reject a certain love and live with that sacrifice. The aging aspect of love's paradox lies in the decision the characters make.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Clarissa Dalloway thinks to herself, while walking toward St. James's Park, on the matter of Peter Walsh and their problematic relationship:

> For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter and his were dry sticks; but suddenly it would come over her, If he were with me now what would he say?—some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness…they came back in the middle of St. James's Park on a fine morning—indeed they did… How he scolded her! How they argued! She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said. (Woolf, p. 7)

And, she did. CD became one—a "West End hostess," a "dreamy socialite," a government employee's wife (Howard, 1981, p. ix). CD rejected PW's proposal because "she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced" (Woolf, 1925, p. 8). She knew she couldn't marry him, "[f]or in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him" (Ibid, pp. 7-8).

CD's choice in rejecting PW and marrying RD is exactly that—her choice. Yet, it's a choice "she had borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the

anguish" of love's sacrifice (Ibid, p. 8). And when CD found out that PW had married a girl from India and was "quite happy" with his life, "she felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged" (Ibid, p. 8). This contradictory statement, feeling young and aged at the same time, represents love's paradox.

In *The Hours* (1998), Clarissa Vaughn thinks to herself, while walking the streets of Greenwich Village, on the matter of Richard Brown and their complicated connection:

> Wind worries the leaves, showing the brighter, grayer green of their undersides, and Clarissa wishes, suddenly with surprising urgency, that Richard were here beside her, right now—not Richard as he's become but the Richard of ten years ago; Richard the fearless, ceaseless talker; Richard the gadfly… Richard has always been Clarissa's most rigorous, infuriating companion, her best friend, and if Richard were still himself, untouched by illness, they could be together right now." (Cunningham, p. 19)

And they could, if only the harsh reality of AIDS and deterioration wasn't in the picture. In fact, "before Richard's decline, Clarissa always fought with him" (Ibid, p. 19). Love, for CV and RB, truly is a paradox. It represents both a threat and salvation—love as a threat or a risk in dealing with AIDS and love as salvation or an escape in *not* dealing with AIDS, in choosing to somehow think in the past (like CV does in this passage) before RB got sick. Plus, CV is a lesbian and, as RB tells her, "has, at heart, become a perfect society wife," which insinuates another paradox: *lesbian* and *perfect society wife* (Ibid, p. 20). The two terms contradict each other.

This brings the analysis to the question of homosexuality and love's paradox. For example, Clarissa Dalloway asks, "But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?" (Woolf, 1925, p. 32). And had it? Was CD truly in love with SS? Could two women possibly be in love? CD wonders:

> The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was more on her side than Sally's. (Ibid, p. 34)

Love's paradox is defined by the way CD describes her feelings for SS, such as "not like one's feelings for a man," "could only exist between women," "sprang from a sense of being," "marriage as a catastrophe," and "chivalry, this protective feeling." CD was in love with SS at this point in her life, and looking back, reflecting on their relationship she knows that she has aged. For now, "she could not even get an echo of her old emotion" (Ibid, p. 34). As CD has grown older and as she and SS have grown apart, the emotions have faded, but the memory lingers still—a paradox in itself—being able to recall certain moments, but unable to feel.

CD goes on to think about the kiss she and SS shared those many years ago. She thinks:

> Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. (Ibid, p. 34)

This represents a moment of purity for CD. She has never felt this way before about another human being, much less a woman, Sally even. After their kiss, she says, "It was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible" (Ibid, p. 36). This moment between CD and SS is both pure and exciting and also painful and horrible, for they both know that this union cannot exist, not in this world. Reality interrupts too often.

In *The Hours* (1998), the question of homosexuality and love's paradox appears when Laura Brown shares an intense moment with her neighbor, Kitty. They are discussing Kitty's

"growth" in her uterus, which is suspected to be the cause of her inability to have children (Cunningham, p. 107). As Kitty is crying in LB's kitchen, LB says:

> Come here… She takes Kitty's shoulders in her hands and, after an awkward moment, bends down until she is practically kneeling… Kitty hesitates, then lets herself be held. She surrenders. She does not cry. Laura can feel the relinquishment; she can feel Kitty give herself over. She thinks, This is how a man feels, holding a woman. (Ibid, p. 109)

Several paradoxical images occur here. The first of which is Kitty speaking with LB about her inability to conceive; she confides in LB. Secondly, the physical movement of the sentences with Kitty's hesitation, then giving in, wanting to be held—it's the same idea of love as a threat and salvation. And lastly, LB thinking as she's holding Kitty in her arms, that "this is how a man feels, holding a woman." Here, we have a reversal of roles where LB is the man, the protector, and Kitty is the woman, the protected.

They feel connected at this moment, truly united. And then, they attempt to express this feeling:

> Without quite meaning to, without deciding to, [Laura] kisses Kitty, lingeringly, on the top of her forehead. She is full of Kitty's perfume and the crisp, clean essence of Kitty's brown-blond hair…. Kitty nods against Laura's breasts. The question has been silently asked and silently answered, it seems. They are both afflicted and blessed, full of shared secrets, striving every moment. They are each impersonating someone. They are weary and beleaguered; they have taken on such enormous work.
>
> Kitty lifts her face, and their lips touch. They both know what they are doing. They rest their mouths, each on the other. They touch their lips together, but do not quite kiss.
>
> It is Kitty who pulls away. (Ibid, p. 110)

This is a moment of purity for LB and Kitty. Obviously, they feel some sort of attraction towards one another, some sort of connection they have felt for sometime. Yet, reality interrupts; Kitty pulls away, leaving them both to soak in the paradoxical images of this moment.

Images like "afflicted and blessed," "shared secrets," "impersonating someone," and "touch their lips, but do not quite kiss" evoke their struggle between threat and salvation, between love and sacrifice.

Aging As Time and Space

Here, the representations of aging and women signify a relationship between time and space. As Daiches (1960) suggests, "We either stand still in time and are led to contemplate diverse but contemporaneous events in space or we stand still in space and are allowed to move up and down temporally in the consciousness of one individual" (as cited in Bloom, 1990, p. 31). At this point, it is necessary to define stream-of-consciousness, a literary technique concerned with the elements of time and space and also the driving force of both novels. Again, Daiches explains the matter of time, space, and stream-of-consciousness in relation to *Mrs. Dalloway* and Virginia Woolf's conception of it:

> Virginia Woolf seems to have grappled carefully with [stream-of-consciousness] in *Mrs. Dalloway*; she limits its scope in time and place; her characters are few and their relations to each other clear-cut; impressions and thought processes are assigned clearly to those to whom they belong, even at the risk of losing some immediacy of effect; the time scheme is patterned with extraordinary care; and altogether the novel represents as neat a piece of construction as she has ever achieved. It is therefore an excellent example to take for a more detailed technical analysis. (Ibid, pp. 30-31)

The conception of time and space proves essential in the framework of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*. Not only does it represent the characters' impressions or viewpoints on their lives, it also defines the manner in which they age.

A perfect example of these elements (stream-of-consciousness, time and space, women and aging) working together is seen through Clarissa Dalloway as she is walking the London streets. She thinks:

> For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty,—one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (Woolf, 1925, p. 4)

Time and space collaborate here as CD is walking the streets and contemplating her life and the lives of others—others being ordinary human beings that also exist in CD's world, that go on about their business as time and space permit. These lines represent CD's interaction with the world and how she views it: as an aging woman, infected with influenza, constantly reminded by Big Ben's chime, how much time she has left. Yet, she loves this, thinking of these things that have molded her, that have given her an identity, a place in society. She loves the traffic, the traffic in her perception of herself and of London.

Clarissa Vaughn exhibits similar perceptions as she moves through the streets of New York City. Time and space collide. She thinks as she crosses Eighth Street:

> She loves, helplessly, the dead television set abandoned on the curb alongside a single white patent-leather pump. She loves the vendor's cart piled with broccoli and peaches and mangoes, each labeled with an index card that offers a price amid abundances of punctuation... It's the city's crush and heave that move you; its intricacy; its endless life. You know the story about Manhattan as a wilderness purchased for strings of beads but you find it impossible not to believe that it has always been a city; that if you dug beneath it you would find the ruins of another, older city, and then another and another… Still, she loves the world for being rude and indestructible, and she knows other people must love it too, poor as well as rich, though no one speaks specifically of the reasons. (Cunningham, 1998, p. 15)

Traveling through the busy streets, CV observes all of life's details. From the abandoned television set to the crowded vendor's cart, she notices. She is aware of her environment, hectic as it is, and loves it. It moves her, pushes her through the congested avenues of the city and of her life. CV knows the city has always been, has existed in the past to people from the past, and shaped their lives as it has hers: an aging woman in an aging city caught between time and space—time, by her daily meandering through life, and space, by her physical presence in the world.

Likewise, Clarissa Dalloway is caught between time and space. As she is preparing for her party, she thinks:

> Laying her brooch on the table, she had a sudden spasm, as if, while she mused, the icy claws had had the chance to fix her. She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August! Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there—the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all other mornings…(Woolf, 1925, pp. 36-37)

Time dictates CD's age, as she is in her "fifty-second year" on this June morning. Space dictates the moment at this point in her life, as she is preparing for her party and plunging into the excitement it brings. She is happy, at this particular moment, thinking of the time she has left, the months "untouched." Her party is this very June evening; the pressures are mounting, but in this moment, time and space come together and enable CD to plunge into the very heart of it, and transfix it there.

Similarly, this transfixed moment, this grip on the world of time and space, occurs in Virginia Woolf as she is preparing to write *Mrs. Dalloway*. She thinks:

> This is one of the most singular experiences, waking on what feels like a good day, preparing to work but not yet actually embarked. At this moment there are infinite possibilities, whole hours ahead. Her mind hums. The morning may penetrate the obfuscation, the clogged pipes, to reach the gold. She can feel it

> inside her, an all but indescribable second self, or rather a parallel, purer self… It is an inner faculty that recognizes the animating mysteries of the world because it is made of the same substance, and when she is very fortunate she is able to write directly through that faculty. (Cunningham, 1998, pp. 34-35)

When VW is in this state, mesmorized by time and space, she can create. It is in this moment she is most happy. It is this moment, free from the boundaries of time and space that she can wander through stream-of-consciousness, pick up her pen, and create.

Aging As a Body Declines

According to Biggs (1993), "To be located in one's body means to look at the world from a unique point of view" (p. 35). The representations of women and aging as a body declines signify a self-opposition because the body "becomes less effective with increased age; it puts limits on human potential, but is at the same time our gateway into the world" (Biggs, 1993, p. 35). It stands as a reminder of how far we've come, a human vessel that has guided our selves, our souls, through life. But it also stands as an obstruction, a hindrance, that once it reaches a certain age, a particular point, it changes and slowly begins to age.

Clarissa Dalloway thinks to herself walking down Bond Street:

> But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown, there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway. (Woolf, 1925, pp. 10-11)

CD's body isn't only declining in the physical sense, here; it's also declining in its identity, its place within the world. Her body has changed ("no more having of children now") and has transformed into an empty vessel, its sole purpose to carry Mrs. Richard Dalloway along "with the rest of them," through life.

Barnett (2002) suggests that "Woolf's women struggle to maintain their senses of self in their relationships with men. Finding themselves cast in roles, they must either play the expected part for affirmation, or they must struggle with disapproval" (p. 57). CD is struggling to maintain her sense of self in her world, in her journey up Bond Street. Cast in the role of Mrs. Richard Dalloway, she no longer has an identity; she no longer has a name; her body has declined, and now she is almost invisible.

Virginia Woolf, in *The Hours* (1998), experiences a similar body decline. After she wakes up, she goes into the bathroom to wash her face:

> 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. She washes her face and does not look, certainly not this morning…(Cunningham, 1998, pp. 30-31)

VW's body is physically aging and she can't even bring herself to look at it in the mirror. This aging, this growing older is more of a phantom here; the shadow of a body's decline that haunts her.

Likewise, in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), this haunting form appears to Clarissa Dalloway. After she finds out she was not invited to lunch at Lady Bruton's house, she says:

> "Fear no more," said Clarissa. Fear no more the heat o' the sun; for the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she had stood shiver…
>
> Millicent Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. No vulgar jealousy could separate her from Richard. But she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton's face, as if it had been a dial cut in impassive stone, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years…
>
> She began to go slowly upstairs, with her hand on the banisters, as if she had left the party, where now this friend now that had flashed back her face, her voice;

> had shut the door and gone out and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night, or rather, to be accurate, against the stare of this matter-of-fact June morning…she thought, feeling herself suddenly shriveled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. (Ibid, pp. 30-31)

In Lady B. not inviting CD to her famous lunch party, CD feels old and useless. She feels as if her time as the reigning hostess of West End London is soon coming to an end. This thought, this idea of not being invited, foreshadows CD's body decline; she becomes "shriveled," "aged," and "out of her body and brain which now failed." The "friend," the "single figure" that CD mentions is the shadow of her aging body, a phantom of her old self.

CD continues to think as she moves towards her bedroom:

> Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday they must disrobe. (Ibid, p. 31)

This phantom appears to Laura Brown in *The Hours* (1998) as she is getting ready for bed. She stands in the bathroom and thinks:

> When she looks in the medicine-cabinet mirror, she briefly imagines that someone is standing behind her. There is no one, of course; it's just a trick of the light. For an instant, no more than that, she has imagined some sort of ghost self, a second version of her, standing immediately behind, watching. It's nothing. She opens the medicine cabinet, puts the toothpaste away. Here, on the glass shelves, are the various lotions and sprays, the bandages and ointments, the medicines. Here is the plastic prescription bottle with its sleeping pills. This bottle, the most recent refill, is almost full—she can't use them, of course, while she's pregnant.
>
> She closes the medicine-cabinet door, which meets the frame with a solid, competent metallic click. She thinks of everything inside the cabinet, on the shelves, in darkness now. She goes into the bedroom, where her husband is waiting. She removes her robe. (Ibid, p. 214)

LB can see herself growing older; she can see the "lotions and sprays," the "bandages and ointments," and the "medicines"—substances used to heal the body. Yet, LB most notably sees

the "prescription bottle with its sleeping pills" and thinks how easy it would be to sleep, to let her body (and herself) go. She notices the phantom, the "ghost self," the "second version of her," watching and reminding about life and death, about the transformation of the body. Then she enters the bedroom, removes the robe from her body, and drops herself into bed with her husband.

Aging As Despair and Death

The following examples illustrate the representations of aging and women as despair and death. It is in these passages where both writers, Woolf and Cunningham, capture the human condition on the brink of madness and desolation.

Clarrisa Dalloway thinks:

> Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (Woolf, 1925, p. 9)

CD is contemplating her existence in the world, what she means to the world, to people she knows and to people she has never met. She wonders what it would be like if she were to die and how or if the world would notice.

Similarly, Clarissa Vaughn contemplates death and despair while walking the streets of New York. She wonders why people, even she, go on living in a hectic and crowded world. She asks herself: "Why else do we struggle to go on living, no matter how compromised, no matter

how harmed? Even if we're further gone than Richard; even if we're fleshless, blazing with lesions, shitting in the sheets; still, we want desperately to live" (Cunningham, 1998, p. 15).

In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), at Clarissa Dalloway's party, the topic of death comes up when CD learns that Septimus Smith has killed himself. This leads her to think about death in general, and all the events of this day in June. She says:

> They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (Ibid, p. 184)

In The Hours (1998), as Clarissa Vaughn is getting Richard Brown ready for his party, he sits "perched on the sill of the open window, straddling it, with one emaciated leg still in the apartment and the other, invisible to her, dangling out over five stories" (Cunningham, p. 196). CV pleads with him to get away from the window, but he refuses and eventually falls to his death. CV thinks, after witnessing such a tragic event:

> It ends here, then, on a pallet of concrete, under the clotheslines, amid shards of glass. She runs her hand, gently, down from his shoulder along the frail curve of his back… She can smell the stale flannel of the robe, the winey sharpness of his unbathed flesh. She would like to speak to him, but can't. She simply rests her head, lightly, against his back. (Ibid, pp. 202-203)

Lines from William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* echo throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. These lines speak of death and the preparation we should all have for its coming:

> Fear no more the heat o' th' sun,
> Nor the furious winter's rages,
> Thou they worldly task hast done,
> Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages.
> Golden lads and girls all must,
> As chimney-sweepers, come to dust. (4.2.258-263)

Representations of the Aging Process

My second research question in this study concerns itself with the representations of the aging process in both novels. Achenbaum (1989) "acknowledged the power of literary works to provide the context for instructive life lessons relating to gerontological education: 'What seems to have fascinated writers everywhere throughout the ages is the insistence of the old to remain true to—to (re)affirm—the basic troths of the human condition in their simple utterances, in their seemingly pedestrian gestures, and in their very mien'" (as cited in Yahnke, 1993, p. 84). Achenbaum's allusion to the "basic truths of the human condition reflects at once the universality of representations of aging in literature and the various means by which literary artists individuate characters in old age, depict their inner lives, portray their interactions across generations, their friendships and their loves, and the basis of their relationships with family and friends" (Ibid, p. 84).

In examining the representations of the aging process in both novels, I uncovered several patterns within the texts. The most interesting of these was the role of the mother and the role of the old woman. These images represent the aging process, as Yahnke suggests, in terms of the "interactions across generations" and the "relationships with family and friends." In answering my second question, I will divide this section into two parts, the first dealing with the role of the mother, and the second dealing with the role of the old woman.

The Role of the Mother

The role of the mother is important in both novels. The relationship between mother and child reveals a certain connection—the mother seeing herself in the child and vice versa. The aging process comes into play when the mother can see the differences between her and the child and when she can see the child grown up, aged.

For example, in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), as Clarissa Dalloway is walking down Bond Street, she thinks about "her old Uncle William" and how he "used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves" (Woolf, p. 11). CD "had a passion for gloves; but her own daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them" (Ibid, p. 11). Elizabeth Dalloway is very different from her mother; CD can sense that and often reflects on their contrasts. She continues to think how "Elizabeth, her own daughter, went to Communion; and how she dressed, how she treated people who came to lunch she did not care a bit, it being her experience that the religious ecstasy made people callous (so did causes)" (Ibid, pp. 11-12). ED is the exact opposite of CD; she is not interested in shopping, in gloves, or in parties. ED is very much interested in other things, in things that cannot be bought (i.e. her love for animals and her love for religion).

Likewise, in The Hours (1998), as Clarissa Vaughn crosses Houston Street, she "passes a shop and thinks of buying a dress for Julia, she'd look stunning in that little black one with the Anna Magnani straps, but Julia doesn't wear dresses, she insists on spending her youth, the brief period in which one can wear anything at all, stomping around in men's undershirts and leather lace-ups the size of cinder blocks. (Why does her daughter tell her so little? What happened to the ring Clarissa gave her for her eighteenth birthday?)" (Cunningham, p. 21). CV is thinking about her daughter, their differences, and the distance between them (since JV tells her so little).

She is thinking about the little things, like the fact that JV stomps around in men's undershirts instead of wearing dresses.

Moving on from the differences between mother and daughter, there is more in this aging process from the role of the mother. For instance, Laura Brown in *The Hours* (1998) rejects her mother role. She finds herself in a state of despair, caring for her husband and caring for a child while pregnant with another:

> Here, then, is the daily transition. With her husband present, she is more nervous but less afraid. She knows how to act. Alone with Richie, she sometimes feels unmoored—he is so entirely, persuasively himself. He wants what he wants so avidly… She knows, or at least suspects, that other mothers of small children must maintain a body of rules and, more to the point, an ongoing mother-self to guide them in negotiating the days spent alone with a child. (Cunningham, p. 47)

LB "can't always remember how a mother would act" (Ibid, p. 47). She cannot find that "mother-self" within her to guide her child, to raise him the way a mother should. She is so consumed with her duties as a mother and her despair as a wife that she cannot find her way.

> She is so tired. She was up until after two, reading. She touches her belly—is it bad for the new baby, her getting so little sleep? She hasn't asked the doctor about it; she's afraid he'll tell her to stop reading altogether. She promises that tonight she'll read less. She'll go to sleep by midnight, at the latest… She will do all that's required, and more. (Ibid, p. 48)

LB desires more than anything to be a good mother. She notices Richie's quirks; she notices what makes him "so entirely, persuasively himself." Through him, she notices what she must do—"all that's required, and more."

Clarissa Vaughn, noticing Julia Vaughn, feels quite different from LB, at least in terms of the requirements of a mother. CV looks at JV:

> Julia sighs with a surprisingly elderly mixture of rue and exhausted patience, and she seems, briefly, like a figure of ancient maternal remonstrance; part of centuries-long line of women who have sighed with rue and exhausted patience over the strange passions of men. Briefly, Clarissa can imagine her daughter at

> fifty: she will be what people refer to as an ample woman, large of body and spirit, inscrutably capable, decisive, undramatic, an early riser. (Ibid, p. 155)

CV can see, as a mother, JV's potential. She can also see herself inside JV. She can imagine her daughter at fifty and see her capable spirit. She can see her succeed in this crazy life, in these crowded streets.

The Role of the Old Woman

An old woman appears in both novels. She does not have a name and some would probably not consider her a major character. However, both Clarissa Dalloway and Clarissa Vaughn (and other characters as well) notice her as they migrate through their lives. They see her singing; they see her sleeping; they are mesmerized by her. She represents the final stage of the aging process—an "old woman"—she has accepted her age and goes on living within it.

For example, Lucrezia Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) passes the "old woman singing in the street…[which makes] her suddenly quite sure that everything was going to be right" (Woolf, p. 83). LS has been struggling with her marriage to Septimus Warren Smith and has felt lonely, isolated, and suicidal at times. But, upon passing the old woman, she feels that everything will be okay; if the old woman is happy in her life and LS can be happy as well.

Clarissa Dalloway sees the old woman through her window. She says:

> How extraordinary it was, strange, yes, touch, to see the old lady (they had been neighbours ever so many years) move away from the window, as if she were attached to that sound, that string. Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her. (Ibid, p. 127)

CD often went to her window to look at the old woman, to watch her; she was a mystery to CD, a mysterious force that pulled her in, that made her question life and death. When SWS commits suicide, CD retreats to her room:

> She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising!—in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to bed. And the sky. It will be a solemn sky, she had thought, it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty. But there it was—ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds. It was new to her… She was going to bed, in the room opposite. It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window. Could she see her? It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking. (Ibid, pp. 185-186)

The old woman fascinates CD. She finds it amazing that in loudness of life—the parties, the laughing, the shouting—the old lady continues living. She continues to get up in the morning and open her blinds; and she continues to lie down at night and go to bed. That's what life is, moving throughout the hours, just as the old woman does.

Likewise, in *The Hours* (1998), Clarissa Vaughn sees the old woman. She notices her on the busy streets of New York:

> Ahead, under the Arch, an old woman in a dark, neatly tailored dress appears to be singing, stationed precisely between the twin statues of George Washington, as warrior and politician, both faces destroyed by weather… Under the cement and grass of the park (she has crossed into the park now, where the old woman throws back her head and sings) lay the bones of those buried in the potter's field that was simply paved over, a hundred years ago, to make Washington Square. (Cunningham, p. 14)

CV notices the old woman; she listens to her sing "tunelessly" (Ibid, p. 14). She sees her old, wrinkled face "destroyed by weather." CV sees her singing in the park, standing on "the bones of those buried."

CV also sees the old woman when she goes to visit Richard Brown in his apartment:

> She goes to the nearest of the three windows, and with some difficulty, raises the oiled-canvas shade. A compromised daylight—that which angles down between Richard's building and its chocolate-brick sister fifteen feet away—falls into the room. Across the alley is the window of a peevish old widow, with its glass and ceramic figures on the windowsill (a donkey pulling a cart, a clown, a grinning squirrel) and its venetian blinds. (Cunningham, p. 58)

CV sees the old woman, the "old widow." She sees this aged woman outside the window, just as CD sees the old woman outside her window. CV notices the objects on the old woman's windowsill. She looks; she watches; and she wonders.

Yet, the most important role the old woman plays (at least in *The Hours*) occurs at the very end of the novel. When Laura Brown comes to CV's apartment for RB's party, she is a "tall, slightly stooped woman of eighty or more. Her hair is bright, steely gray; her skin is translucent, parchment-colored, as warm with brown freckles the size of pinpricks. She wears a dark floral dress and soft, creepy, old-woman shoes" (Ibid, p. 218). CV notices her; she looks at her carefully and knows that this old woman "has been worshipped and despised; she knows she has obsessed a man who might, conceivably, prove to be a significant artist" (Ibid, p. 221). But, it is too late. RB has killed himself and the world will never know if he could have been a "significant artist."

As CV and LB sit on the sofa they discuss RB's death and how it could have been prevented.

> Clarissa says, "I took the best care of him I could."
>
> Laura nods. She says, "I wish I could have done better."
>
> "I wish the same thing myself."
>
> Laura reaches over and takes Clarissa's hand. Under the soft, loose skin of Laura's hand, palpably, are the spines and knobs of bones, the cords of veins. (Ibid, p. 222)

LB, the old woman, represents to CV "the woman of wrath and sorrow, of pathos, of dazzling charm; the woman in love with death; the victim and torturer who haunted RB's work. Here, right here in this room, is the beloved; the traitor" (Ibid, p. 226). CV almost feels disgust for LB because she knows how RB felt towards his mother. Yet, she also feels sympathy; she tries to understand LB, to read her old, wrinkled face. And in the end, she sees herself in LB—in LB as the old woman, struggling through life and contending with the hours. I want to close this analysis with these lines, representing aging, women, time, and life:

> Here is an old woman, a retired librarian from Toronto, wearing old woman's shoes.
>
> And here she is, herself, Clarissa, not Mrs. Dalloway anymore; there is no one now to call her that. Here she is with another hour before her. (Ibid, p. 226)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

> *"Fine," Clarissa says. She sits beside Laura on the sofa. She simply does what her daughter tells her to, and finds a surprising relief in it. Maybe, she thinks, one could begin dying into this: the ministrations of a grown daughter, the comforts of a room. Here, then, is age. Here are the little consolations, the lamp and the book. Here is the world, increasingly managed by people who are not you; who will do either well or badly; who do not look at you when they pass you in the street… Heaven only knows why we love it so.*
>
> *Here, then, is the party, still laid; here are the flowers, still fresh; everything ready for the guests, who have turned out to be only four. Forgive us, Richard. It is, in fact, a party, after all. It is a party for the not-yet-dead; for the relatively undamaged; for those who for mysterious reasons have the fortune to be alive. (Cunningham, 1998, pp. 220, 226)*

This study examined the representations of aging in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*. I wanted to know how aging and women were represented and the ways in which the aging process affected the characters. Looking through a feminist lens, I suggested the need to reevaluate the aging process in terms of woman's knowledge of herself and her body. I recommended the belief that the oppression of women is magnified by a youth obsession, thus creating an anti-aging society.

Using textual analysis, I investigated the content of the texts and interpreted meanings within them. The patterns discovered within the texts led me to divide the representations of aging and women into four central locations: aging as love's paradox, aging as time and space, aging as a body declines, and aging as despair and death. Likewise, the patterns discovered within the texts on the representations of the aging process led me to focus on two patterns: the role of the mother and the role of the old woman.

Returning to Miller (2002) and the importance of studying literature, I have found that through literature we can understand old age and find solace for the human condition. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* was published in 1925; Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* in 1998. Seventy-three years exist between these novels; a lot has happened in these seventy-three years. Yet, one thing remains true to both times: people still grow old and age. They still struggle with life; they still contend with the hours of their days.

While this fact remains true, it is important at this point in closing my study, to discuss the implications of aging as it relates to feminist theory. Using the fundamental issue concerning feminist theory, according to Kolmar and Bartkowski (200), I examined "women's inequality, subordination, [and] domination by men" in these texts (p. 2). I also aimed to describe, explain, and analyze the conditions of women's lives in both novels. Drawing on Woolf's insistence that women must claim their language free from social arrangement and sexual polarization, I found that the representations of aging and women confine them to certain roles—roles within themselves and roles within society.

The women in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* struggle with aging in love's paradox, in time and space, in their bodies' decline, and in despair and death. They struggle against "the organizing structures of social and cultural life [that] are continually reproduced and modified through the myriad activities of everyday life" (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 1998, p. 7). As these women go about their days, as they meander through the hours, they are confronted with social realities—realities that confine them to an unhappy marriage, to a restricted space, to an aging body, and to a foreshadowing death.

Each woman's culture confines her to these realities. Thus, by studying these texts in terms of Carey's assertion on cultural studies—an attempt to diagnose human meanings—I

found that the representations of the aging process patterned itself into two forms: a mother and an old woman. I observed the meaning of being a mother in 1920s London, 1950s California, and 1990s New York. The process was the same in each time. The mother sees in the child a reflection, a requirement, a resource for moving on with life, a reason for living through the hours. I also observed the meaning of the old woman, who randomly appears on streets, in parks, and through windows. She is meticulously placed in the passages at the moments when the characters' are struggling with something—death, life, marriage, etc. They look to the old woman as a guide, a mesmerizing force. They see in her the final stage of the aging process—an old woman—who has accepted her age and goes on living within it.

These women struggle with the phantom of aging, the shadow of their old selves, who appear to them and remind them about life and death, about the transformation of the body, and about their role in society. Struggling against the angel in the house, these women attempt to reject the "qualities of suppression, deceit, self-deprecation, guilt and superficiality" (Curtis, 2002, p. 19). They try to ignore this dreaded angel. Yet, the constructs of society and the realities of culture confine these women to a life of domesticity, to a world of hosting parties, to a "private sphere" of existence ("Victorian England," 2003).

Woolf wrote about rejecting the angel. She wanted "new aesthetic and imaginative horizons [to be] opened out for the sensibility and soul of the new woman" (Sharma, 1975, p. 64). And they were. For in *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf created a new genre of novel; she captured a woman on the brink of creation and madness. She wrote about this woman's ordinary day as she plans her party and interacts with her environment. She described this woman's life and all the hours it consumed on this day in June. She gave her a voice and allowed it to be heard.

Cunningham heard such a voice; he heard the power in Woolf's language about this "outwardly unexceptional woman," this Clarissa Dalloway.[1] He used this voice to propel his story about three outwardly unexceptional women in the madness of Virginia Woolf, in the disparity of Laura Brown, and in the reflection of Clarissa Vaughn. He let these voices be heard to an entire new generation—a generation obsessed with aging and growing older. After all, "[t]he way society is constructed, alongside myths and notions about women's natural roles and predispositions as careers and mothers in particular, sets up tensions and ambiguities in thinking about, and reflecting upon, these issues" (Bernard, Phillips, Machin, & Davies, 2000, p. 2).

Woolf challenged society, as did Cunningham, to think about aging and women, to notice time and space, to reflect on the hours of life. As mentioned before, Browne (1998) remarks on the issue concerning all women regardless of class distinction, religion, race, sexual orientation, etc.:

> We need, therefore, to be aware of the dimensions which bind us all together as women, but also alert and sensitive to the rich variety of differences and experiences among us. (as cited in Bernard et. al, pp. 2-3)

I believe that through literature we, as women, can become "aware of the dimensions that bind us together." We can understand what it's like to be a mother, to be a child, to be a hostess, to be a guest, to be in love, to be alone, to be in life, and to be dead. These novels can open our eyes not only to the importance of studying literature, but also to our understanding of old age.

As women, aging in a society obsessed with staying young, we are forced to deal with images that remind and restrict us of how old we are. We begin to think after seeing these images played out on newsstands and in television commercials that we are not good enough if

[1] Cunningham, M. (2003, November 2). Meet the writers: Michael Cunningham. *Barnes & Noble.com.* www.barnesandnoble.com/writers/writerdetails.

we are old. Reality dictates that we live in a youth oriented world where looking old is considered abnormal and treated as a disease.[2]

Thus, after analyzing the representations of aging and women in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, I have come to believe my projected assertions listed in the Introduction to this study. I have provided insight into the aging process for women, into the importance of literature and reading, and into the value of studying literature. I have drawn attention to the effects of a youth obsessed media and offered an understanding of the age issue found in both novels. And, in conclusion, I contest that we are all left with the hours; we are all measured by time—it's what we do in those minutes, those moments that make us who we are. Soul's don't age; only bodies.

[2] CNN Presents: 'In Search of the Fountain of Youth.' (2003, November 9). Transcript available from www.cnn.com/ TRANSCRIPTS/0311/09/cp.00.html.

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