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“An Emptiness About the Heart of Life”:

A Reformed Approach to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*



by Mary J. Dengler

Postmodernism accepts no textual interpretation as authoritative and no moral view as correct. In a culture that relies on opinion to resolve issues, how do Christians resolve biblical/cultural tensions when reading fiction? Abraham Kuyper

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answers that question. He tells us not to leave the arts and sciences “in the hands of unbelievers” but instead to consider it our task to know God in all his works,” to “fathom with all the energy of [our] intellect, things terrestrial as well as things celestial,” to “open to view both the order of creation and the ‘common grace’ of the God [we] adore” in “nature,” the “production of human industry,” and “the life [and history] of mankind” (Calvinism and Science” 125).

We are called, then, to fathom Virginia Woolf's modern classic *Mrs. Dalloway*¹ and Michael Cunningham's postmodern derivative work, *The Hours*,² as examples of common grace. Guided by biblical norms,³ we accept the truths and aesthetic brilliance of these works as “gifts of grace” (Kuyper, “Calvinism and Art” 155), while we resist and question the works' moral and philosophical assumptions.

Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and Cunningham's *The Hours* (1998)⁴ succeed as gifts of grace by depicting one aspect of reality—the human struggle between certainty and doubt and the causes of that struggle. Writers who give us this “reality,” says Woolf, are “good human beings...even if they show every variety of human depravity” (*A Room of One's Own* 109); they are good if they write with “integrity” (72) about the human condition.⁵ Woolf says

it is the writer's "business to find [reality] and... communicate it to the rest of us" for its "[cataract-removing] operation...on the senses" that allows us to see "more intensely afterwards" (110). Both writers do just that: they show us the contradictory internal world of characters enthralled with life, perplexed at its mystery, disquieted at their own choices, and anxious to perform a redemptive act before life's end. Together, they give us a clearer perception of what Woolf calls "Mrs. Brown," or "life itself" ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 212). They show us what Clarissa Dalloway calls "an emptiness about the heart of life" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 31).

That perception grows if we read Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Cunningham's *The Hours* together, along with Woolf biographies and Woolf's non-fiction. Reading contextually, we enter what Schliermacher posited, and Dilthey coined, the "hermeneutic circle," of moving from parts to whole and whole to parts (Murfin/Ray 155). Doing so illuminates the whole. And even though we can't enter the "horizon," or "range of vision," of another time as if it were fixed, writes Gadamer, we can fuse our horizon with the horizons of Woolf and Cunningham (269-73) for the interaction and impact of the two "contexts" (297). Cunningham's interpretation of Woolf's life and text according to late twentieth-century sex/gender theories changes the focus of Woolf's work.

This paper contends that re-reading Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* from a horizon broadened by Cunningham's work changes the focus from Septimus Smith's suicide and Clarissa Dalloway's party to a pivotal moment in their youth: Clarissa's kiss with Sally Seton and Septimus' affection with his officer Evans. For both characters, that same-sex intimacy paradoxically fills the hours that follow with anxiety-producing emptiness and determines their need to compensate for life's failure.

This change of focus results from a "dialogue" between readers and texts over a common "subject" (Phillips 3). In that dialogue, Christian readers distinguish Cunningham's assumptions from their own by turning to God's Word, which, as Gadamer explains, is perfect and complete, unlike the human word, which "never possesses complete self-presence but is dispersed into thinking this or

that..." (385).

The common subject is "life itself," its mystery/ambiguity, represented in the insignificant but complex Mrs. Brown, of Woolf's essay "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown." According to Quentin Bell, this essay comes "as near as [Woolf] came to an aesthetic manifesto" (2.104). In it she gives the "business" of the Georgian novelists⁶: "to look past the...preaching and moralizing of Wells and Galsworthy...and approach that central mystery, Mrs. Brown herself" (104-105). That central mystery, as Woolf presents it, agrees with what existentialists Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger explain as humanity's inability to grasp or define life except in retrospect and therefore of living in ambivalence and anxiety, certain only of death. The splendor of an unexpected early intimacy, followed by a life that fails to match that splendor, points to ambivalence in Woolf, who blamed gender identity and inequity in her critical writings.

Woolf's feminist theory blames cultural inequity for much of the dissatisfaction that plagues women—and by inference her characters. Woolf's fiction and non-fiction introduce ideas developed by later feminist schools. First, Woolf resists phallogocentrism through silence (Murfin/Ray 172, 122) when character Clarissa Dalloway mentally escapes Peter Walsh's criticism by remembering Sally Seton's kiss. Second, Woolf introduces "semiotic" or "unifying and fluid" language, as opposed to classifying or "symbolic" male language (127), in her stream-of-consciousness narrator, who connects characters' thoughts and increases the ambiguity of each moment's perception. Third, she connects "women's bodies and writing" (123), using the window (symbolic of female sexual anatomy and absorbing perception) as the lens through which Clarissa Dalloway and her androgynous counterpart, Septimus Smith, absorb reality, as opposed to the clock, Big Ben (symbolic of male anatomy and analytical perception), whose striking divides the day with reminders of time's and life's passing. Fourth, she focuses on fashion, "madness, disease, and the demonic" (124), in Clarissa Dalloway's comfort in clothes/Bond Street and in Septimus Smith's hallucinations—prophesying a new religion, in which all things are alive in God. Most apparently, she introduces "gynocentrism," or fe-

male writing—"the way women across the ages have perceived themselves and imagined reality" (124), focusing her narrative on one day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway.

Woolf also introduces gender fiction and theory, developed by later theorists, to address another ambiguity—gender identity. Woolf's character depictions suggest gender as a "learned behavior, a product of culture and its institutions," *not* "something natural or innate"; "heterosexuality and homosexuality" as "social constructs"; and sexuality as "a continuum, not a fixed set of binary oppositions" (Murfin/Ray 139). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf develops a gender and sexual continuum, depicting the most androgynous characters as the most sensitive and creative, for example Septimus Smith's anguish in recalling his lost love even as he envisions a new religion, and Clarissa Dalloway's memory of Sally's kiss even as she plans a salvific party.

To validate that continuum, Woolf imagines, in *A Room of One's Own*, the writer's imagination androgynously, as an invisible river uniting a man and woman from opposite sides of a street, a union that removes the "strain" of seeing "one sex as distinct from the other" (97, essay 6). Woolf describes this unity of both powers as "the most complete happiness," as "normal and comfortable"; for in it, "the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties" (98-99). Woolf's theory of the writer's androgyny, like Mrs. Dalloway's party and Septimus' religion, attempts to repair the ambivalence created by cultural gender constructs.

Cunningham, fusing Woolf's horizon with his own, implies the same writer-androgyny, the same ambivalence, and the same gynocentrism in focusing on character-Woolf; her reader, Laura Brown; and her namesake, Clarissa Vaughn, during a day. And like Woolf, only more so, Cunningham develops the gender/sex continuum introduced by Woolf's characters. Before Cunningham's character-Woolf imagines the kiss between Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton for her novel, she kisses her sister Vanessa; that kiss is replicated by reader Laura Brown with Kitty and by Clarissa Vaughn, openly, with Sally.

Woolf's writing as a "woman-manly" and Cunningham's writing as a "man-womanly" (Woolf, *A Room* 98-99) challenges the historically

Christian assumption that God's creation of humans "in his...image" differentiated "male and female" (Gen. 1:27) in more than anatomical ways. Some infer a maleness and femaleness in God's nature to explain the two genders. Others infer inherent neutral capacities of self-consciousness and reason as God's image but culturally constructed norms for maleness and femaleness. Karl Barth explains that each human being is totally "man or woman" and "man and woman," reflecting the differentiation and unity of the Trinity (195). Jürgen Moltmann explains humanity's likeness to God (God's plurality and unity) in the "sexual differentiation and community of human beings" (220); for Moltmann the human analogy of God consists in "the community of man and wife, which corresponds to the fellowship of God with the Trinity" (220). For both theologians, the sexes and genders are distinct in nature and unified in marriage,⁷ not a compendium. Woolf's assumption of greater freedom in writing as "man womanly" or a "woman manly" suggests cultural conditioning, cultural defiance, insight, or an empowering contradiction. Contrary to a sexual continuum, Christians assume that humanity's defiance of God not only destroyed "intimacy, community" (Schwehn 131) and self-knowledge but fostered male attempts to master and limit women (Gen. 3.16-18), adding to the heart's "emptiness."

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf roots her feminist/gender theory in a transcendent, all-encompassing "Nature" (72), which eliminates gender distinctions and moral judgments. Woolf asserts a woman's need of resources and "a room of her own" if she is "to write fiction" (4). To legitimate that position, she implies nature's divinity and the imagination's participation in divinity in her description of the Oxford bushes, their seeming "to burn with fire" (5). This description implies both a world-spirit and the imagination's participation in the world-spirit as it projects, like a lamp, what it perceives. Woolf implies not only nature's reflecting, mirror-like, the images projected by human imagination⁸ but also reality's consisting of our perceptions. From a transcendentalist frame,⁹ Woolf argues that denying women's divinity has fostered their literary ignorance and silence (essay 1), a phallo-centric rendering of women by his-

tory (essay 2), and a tragic fate for any woman who dared to write and live like Shakespeare (essay 3).

The freedom to write “as women write” (74), Woolf implies (essay 4), presupposes a mind that, like a looking glass,¹⁰ finds “no obstacle” between itself and its expression (57). Identifying those obstacles as “anger, ignorance, and fear” caused by male-imposed restrictions (73), she attributes her ability to avoid those obstacles to Nature’s “inner light” of judgment (72), another allusion to a world-consciousness, and praises Jane Austen’s freedom from such obstacles in writing on wom-

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en’s interests instead of men’s (74). Woolf exercises that freedom by focusing on Clarissa Dalloway’s concerns in a day.

This freedom is also contingent on the work of previous writers, Woolf explains in her fifth essay, as if predicting Michael Cunningham’s novel about her life/novel. Explaining her freedom to depict one woman’s feelings for another, she writes, “Books continue each other” (80), and cites novelist Mary Carmichael’s statement “Chloe liked Olivia” (82-83) as initiating a major change in writing. Woolf continues that freedom with Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton’s kiss, as does Cunningham, who develops that freedom in his character-Woolf’s kissing her sister Vanessa as “forbidden fruit,” Laura Brown’s kissing Kitty guiltily, and Clarissa Vaughn’s kissing partner Sally openly and guiltlessly. In a re-reading of Woolf, Clarissa

Dalloway’s discontented life, after a moment of splendor with Sally, interrupted and trivialized by Peter Walsh, seems attributable to cultural prohibitions and conditions.

Clarissa Dalloway’s youthful love of Sally Seton (*Mrs. Dalloway* 32-35) makes sense in the context of Woolf’s life, recorded in Quentin Bell’s Woolf biographies and in Woolf’s non-fiction, dramatized in Cunningham’s character-Woolf. The conversion of Woolf’s father from Anglicanism to Agnosticism (“Leslie Stephen”) led to Woolf’s religious cynicism and mystic yearning (Bell 2.136), expressed in Clarissa Dalloway’s hope for absorption in a world-spirit.

Woolf’s sense of failure is rooted in women’s limited education. Though she studied literature with her father and learned German, Greek, and Latin (Bell 1.51), she resented a “haphazard” education that emphasized “female accomplishments” while her brothers studied at school and Cambridge (1.27). In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf decries women’s ignorance (112), expressed in Clarissa Dalloway’s anguish of knowing “nothing” (*Mrs. Dalloway* 8) and giving parties as compensation, like Cunningham’s Laura Brown.

Most significantly, Woolf’s enduring her two step-brothers’ sexual abuse explains her closeness with brother Toby’s gay Cambridge friends, her depression and hallucinations, her turn to women for affection (from sisters Vanessa and Kitty to friends Madge Williams, Violet Dickinson, and Vita Sackville-West) and the Sally Seton kiss. In *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf recalls being “ashamed or afraid of [her] own body” and hallucinating a “hideous face” looking over her shoulder in the mirror (9), as if haunted by guilt, atavism, or a devil. That face appears to Cunningham’s Laura Brown as she anticipates, with dread, her waiting husband. As Clarissa explains in *Mrs. Dalloway*, love with Sally Seton evoked a “disinterested” and pure feeling (34), unlike Woolf’s “defensive panic” and self-loathing (Bell 1.44).

Woolf’s relationship with Vita Sackville-West, the pen name for lesbian Mrs. Harold Nicolson (Bell 2.115, 116), attests to Woolf’s ambivalence and completes the model for Sally Seton in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf’s biographer Bell believes that whatever happened between Virginia and Vita

sexually was “not of a kind to excite Virginia or to satisfy Vita,” since for Virginia it was “an affair of the heart” (119) that ended after ten years.

Woolf writes in her *Diary* that her Vita friendship ended with “a certain emptiness” (324). Apparently, it didn’t satisfy Woolf enough to be continued or to end her marriage to Leonard. Though she identified herself “with the cause of homosexuality by spending a week in France alone with Vita,” she later wrote Vita that she married Leonard because she preferred “living with him to saying good-by to him” (139).

Woolf’s loving both Leonard and Vita supports Woolf’s belief in a gender/sex continuum. This continuum originated in her childhood victimization and transcendentalist beliefs and expressed itself in a moment’s dazzling kiss with Sally Seton in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *The Hours*, Cunningham develops the continuum into a permanent lesbian love between Clarissa and Sally and a gay love between Richard and Louis. But the ambivalence and anxiety remain.

Re-reading *Mrs. Dalloway* in light of Cunningham’s *The Hours* heightens Clarissa Dalloway’s ambivalence and its causes. Successive joy and misery characterize Clarissa Dalloway during a day, as events unearth contradictions from the past and create anxiety. Ambivalence toward life emerges when, at 53, she greets the June morning with “What a lark! What a plunge!” (3). Her delight reminds her of a similar but painful morning with Peter Walsh, “intolerable” but “adorable to walk with on a morning like this”; she admired his interests in politics, “Wagner, Pope’s poetry” but suffered when he trivialized her as a “perfect hostess” (7). And though she affirms her marriage to Richard, who gives her the luxuries that Peter could not, she remembers anguishing over Peter’s marriage (8) and anguishes again.

Her anguish leads to transcendent longing. Feeling “far out to sea and alone” in knowing “no language; no history” (8), she dreads her death while the world continues. For hope, she imagines her existence continuing “like a mist between the [trees] and the people she knew best” (9). Consoled in that hope, her love of Bond-Street shops, and her “gift” of knowing people (9), she buys flowers for her party.

Her party will serve as her gesture to a spiritually empty world. In such a world, she must “all the more...repay” in how she treats every creature, from servants to husband Richard, for their service (29). Then, diminished when Lady Broughton invites only Richard to a political luncheon, she retreats nun-like to her bedroom with “an emptiness about the heart of life” (31).

That “emptiness” triggers the consoling memory of a girlhood love—of Sally Seton—and their “kiss.” She recalls her “rapture”: “Had that not been love?” (31). Memories of night-long talks about world reform, philosophy, and poetry clarify for her the difference between female love and male/female love: with women, there is “purity” and disinterestedness (34). Their kiss she compares to “a diamond, something infinitely precious, through which “the radiance burned,” the “religious feeling” (34-35). The transcendent quality in her love with Sally, which resurfaces in Laura Brown’s love for Kitty in *The Hours*, surpasses love with Peter and marriage with Richard and filled the emptiness of Woolf’s own life.

Clarissa Dalloway’s effort to unite the incompatible parts of life through that same splendor and offer it to others—through a party—suggests more than Lacan’s *objet petit a*, or unattainable object of desire. It suggests not only lost intimacy and purity but the desire to make a redemptive gift to compensate for life’s emptiness and failure (37). In fact, she affirms her parties as “an offering, . . . a person’s duty, as part of a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship. . . [.] to mitigate the sufferings of our fellow prisoners,” or, to “[do] good for the sake of goodness” (78). That gift inspires Clarissa’s “wave” of joy: “that is all” (40), or “enough,” she says, even though the party, like life, “must end” (122).

Christian readers recognize Clarissa’s emptiness and haunting moral responsibility. Compelled by truth written on the heart, she proposes an offering, Cain-like, and longs for transcendence. Affirming her parties in spite of male opinion, she tries to redeem the world temporarily. Hearing that Dr. Bradford’s patient—war-traumatized visionary Septimus Smith—has killed himself, she applauds him for preserving his soul’s “mystery” and attempting to “embrace” what evades one in life (184)—connectedness.

Cunningham continues where Woolf leaves off. In so doing, he recasts Clarissa Dalloway's ambivalence by fictionalizing Woolf's life through a late-twentieth-century frame, including her writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, its effects on reader Laura Brown, Laura's effect on her son (gay writer Richard Brown), and Richard's effect on his ex-lover Clarissa Vaughn, whom he calls "Mrs. Dalloway," in gentle irony for her parties. Most significantly, Cunningham allows Clarissa Vaughn to pursue the life that Clarissa Dalloway lived in a moment's kiss.

Not surprisingly, Cunningham's characters voice the same "emptiness" but without the obligation for a compensatory gift. The gift—whether Laura Brown's cake, Clarissa Vaughn's party, or Richard Brown's novel—seems motivated more by self-affirmation than a compassionate redemption of others. Its achievement leaves each with the same emptiness.

Cunningham's emphasis on "the hours" addresses the same predicament: living between the no-longer and the "not-yet," aware of time in the knowledge of death, and assuming the "burden" of the past to explain the "present" (Barrett 228; Heidegger, *Being and Time* 17). Like Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway, who appreciates her husband, Richard, but regrets a life without Peter Walsh, Clarissa Vaughn appreciates her life-partner, Sally, but regrets a life without Richard Brown and plans a party to honor him. For each Clarissa, life fails to fulfill the promise of a past kiss.

Clarissa Vaughn's ambivalence, despite her more advantageous educational and professional circumstances and her greater sexual freedom, suggests that even had Clarissa Dalloway graduated from Cambridge, stood for parliament, and married Sally Seton, she would voice the same ambivalence about life, alleviated only in the freedom to choose her burden. Cunningham suggests that possibility in the various approaches to suicide. Unlike character-Woolf, who drowns herself to escape madness and her husband's restraints, or Richard Brown, who drops to the street to escape madness and the restraints of AIDS, Laura Brown stops her suicide attempts after leaving her husband and children. Still, her freedom, like Clarissa Vaughn's, doesn't end her ambivalence.

In his final chapter on "Mrs. Woolf,"

Cunningham highlights the soul's predicament. Here, character-Woolf recalls Vanessa's kiss—"full of something not unlike what [she] wants from life[.]...full of love complex and ravenous, ancient, ...this afternoon's manifestation of the central mystery itself" (210). Then, to compensate for its absence, she designs a gift that evokes that feeling in others: she decides that her novel's protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, will have loved a woman when she was young, will "carry the memory of that kiss" and its "soaring hope...all her life," but will "never find a love like that which the...kiss seemed to offer" (211).

The beneficiary of that redemptive gift is Mrs. Laura Brown, living in 1940s' Los Angeles. She temporarily escapes her failure as a wife/mother and her guilt of kissing Kitty by driving to a hotel room to read *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel "buoys her" upon "a wave...of weightless brilliance" (41).

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When her return to her anxious son and successful birthday party ends in "fury" at being "trapped" in a marriage of having "to please" (205), her solution is a suicide attempt, followed by escape to Toronto to support herself as a librarian. There, she lives the freedom fantasized by character-Woolf and Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway.

By contrast, Cunningham's Clarissa Vaughn—a 1990s' New-York parallel of Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway—faces no restriction but time. Free to acquire an education, a publishing career, a same-sex partnership, and the self-determinism that Clarissa Dalloway, Laura Brown, and character-Woolf lacked, she exudes not only the same fascination with the morning, the coming party, and the transcendent (in her case, an actress instead of a burning bush, a mist, or royalty) but also the

same second-guessing. With all her freedom, Clarissa Vaughn misses the splendor anticipated from her early love affair with Richard. Their break-up at eighteen—each to pursue greater happiness—ended in AIDS for Richard and a partnership with Sally for Clarissa. That kiss with Richard she now recognizes as her life's best moment; and for Richard, the kiss is "still happening" (67), in spite of a succession of gay lovers.

Like the others, Richard had attempted a compensatory but self-affirming gift,¹ a book "about the lives [they] might have lived" (67), "something alive and shocking enough [to]...stand beside a morning in someone's life" (199). His saying so makes Clarissa Vaughn, like Clarissa Dalloway with Peter, imagine the life they "might have had together" (68). Richard Brown has lived the life that Septimus Smith wanted to live, but he lacks Smith's transcendent hope: he falls to his death to escape his party and...every hour after that...toward silence" (197-8).

Clarissa's reaction to Richard's suicide lacks the affirmation of Clarissa Dalloway's reaction to Septimus's suicide; it even lacks disinterested love. Instead, her silent eulogy justifies leaving him and admits her party's intention to "exhibit his devotion" to her (203).

Ironically, her party to honor Richard for his literary award becomes a wake, where his mother, Laura Brown, justifies her past decision—the only means of a person's affirming existence, says Heidigger ("Holderlin" 565). She admits that deserting her family led to her contentment, in spite of their deaths. Of all the characters, Laura Brown voices the least regret: "We did the best we could, dear. That's all anyone can do, isn't it?" (222). Her life and words counter the feminine ideal by suggesting each person's freedom to choose a life-course without guilt over consequences. She did what Clarissa Dalloway and character-Woolf only fantasized, yet her actions make Clarissa Dalloway's party more heroic in its concern for fellow travelers.

Clarissa Vaughn's summary of life, after Richard's death, clarifies the difference between Woolf's horizon and Cunningham's horizon, between early and late twentieth-century world-views. Woolf's included moral responsibility and

transcendent hope; Cunningham's, as explained by Clarissa Vaughn, expresses moral neutrality, death's finality, longing for what is lost, and hope for simply more:

We throw our parties, we abandon our families to live alone...; we struggle to write books that do not change the world, despite our gifts and our unstinting efforts.... We live our lives, do whatever we do, and then we sleep—it's as simple and ordinary as that.... 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.... Still,...we hope...for more. (225)

Re-reading Woolf after reading Cunningham clarifies one aspect of the human dilemma. Even though Cunningham's Clarissa Vaughn and Richard Brown achieve what Woolf's characters fantasize, they find no greater contentment than did Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith. All lack the unifying Word, which helps alleviate the heart's emptiness by countering ambivalence with obedience, countering failure with redemption, and countering self-interest with the command to love disinterestedly.

Endnotes

1. Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* follows the actions and thoughts of Clarissa Dalloway, and those whose lives affect her, on a June morning in post World War I London as she prepares for a party, her specialty. Woolf demonstrates, through her stream-of-consciousness narrator, how each person affects the thoughts of others: these include Clarissa Dalloway, comfortably married to parliamentarian Richard; Peter Walsh, whom she rejected years earlier but who is briefly back in London and stops for a visit; Septimus Smith, a young traumatized war veteran whom she sees on her walk to buy flowers; Septimus' wife, Lucrezia, who helplessly watches her husband's psychological decline; Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth, just starting her adult life; the daughter's working-class tutor, Doris Kilman, enraptured with her student and jealous of Clarissa's position in life; and Sally Seton, Clarissa's girlhood friend with whom Clarissa once shared a dazzling kiss. Events progress from Clarissa's buying flowers, to watching her husband depart for a luncheon, to being visited by Peter Walsh, to being visited by Miss Kilman

and reach a climax at her evening's party, where she attempts to connect disparate lives but learns that Septimus Smith has killed himself.

2. Cunningham's *The Hours*, derived from *Mrs. Dalloway*, follows the thoughts and actions of author Virginia Woolf, as she writes her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, as well as the life and thoughts of reader Laura Brown, living in 1940s' Los Angeles; writer Richard Brown, Laura's AIDS-infected son, living in 1990s' New York; and Clarissa Vaughn, Richard's first love, before they both adopted the gay life. Cunningham writes of the ways Virginia Woolf's novel affects and connects her readers' lives, as they attempt their own creative works and parties. By the novel's end, both Virginia Woolf and her reader's son Richard Brown have committed suicide.
3. See 2 Timothy 3.15-17; 1 John 4.1; Ex. 20.1-2; Matt. 5-7; Rom. 1; Col. 3. 1-25.
4. Cunningham took as his title the working title of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, as his novel responds to hers.
5. They reveal the fallen human condition as one of living in a good creation while defying or being oblivious to God and his laws, suffering the devastating effects of the fall, and ignoring Christ's offer of redemption in their own attempts at self-redemption and philosophically based transcendence.
6. "Georgian novelists" refers to English novelists writing during the reign of King George V, 1910-1936, including not only the experimental work of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, etc., but also the continued work of Edwardian novelists Galsworthy, Wells, Bennett, and Conrad as well as work of Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and Somerset Maugham (Harmon/Holman 235).
7. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: A Selection with Introduction by Helmut Gollwitzer* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), pp. 195-203; and Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 220-223.
8. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp*, p. 60, explains the Expressionist Theory, based in Transcendentalism
9. This philosophy justifies her feminist-gender criticism and provides solace for her characters since it implies human divinity and makes death a transition to the universal consciousness.
10. This concept is explained by Hermione Lee, p. 19-20.
11. I.e., Clarissa Dalloway's effort to give a party as a compensatory gift to the world, Septimus's desire to bring a religion of love to the world, Clarissa Vaughn's attempt to buy Evans a book that evokes a feeling beyond human happiness, her desire to give Richard a party that expresses more than friendship, Laura

Brown's effort to bake a cake that fills her family with joy, or character-Woolf's desire to write a book that compensates for her failures.

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