

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

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**VIRGINIA WOOLF'S DIARY KEEPING PRACTICE AND THE CREATIVE
PROCESS OF *MRS DALLOWAY* (1925)**

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“What sort of diary should I like mine to be? Something loose knit and yet not slovenly, so elastic that it will embrace any thing, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind. I should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through. I should like to come back, after a year or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself and refined itself and coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life, and yet steady, tranquil compounds with the aloofness of a work of art” (Woolf D1 779/780).

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Abstract

Diaries, especially when written by women, are usually perceived as a non-literary, minor genre. However, when analyzing the diaries of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Simons recognizes them as a truthful “demonstration of the diary as art” (18). Woolf was a prolific 20th century writer who, in addition to novels, short stories, and essays, wrote many diaries, the primary corpus of this research. This thesis aims to investigate, from the perspective of life writing by women, the impact that the diary-writing practice had on Virginia Woolf’s life and work, especially in relation to her creative process. Starting with a profile of the functions that Woolf ascribes her diaries, I intend to identify how ideas for her fiction emerge; how she plans the writing; and how her reflections on the process are recorded and reworked over time. In order to demonstrate how she used her diary to conceptualize literary ideas and perceptions, I analyze passages about the diary-writing practice itself and on *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), from a selection of entries from 1922 to 1925 (the main period for the genesis of the novel and its initial reception).

Keywords: Virginia Woolf; Diaries by literary women; *Mrs Dalloway*; Life Writing; Genetic Criticism.

Resumo

Diários, especialmente escritos por mulheres, são usualmente vistos como um gênero menor, não literário. No entanto, ao analisar os diários de Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Simons afirma que podemos vê-los como uma verdadeira “demonstração do diário como arte” (18). Woolf foi uma prolífica escritora do século 20 que, além de romances, contos e ensaios, escreveu muitos diários, que formam o corpus primário dessa pesquisa. Em vista disso, esse trabalho pretende investigar, dentro da área de diários de escritoras, o impacto que a prática da escrita de diário possui na vida e obra dessa autora, em especial em relação ao seu processo criativo. Partindo de um perfil das funções que Woolf dá a seus diários, deseja-se identificar como as ideias da sua ficção emergem; como ela planeja a escrita e como suas reflexões sobre o processo são registradas e retrabalhadas ao longo do tempo. A fim de demonstrar como Virginia Woolf utiliza seu diário para conceituar ideias e percepções literárias, foi realizada uma análise das passagens sobre a própria prática diarística e sobre a escrita de *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) nos diários da autora, através de uma seleção de registros de 1922 a 1925 (período principal da gênese do romance até sua recepção inicial).

Palavras-chave: Virginia Woolf; Diários de escritoras; *Mrs Dalloway*; Escritas de si; Crítica Genética.

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Introduction

“Dear diary...”: who has never heard this sentence before? The combination of these two words has long been attributed to an old familiar practice: diary writing, where the notebook or the paper sheets play the role of a place to record the daily events of one’s life and to confide personal feelings. This common perception of the diary as an intimate kind of writing, along with the notion that women are the most frequent practitioners of it, has led to the assumption that it is a practice with little or no complexity, a non-literary sort of writing not significant as opposed to novels, short stories or poems. Nevertheless, as described by Lejeune and illustrated by many widely-read diarists, the diary-keeping has many functions, such as to write down one’s memories, analyze, examine and question oneself (self-perception), find a place of resistance in unfavorable situations (the diary of Anne Frank, for example), speculate ideas/insights, among many other ideas (302-305, my translation¹).

Moreover, the practice may also play a fundamental role in one’s life, especially for women. In a seminal study of diaries written by literary women, Judy Simons examined how keeping a diary could affect their lives, in particular during the 18th and 19th centuries. She indicated the diary’s strength as a tool of expression in a world dominated by the “female silence²” (39), analyzing the importance of the practice for women who were writers. Additionally, the author also showed how diary writing could be relevant for the literary process of creating fiction, thus mixing the areas of fiction writing and life writing³. As a prolific diarist, novelist and essayist, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) put this function into

¹ All quotations by Lejeune are from *O Pacto Autobiográfico* (2014), a compilation of the French author’s texts translated into Portuguese by Jovita Noronha and Maria Guedes for Editora UFMG. Although there are editions of his works in English, all quotations included here are from that compilation and were translated by me.

² The “female silence” is characterized by a world dominated by men: where men could publically speak, write and express their opinions, women were left with silence.

³ “Life writing” itself is an expression that gained its visibility as a multivalent descriptor of auto/biographical genres as a result of Woolf’s own work, in the essay “A Sketch of the Past” (1939).

practice. Among the literary writings studied, Simons defined her diaries as the “consummate demonstration of the diary as art” (18).

In addition to novels, short stories, letters, and essays, Virginia Woolf has left a great number of diaries. Although written for almost three decades and filled with numerous different subjects, they are often considered less important than her most well-known works, such as her novels. However, in a study about her diaries, Drew Shannon describes them as relevant as her other pieces and an insight to her mind as a writer: “a rich, various, multifaceted, elegant, funny book, one that repays close scrutiny and illuminates the entirety of Woolf’s oeuvre” (18). Diary entries can be found in three major editions: *A Writer’s Diary* (1953), a selection of extracts compiled by Woolf’s husband, Leonard Woolf, after her death; *A Passionate Apprentice* (1990), edited by Mitchell A. Leaska and containing the early journals; and a five-volume collection of the complete diaries from 1915 to 1941⁴, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (1977-84), edited by Anne Olivier Bell and assisted by Andrew McNeillie.

Although in this research I opted to work with two volumes of the whole collection of her diaries, in the preface of *A Writer’s Diary* Leonard Woolf sheds some light upon the idea of how Virginia Woolf used her diary as a laboratory for her writing. He names the book as “a writer’s diary”, explaining how she would use the space not only to talk about her daily life, the things she did and the people she saw, but also to discuss the “day-to-day problems of plot or form, of character or exposition” (9). This idea, along with the conception of her diary as her “practice-ground” (Shannon 49) suggest how complex and multifunctional diaries in general may be, but more specifically as to how the practice was relevant to Woolf’s professional life as a writer, for whom the diary writing was an essential feature of the creative process and a space for literary experimentation.

⁴ Referring to her “so-called ‘mature’ diaries” (Blyth 354), written after the year of 1915 until her death in 1941. Although she had written some early entries before, 1915 was the year when she actively started keeping a diary.

Moreover, as mentioned before, Woolf wrote many novels, such is the case of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), one of her better-known works, which she wrote between the years of 1922 and 1925. In the book, she explores the themes of life and death, suicide, sanity and insanity, as she herself describes in first her notes for the novel (qtd. in Lee, 507/508). The novel, which was developed through the combination of two short stories, “The Prime Minister” and “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street”, appeared constantly in Woolf’s diaries, especially during the years of its production. Likewise, the passage of time and the anguish of mortality are common themes both in her entries and in the novel, which suggest a connection between the two works.

It is possible to note how the diary is much more complex than just a place for merely personal confessions, sheltering many different functions such as literary analysis and experimentation. However, whereas the diary has not yet been perceived as a major literary genre, not many studies have been done in relation to it, particularly about this connection between life writing and fiction writing. Because of this, I intend to highlight the importance of the diary-keeping practice, by portraying its influence on the literary production of Virginia Woolf. The objective of this research is, thus, to trace a profile of Woolf’s diaries, by emphasizing its numerous functions as well as tracking the creative process of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* in the diary entries. In order to achieve this, I analyzed Woolf’s entries on literary experimentation and self-reflection as a writer, and then produced of a timeline of the creative process of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), as manifested in the diaries.

Review of the Literature

This section will give an overview of the main aspects that supported this study, in order to analyze how Virginia Woolf’s diary-keeping practice influenced the creative process of the novel *Mrs Dalloway*. Firstly, I will bring into discussion the area of genetic criticism, which will help to develop a deeper comprehension about the creative process of a work.

Next, I will explain the importance of the diary-keeping practice for women diarists. The diary will be examined as a place for literary experimentation, demonstrating how some women diarists have perceived this characteristic of the diary. Finally, in the last part I will explore the diaries of Virginia Woolf, exploring the main characteristics of her diaries and highlighting this author as a woman diarist, a reader of diaries and a writer diarist.

The creative process: genetic criticism and the diary-keeping practice

The creative process of a literary work is a complex development: from the first idea to the publication of a text, a series of processes take place in order to achieve a final product – most often, a published book. The writer crosses, thus, many stages of creation, constantly searching, writing, re-writing, and editing the text; as well as continually (re-) creating and (re-) signifying ideas. Genetic criticism is the area that seeks to comprehend these movements; its main object of study is the “temporal dimension of the text in nascent state” (De Biasi 1, my translation⁵) and its main objective is to reconstruct the history behind the text in this initial state.

De Biasi indicates how genetic criticism relies on the perception that the published book of a literary work is the effect of its creative process (1); where manuscripts and other archival materials may demonstrate the paths crossed by the writer. In this way, the archive can be used to analyze and understand the development of the finished work, with the entire movement of adjustments and improvements. This idea is portrayed by Levillant: “The draft does not tell, it shows: the violence of conflicts, the cost of the choices, the impossible coatings, the dripping, the censorship, the loss, the emergence of immensities, everything that the entire being writes – and does not write. The draft is no longer the preparation, but the other-text” (31/32, qtd. in De Biasi). In other words, the focus of this area is in the

⁵ All quotations are from his chapter “Crítica Genética” in the book *Métodos Críticos Para Análise Literária* (2006) translated from French into Portuguese by Olinda Prata. All translations into English are mine.

understanding of the creative development of a (“finished”) text, through the examination of the constant changes of the “other-text” (32) and the analysis of its various stages of working and reworking.

Although the manuscript is one of the most important objects of study of the area, genetic criticism has developed and its focus evolved to all the sources that may trace the path of the creative process of creative works (for instance novels, poems, but also paintings, movies, and others). In this way, the area has become interdisciplinary, which considers and recognizes the multiplicity of ways of exploring the creative process of any artistic work: “the essential continuity between a work and its genesis” (1), as explained by Kinderman in the introduction of a book that explores the creative process of music, literature and theater.

Moreover, in a study about diary-keeping and genetic criticism, Simonet-Tenant indicates that diaries can trace back the process of the creation of a work of art. According to her, since the diary is a space where one can write more casually and freely about ideas, it becomes “an ideal space to shelter the lightning and seductive ideas which have not yet found the place and the time of their realization, but of which one wants to keep track” (13, my translation⁶). In other words, the diary is a fitting space for the writer diarist to experiment, analyze and conceptualize new ideas, becoming, thus, a way of exposing the genesis of a text.

De Biasi explains that a text is the result of a progressive preparation constituted of various steps, including even a phase before the decision of writing *per se*. The “pre-initial stage” (10) would be an exploratory phase, where ideas would obsessively appear in the writer’s mind. This explains why Simonet-Tenant considers that the diary plays an important role in this first state of creation, where she believes that it can show “from the inscription of the meteoric idea to the record of obsessive images and provisional writings” (27).

Nevertheless, she also mentions how even though the space is ideal to experiment thoughts,

⁶ Simonet-Tenant’s text is originally written in French. All translations to English are mine.

in reality the situation is much more complex: only certain ideas can be traced back in the entry, since many variables can influence the process, such as not writing every day or having multiple notebooks (13).

Virginia Woolf was a diarist who would use the diary-keeping practice to experiment, analyze and examine ideas. Gabler explains that she was “characteristically her own recorder” (287), and her diaries and letters may trace back many aspects of her work. In addition, while analyzing the creative process of *To The Lighthouse* (1927) in her diary entries, he comes to the conclusion that the space could indicate clues of the development of the novel (289), thus making a connection between diary-novel and memory-fiction. Correspondingly, besides writing ideas in her diary to keep track of them, Woolf was also a constant reader of her own notebooks, referring to herself as the future reader of the entries, which illustrates Simonet-Tenant’s emphasis on the importance of the diary to keep track of dormant ideas (13).

With this in mind, this research makes use of genetic criticism to trace back the creative process of a literary work. Moreover, it also recognizes how the diary can be used as a tool to search for clues and ideas that show the paths a writer treads when writing a book. As follows, Woolf’s diaries are here considered more than a device for her own self-development as a writer and person: they are a space where she could experiment in order to give form to ideas that would lead to the creation of her other works.

Breaking the chain of silence: women and their diaries

Who keeps a diary? Lejeune explains that the generic assumption is to imagine teenage girls, since it is a culturally imposed “feminine” activity. He indicates that girls’ passion for diary during teenage years comes from a historical conditioning in France, where during the 19th century middle class teenage girls would be stimulated to keep a diary, inspected by educators (298). He also mentions how nowadays people still give them

notebooks with little padlocks, an uncommon gift for boys (298). Similarly, Abbott traces an overview of the women diarist profile represented in fiction, as follows: “the writer is usually married; she is oppressed by the indifference, the insensitivity, or the love of her husband (or lover); she is a victim of the stereotyping imposed on her by virtue of her gender; her powerlessness is a function of her social condition as a woman” (16).

Abbott’s profile of the women diarist in fiction has verisimilitude, since diaries have in fact been a tool for women to express themselves in a world dominated by men. As mentioned, Simons indicates how diaries played an important role in women’s lives as a way of expression and self-definition, especially during the 18th and 19th centuries. According to the theorist, “for women writers, whose social utterances were often constrained by patriarchal impositions of female propriety, the medium came to have a special value as a personal space in which to negotiate that delicate boundary between private opinion and its open articulation” (11). The diary, thus, functioned as a tool for giving voice to women in a culture of imposed silence, becoming a place where they could express themselves.

Even though for these women the practice would become “indirect means of resistance to codes of behaviour” (Simons 4), the perception of the diary as a “feminine” activity helped to create the perception of its writing as non-literary and a less important genre. Not only was it a common place for women to express themselves when they had no other vent (Simons 4), frequently teenage girls practiced the activity, since married women should not keep secrets from their husbands (Raoul 58), which expands even more the neglect of the genre and excludes the recognition its complexities and many functions. Furthermore, the diary’s neglect and its diminutive importance is surely determined by a world dominated by men, as described by Spender:

The dichotomy of male/female, public/private is maintained by permitting women to write for private audience (which can be extended to encompass

other women) but discouraging them from writing for a public audience, that is, men. In the “private” sphere, women have been permitted to write for themselves (for example diaries) and for each other in the form of letters, “accomplished” pieces, moral treatises, articles of interest for other women – particularly in the domestic area – and even novels for women (during the nineteenth century, women were the mainstay of the novel reading public). (192)

Women could only have the diary, a private medium, to express themselves, when men were able to explore public genres, such as poetry, frequently considered the highest attainment in literature. These aspects show the diminished importance given to the genre, whose characteristics are not often studied nor analyzed; and explain why the diary is not generally conceived in its literary aspects. Notwithstanding, it can have an incredible artistic value, as indicated by Lejeune when he explains that “just like a work of art, the diary only exists in a single copy” (301), with all its own individual characteristics, such as the diarist’s handwriting, the usages he/she attributes to the practice, and sometimes even other details (pressed flowers and drawings, for example). This is especially relevant when taking into consideration Virginia Woolf’s diaries, considered by Simons as a form of art (18). Shannon emphasizes that her diaries comprehended a variety of functions, because Woolf would use them “as a sounding board for ideas, a place to try out experimental prose, to pose structural questions, to check her progress, and, often, to castigate herself for not meeting her strict deadlines” (13).

Some women diarists have denied the idea of using the diary to experiment with fiction. This is the case of the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who believed that confessional writing could be attached to one’s “true self” and thus there should be a distance between diary and fiction: “there is a very profound distinction between any kind of

confession and creative work” (qtd. in Simons 195). However, Susan Sontag, another illustrious diarist and writer, saw the diary as a “device for self-improvement” (qtd. in Maunsell 1). Her diary-writing practice was of extreme importance to her development as a person and a writer, and her notebook was the place where she could exercise her self-consciousness. Showalter observes that Sontag’s writing was used to “try out new selves and construct her formidable persona” (2, qtd. in Maunsell).

This notion of the diary as a space for literary experimentation, self-perception and development is of great importance, since it shows a possible connection between the intimate writing and the creation of fiction, as exemplified by one of Sontag’s entries: “In the journal I do not just express myself more openly than I could do to any person; I create myself. The journal is a vehicle for my sense of selfhood. It represents me as emotionally and spiritually independent. Therefore it does not simply record my actual, daily life but rather — in many cases — offers an alternative to it” (7, qtd. in Maunsell). This idea is extremely important because it illustrates Simons’ argument that the diary is a place for women writers to develop their creative work: “women writers found their personal journals not just a useful form to expatiate on their own problems as writers but an active opportunity (conscious or not) to evolve a personal literary voice” (194).

These aspects highlight how keeping a diary can be relevant to diarists and not a frivolous and unimportant practice as it is generally conceived. One can attribute many functions to this form, such as literary experimentation, creation of one’s (other) selves and development of one’s literary voice. The perception of the diary as a less important genre is culturally made, especially through perception of this practice as “feminine” and, alas, unimportant (which also shows how these two aspects are perceived as mutually connected). Diaries can be, thus, multifunctional and of great complexity; such is the case of Virginia Woolf’s, which will be the focus of the following section.

“I am entirely and for ever my own mistress”: the diaries of Virginia Woolf

Right in the beginning of her scholarly biography of Woolf, Hermione Lee writes about how one must make a decision when starting to write her biography, since the different openings may suggest diverse choices on how to perceive her (20). There are many aspects of Woolf’s life that can be taken into consideration: her literary career as a modernist writer, her relationship with her husband Leonard Woolf or with the Bloomsbury Group, among others. In this way, one shall have to decide on what to focus, in order to choose how to regard this complex and remarkable author. Consequently, this study seeks to perceive Woolf through her diary writing practice. This decision shelters other important variables – her position as a woman diarist (where the diary becomes a much more relevant tool than for men, as already described before); a reader of diaries (for Woolf would constantly re-read her entries besides reading other people’s diaries); and a writer diarist (where the diary may shed some light upon her career as a writer, offering insights about her published works).

When speaking about Woolf’s diary, Lee indicates its numerous distinct functions: “She is much concerned with how she writes it, and what it’s for. And its uses vary: it is a ‘barometer’ of her feelings, a storehouse for memories, a record of events and encounters, a practice-ground for writing, a commentary on work in progress, and a sedative for agitation, anger, or apprehension” (23). Woolf was constantly preoccupied about her own way of writing and the purposes of her diary, which became a place that she would constantly reinvent herself and her style. This perhaps illustrates why Simons considers Woolf as “one of the most prolific as well as one of the most self-aware of literary diarists” (10), indicating how fundamental the diary was in her life, a vital part of her literary experiences, both as woman and writer (140). The author also characterizes it as art (18) and as Woolf’s “major literary project” (171), since it was permanently in movement, flourishing and evolving.

However, because of these numerous multifunctional aspects of the diary, Simons indicates that it could not be defined by a single variable:

There is a danger in trying to extract any single unifying idea from Woolf's diary. It is a shifting document, covering a lengthy time span, and embracing a range of functions. Although one central recurrent topic is that of her writing, it is by no means the only subject of the volumes which follow the life of a woman for twenty-six years. Like those of other writers, Woolf's diary incorporates diverse voices, but in her case these voices constitute the essence of the text. (...) Woolf's diary cannot be reduced to any primary feature. (180)

Therefore, Woolf's diary, her most personal work, remains difficult to define, due to its versatile and mutating characteristic. Many scholars have tried to describe it, and one aspect they all seem to have in common is the perception of how complex and multifaceted her diary was – a place that served as an expansion of Woolf's life. Lounsberry characterizes it by trying to describe its function as the attachment between her life and work: “her heart-stopping, boundary-stretching diary [serves] as a doorway to her fiction and nonfiction” (1). Shannon, on the other hand, shows how the diaries seem to be a novel of her life: “the diary of Virginia Woolf as a whole reads like an immensely detailed six-volume novel, full of drama, incident, humor, pathos, joy, sadness” (48).

Moreover, as mentioned before, Woolf was a constant reader of diaries – hers or other people's. Simons explains that she was the “reader of her own text, imagining herself transformed by age, as a woman of fifty re-examining the work she has produced fifteen years before” (10). This aspect is extremely important because it shows another function of the diary – how it can be a place for the diarist's self-development. Reading one's entries may become as relevant as writing them (Simons 10), since the act may produce a change in the reader. Re-reading, thus, would also be a part of Woolf's diary writing practice, where

she would be able to find other meanings to elements she was unaware when writing them in the first place (Simons 176). Similarly, besides reading her own entries, she was also a constant reader of other people's diaries. According to Lounsberry, she was an avid diary reader that would read different types of diaries: "Her taste in diaries ran to the eclectic. She read the diaries of governesses and Eton masters, country parsons and city curates, literary lawyers and doctors, printers and politicians, artists and aristocrats. She savored the diaries of other writers" (3). This perhaps aided her in the process of her writing and the development of her own diary.

Along these lines, it is possible to note how relevant Woolf's diaries were to her life. Correspondingly, her diary-keeping practice is often considered to be of extreme importance to her other literary works, where, according to Blyth, it would "offer a great deal of insight into her published works" (353). The use of the diary as a place for literary experimentation is one of the most important aspects of her practice, as Woolf would use her notebooks not only to talk about her life and work, but in fact experiment and analyze ideas for her fiction. Moreover, Shannon affirms that her notebooks would serve as "a place for her to ruminate, to reflect, to plan, to celebrate, to mourn, and to hone her skills" (14). Lounsberry also highlights how her diary would capture her creative process (9).

One of the most important aspects of Woolf's diary is, thus, how it worked as laboratory for her writing. Her notebooks offer an innovative perception of the diary writing practice, as she used it as a way of experimenting and conceptualizing ideas for fiction. These aspects highlight why Leonard Woolf collected her wife's diary entries about writing, compiled them in a book called *A Writer's Diary* and explained in its preface how her diary could illuminate her literary career: "The book throws light upon Virginia Woolf's intentions, objects, and methods as a writer. It gives an unusual psychological picture of artistic

production from within. Its value and interest naturally depend to a great extent upon the value and interest of the product of Virginia Woolf's art" (9).

Objectives, method and procedures

As explained, diaries can be multifunctional, a device for self-awareness and literary experimentation that can trace back the creative process of a work, and they play important roles on women diarist/writer's lives; such is the case of Virginia Woolf. Lejeune emphasizes the multifaceted characteristic of the diary-keeping practice, which can shelter many functions: write down one's memories; attempt to fix the past time into the present; unburden thoughts and emotions; plan and organize one's life; or simply be a place for the pleasure of writing (302-305). The diary is, he sums up, "simply humane, with its strengths and weaknesses" (309). In addition, according to Lee, Woolf had a passion for "'lives of the obscure', and for marginal, unvalued literary forms like memoirs, letters, and journals; these lives [being], mostly, women's" (32). This aspect is of great relevance, since it not only highlights Woolf's interest for the subject, but also emphasizes my concern for illustrating the importance of the diary for women diarists. As a result, the diaries of Virginia Woolf were chosen not only because she attributed many functions to the practice, but also because she was an avid reader of diaries written by women.

Moreover, besides writing an extensive number of diaries, Woolf was a prolific writer who wrote many essays, novels and short stories. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), one of her most famous and acclaimed books, is very singular, described by Saint-Armour as "an exception among exceptions" (79). Two main ideas must be taken into consideration in relation to this book – firstly, it is a novel that branched from two short stories: "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and "The Prime Minister"; and secondly, the character of Clarissa Dalloway has a very distinct trajectory in Woolf's literary works. Since her first appearance in *The Voyage Out* (1915) as a minor character, to her great development as the protagonist of the novel *Mrs*

Dalloway (1925), published ten years later, it is possible to perceive that the character stayed in Virginia Woolf's mind for a long time. Latham describes Clarissa as a "migratory character, a node within a vast literary network" (2).

Another very important aspect that must be taken into consideration is the subject of time, a point of connection between Woolf's life and fiction. This may show the link between diary/novel and life-writing/fiction writing, as Simons describes: "The passage of time, the only apparent formal property that consistently determined the sequence of individual entries, was also a theme that was to haunt her all her life. Her preoccupation with the interweaving of temporal levels – the past, present and future lives – connects with her absorption with the self as subject" (183). Correspondingly, since *Mrs Dalloway* was originally meant to be called "The Hours" and all the events of the novel occur in a single day, Saint-Armour believes that the work is itself a clock: "Keyed to a single day and divided into 12 sections, the novel presents itself as a device for quantifying diurnal experience: it is a clock" (89). Although this study does not seek to explore the issue of time in the novel but rather in the diary entries, it is important to perceive that it is a theme present in both works, and is another point of connection between the two.

Shannon believes that *Mrs Dalloway* marked "an advance of her use of the diary as a creative tool" (81). Although Virginia Woolf had already used the diary to explore ideas, voices, and styles for her fiction, this novel marks the advance of her use of the diary, since "never before has she discussed a work in such depth; never before has she so often taken a book's emotional temperature, and her own, while writing it" (91). For these reasons, the choice of working with the genesis of this novel in the diaries is due to four main aspects: 1) generally speaking, *Mrs Dalloway* is one of her most famous works; 2) it is a very singular novel (Saint-Armour 79), stemming from two different short stories and that has one of her most persistent characters, Clarissa Dalloway, considered to be a "timeless figure" (Latham

2); 3) it is connected to the diary in its preoccupation with the passage of time; and 4) it marks a moment when the diary was extensively used for experiments with fiction (Shannon 81).

Thus, my objective is to illustrate how diaries are much more complex than generally perceived, by stressing their many functions and characteristics. More specifically, I intend to shed some light upon the diary practice of a someone who is a *woman* and a *writer*, Virginia Woolf. In this way, this research aims at: 1) tracing a profile of Woolf's diaries, by emphasizing the numerous functions she attributed to the practice; and 2) tracking the creative process of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in her diary entries, by examining how she used the diary as a writing laboratory to experiment with fiction. The main corpus of the study is the diary of Virginia Woolf, from the years of 1922 to 1925 (the period that comprises drafting, rewriting, revising proofs, publication, and early reception of *Mrs Dalloway*). The entries from 1922 to 1924 are present in the Volume II (1978) of the diaries, and the year of 1925 is present in the Volume III (1980) of the collection, both edited by Anne Olivier Bell and assisted by Andrew McNeillie. Two aspects are important to note here: firstly, I chose to use the whole collection of entries instead of Leonard Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*, in order to trace a profile of Virginia Woolf's diaries from complete entries, with all the nuances and multiplicity of functions and not to the single function of a "writer's diary". Secondly, all the entries were transcribed as found in the entries of the whole collection, with Woolf's spelling and grammar mistakes, abbreviations and use of ampersands (&), to give a closer idea of what her diaries were like.

The present discussion was carried out having in mind the theoretical framework on diaries and the auto/biographical presented by Lejeune and Abbott, along with the base of genetic criticism, the relevance of diaries written by women and the main studies about Virginia Woolf's diaries. Lejeune emphasizes the many functions of the diary, how the

practice manifests in the diarist's life and the different aspects and elements about diary writing. Similarly, in the book *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action* (1984), Abbott discusses many important features about the profile of the diarist and the diary's functions. These ideas helped to guide the whole discussion of this study, where the elements found on Virginia Woolf's entries were compared and contrasted to the theoretical framework about diary writing presented by these two authors.

In order to describe Virginia Woolf's diaries, as well as to produce a mapping of the creative process of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in the diary, I divided the present study in three main procedures: 1) gathering the data from relevant entries in the diary; 2) analyzing these entries with the concepts of diary writing in mind; 3) creating an outline of Woolf's diaries, as well as a timeline of the novel as presented in the diary. The collection of the entries took into consideration sentences that demonstrated Woolf's ideas of self-reflection, along with her perceptions of herself as a writer and diarist. Next, an examination of the entries that described the creative process of *Mrs Dalloway* took place, in order to understand how Woolf would conceptualize her ideas; what problems she faced were when writing the novel; how she would perceive the reception of her books; what were her self-perceptions as a woman writer; among other ideas that encircle her position of diarist and published author.

Through these procedures, it was possible to perceive the connections between the diary-keeping practice and the creation of fiction; showing, thus, not only the link between the areas of life writing and fiction writing, but the relevance and importance of the diary as a whole. This discussion is going to be the focus of the following section.

Results and Discussion

“My diary shall receive me on its downy pillow”: the diaries of Virginia Woolf

Abbott suggests that diarists may use their notebooks as a place to build new versions of themselves; a space for self-perception and development of the self (43). Likewise,

Lejeune attributes to the diary many functions, such as the expression of the self and the reflection of ideas (318). Along these lines, this section aims at exploring Woolf's diary-keeping practice, by creating a panorama of the functions she attributed to the diary and the impacts that it had in her life. The analysis comprises the years of 1922 to 1925. The section is divided in four parts: 1) examining the diaries of Virginia Woolf (a discussion of the functions of her diary); 2) the fusion of life and fiction (an analysis of how Woolf used the diary as a laboratory for literary experimentation); 3) the blisses and woes of writing (an examination of the positive and negative impacts of writing confided in the diary) and 4) the obsession with time (an investigation of how time is a common theme in the diary and in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*).

“How entirely I live in my imagination”: examining Virginia Woolf’s diaries

What kind of diarist is Virginia Woolf? This question opens space to many different perspectives, since she used her notebooks for countless situations. Right in the first entry of 1922, on January 3, it is already possible to note how Woolf attributed to the practice various functions and wrote about numerous aspects:

Blank leaves grow at the end of my diaries. (...) In the morning I wrote with steady stoicism my posthumous article upon Hardy. No more reviewing for me. (...) Leonard planted, pruned, sprayed, though the cold & the wet & the wildness made his behaviour a heroism to be admired, not comprehended. And last night, on top of our arrival, came to dinner Peter & Topsy. Her face is unnaturally elongated. It looks as if it had been caught in a door as a child. (...) We talked about Fredegond's religious mania; about Cambridge; youth; our set; theirs; the past. (...) But there's 6 o'clock striking, & its my evening with the Pastons. Tonight my reading begins. (D2 941/942⁷)

⁷ D2 are the initials of Diary Volume 2 (1920-1924); D3 stands for Diary Volume 3 (1925-1930). The numbers

Firstly, Woolf presents the perception of the diary as a daily habit, where she feels guilty about the blank pages of the notebook. Next, she records about her professional life, giving details about her writings. Then, she talks about her daily life – Leonard and dinner with friends – along with her impressions about it (such as the description of Topsy’s “unnaturally elongated [face]” (D2 941)). Although in this entry she does not give many details about what she was going to read and only that she was going to do it (“tonight my reading begins” (D2 942)), the diary also served as a space for her to keep track of the impressions of the books she was reading and the impact they had on her. Moreover, one of the most important features of the practice was how she used the diary to organize her work and life, such as the plan that she would start reading that night. Interestingly, in the next entry, almost twenty days later, she explains why she was not able to do that: “Tonight my reading begins’ did I say? And two nights later I was shivering over the fire & had to tumble into bed with the influenza” (D2 942). This indicates a connection among the diary entries (as she re-reads the prior entry before writing a new one) and the idea that she had to explain to herself why her plans had not worked out. As a diarist, she commits to herself and takes the practice seriously.

In this way, Virginia Woolf’s diary was a space where she could keep track of her works and professional life; consider the events of her daily routine (along with her impressions and feelings about it); take notes about her readings and writings (while experimenting and exploring ideas); and reflect about herself in a constant practice of re-reading her own entries. All these aspects suggest that the diary helped her to shape her self-perception: whilst she wrote, examined and questioned herself, she would become more self-aware about her life and her personality. This occurs especially in relation to her writing

of the diary pages are from an online version of the diaries, a PDF file that comprises *A Writer’s Diary*, *A Passionate Apprentice* and *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*.

career, where she would examine her intentions as a writer and reflect upon her professional life: “my only interest as a writer lies, I begin to see, in some queer individuality: not in strength, or passion, or anything startling; but then I say to myself, is not ‘some queer individuality’ precisely the quality I respect?” (D2 953).

Another important aspect to consider about her diaries is how during this period of her life she opted to write in a notebook instead of paper sheets. Although this may seem insignificant, in the diary practice the choice of the object inflicts in the diarist’s life. Using a notebook helps to create a sense of continuity – even though the diarist does not write every day or writes about many different things, this object blends these entries together. This is what Lejeune calls the “life insurance” of the diary, where “the notebook chains and merges everything all over” (338). However, by choosing this medium she also has to deal with the great amount of blank pages that come with it. Lejeune explains that the notebook has to deal with two opposing sides: 1) a discourse already written from the previous entries and 2) an emptiness of blank pages, waiting to be occupied (340).

The burden of these blank pages certainly had an impact on her, since she felt guilty when she would not write in the diary. In an entry of 1924, after more than one month without writing, she confides how the heaviness of this fact was weighting upon her: “my diary will be defrauded; stifled by too much life. The unrecorded clogs my pen” (D3 1058). Sometimes she would express this culpability on even more hyperbolic ways, as shown in this entry of 1922: “Disgraceful! disgraceful! disgraceful! From the 27th day of April to this, the eleventh of June, not a word has been recorded” (D2 958). Other times she would blame aspects of her life for not writing, such as when she moved to London in 1924: “Really it is a disgrace—the number of blank pages in this book! The effect of London on diaries is decidedly bad” (D2 1075). When she planned her diary writing and committed herself to this action (“But now I am going to write till we move—6 weeks straight ahead” (D2 1049)),

Woolf would make sure to explain herself if she could not achieve her promise: “I didn’t write however, because L. started the flu” (D2 1049).

The fear of the blank page seemed to haunt her in many entries: “I want to leave as few pages blank as possible; & the end of the year is only some three weeks off” (D2 1039); “I cant waste so many blank pages” (D3 1079); “I have got my new diary made, & shall close this, with a thousand apologies, & some ominous forebodings at the sight of all the blank pages” (D3 1080). These entries also suggest two ideas – that the notebook diarist must fill all the blanks and that he/she should start a new notebook yearly. The last, a common belief for diarists, leads to the “provisional farewells” of the diary, as described by Lejeune: a “partial closure that presupposes continuation, a kind of stage, with an apparent face facing towards the past and a virtual face towards the future” (313). In the beginning of 1925, Woolf “closes her diary with a thousand apologies” (D3 1080) when wanting to start the year afresh, indicating the need to apologize to herself and say goodbye to the notebook.

Additionally, other partial closures appear in the diary. These farewells emerge when she would not have enough time to write (“I’m fretful with people. Every day will now be occupied till Tuesday week. So this is my last chance so far as diary goes, I daresay” (D2 975)); or when she traveled (“I dont know if this is my last chance of writing, or if I shall take the black book to Rodmell & fill its last pages there” (D2 1040). The most evident “goodbye” takes place in 1924, when she moves to London. Firstly, in March 4, she confides the lack of time she was experiencing with the moving out: “The twelve months at this rate will overflow. This is another, provisional farewell, for I may have no time—“ (D2 1053). Next, a week later, she finally says goodbye to the diary: “And I’m now going to write the very last pages ever to be written at Hogarth House” (D2 1053). As she transitions to a new stage of her life, so does the diary, in a ritual of passage that occurs both in life and in diary writing.

Lejeune notes that although many diarists feel guilty about not writing for a time, discontinuity and gaps are parts of the diary practice (330). However, since Woolf proposes herself to write on a daily basis, the diary appears as something obligatory in her life, an essential part of her routine: “I will seize the opportunity of tea being done, Ralph gone, & Leonard writing letters, to pay some of my dues here” (D2 963); “my conscience drives me again to write” (D2 964). It is also possible to perceive that the diary is something that is constantly present in her mind, as she states: “I thought to myself, as Lytton was talking, now I will remember this & write it down in my diary tomorrow. And as I thought that, everything melted to mist. People don’t say things, except in biographies” (D2 948). Woolf makes mental notes about what she wanted to record in her diary, which turns into a necessary tool for keeping track of her thoughts and ideas. In this entry, it is also possible to notice the difficulty of putting dialogues and daily events into writing, once everything seems to “melt to mist” (D2 948). In 1923, she makes two attempts to record conversations: “As for recording conversations, nothing is harder. Let me try” (1018); “A great many conversations to record:” (1022). There are about five pages of Woolf trying to transcribe remembered dialogues, which may suggest how she explores her diary to experiment other things, such as transcription: an attempt to turn the mist into words.

Furthermore, the diary would also be the space where she could fill her mind with other thoughts when she felt unable to write for work. This happens, for example, in August 1922, when she had a headache and decided to use the diary to copy a letter from her friend (denominated as “S.W.”) and at least have the pleasure of filling the blank page: “A headache: no writing; so I will copy” (D2 972). Correspondingly, the space works as a friend that she uses to understand herself and feel better about her life. Abbott explains that the act of putting confusion into words helps to reestablish order in someone’s existence, since “to go on writing is to go on living” (92). This idea, combined with Lejeune’s indication that the

diary helps to bring “courage and support” (305), highlights the idea that the diary writing can aid and bring comfort to the diarist. Woolf is aware of this healing space, as she seeks for her diary when in need of this support: “I want to lie down like a tired child & weep away this life of care—& my diary shall receive me on its downy pillow” (D3 1111). The act of writing also helps her to free herself from harmful emotions, as she confides in an entry: “writing partly to test my new penkala (professing fountain qualities) partly to exorcise my demon” (D2 1067).

This comfort also appears when she uses the diary at moments when she felt unable to do other activities: “I meant to use this diary to pull myself up from a fortnights debauch of journalism” (D2 1009); “I am intolerably sleepy & annulled, & so write here” (D3 1103). This happens especially when she feels incapable to read, thus seeking for diary writing: “Miss Mary Butts being gone, & my head too stupid for reading, may as well write here, for my amusement later perhaps” (D2 984); “It is a curious fact that I can write this diary when I am too much distracted to read” (D2 1010); “Back from Rodmell; unable to settle in; therefore I write diary. How often I have said this! An odd psychological fact—that I can write when I’m too jangled to read” (D2 1039). These entries highlight how the diary becomes a space to write when her head is unable to read or work: confiding in her notebooks brings her comfort and “reinstates order” (Abbott 92).

Moreover, when she mentions that she is writing “for her amusement later” (D2 984), she suggests another very important idea about the diary practice: the possibility of re-reading the entries. Lejeune explains how memory and organization are two fundamental functions of the diary (385) and Virginia Woolf is certainly aware of this role of the practice. When analyzing her diary entries, it is possible to notice how she mostly writes to keep track of her memories and to re-read her diaries in the future to understand her transformations and develop her self-improvement. She explicitly notes this in an entry of 1923, where she

exposes how she uses the diary as an archive for her memories: “I am putting down notes to use later in re-constructing this period” (D2 1007). This is what Lejeune calls as the “memory of paper” (320): Woolf writes to not forget and to re-read and trace back certain memories and time periods of her life.

Likewise, Lejeune explains that the diary is programmed to be constantly re-read, and that the presence of the future is what makes the diary-keeping practice so fundamentally important (315). The author also describes the notebook’s promise of continuity, where “the intention of writing presupposes the possibility of doing so: the diarist enters a ghostly space in which writing overlaps death – an infinite *postscriptum*” (313). These ideas combined help clarify the urge that Woolf felt when writing this entry of the beginning of 1924: “This year is almost certainly bound to be the most eventful in the whole of our (recorded) career.

Tomorrow I go up to London to look for houses. (...) I should like, very much, to turn to the last page of this virgin volume & there find my dreams true. It rests with me to substantiate them between now & then” (D2 1042). Here, the blank pages of the notebook become the promise of the future and of her dreams coming true. The gap between the beginning and the end of the diary is composed by the present moment and, although Woolf would like to skip this process and go straight to her happy future, she is aware that the present is the only resource she has to achieve her dreams.

Additionally, a fundamental function of the diary for Woolf is as a space for self-perception as a person and a writer. She is able to understand herself as an observer through the act of writing, reading and examining her own entries. Abbott affirms that diarists are able to “see [themselves] through the agency of [their] diary” (15), which makes it a space for self-reflection. To exemplify this, the author explains how Puritans used their diaries as an instrument for the “determination of personal identity” (86): they would keep track of their daily activities and thoughts in order to become morally better people, seeking for salvation.

Although their purpose was more religious and spiritual, using the diary as a place for self-observation by tracing one's identity is something that Woolf would do with her own diaries. She would also read, re-read and revisit her notebooks in order to understand herself. More importantly, she was aware of this aspect of diary writing, as she attributed these functions to her practice: "How it would interest me if this diary were ever to become a real diary: something in which I could see changes, trace moods developing" (D2 1004).

This idea is especially relevant when she uses the diary to understand her writing and her position as a writer. Sometimes she uses the diary to keep track of the subjects she desired to write about, such as when she decided she wanted to talk about clothes: "But I must remember to write about my clothes next time I have an impulse to write. My love of clothes interests me profoundly: only it is not love; & what it is I must discover" (1091); "No time— & I must change, & write about clothes some day soon" (1091); or when she was aware of her privileges as a woman writer: "yet I'm the only woman in England free to write what I like" (D3 1107). And finally, in an entry 1925, she also used her diary to experiment a new word for "novel": "I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant "novel". A new — by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" (D3 1101).

This section traced a profile of Virginia Woolf as a diarist, as well as some functions she attributed to the diary. It was possible to perceive how the diary was an extremely important aspect of her life, a place for analyzing and examining herself, for keeping track and planning her work and life and experimenting and exploring ideas and impressions. The diary was also a constant thought in her mind, a part of her routine, where she obliged herself to write with great frequency. In addition, it served not only as a space for her to talk about writing, but also as a space to experiment fiction. This will be the focus of the next section.

“In this book I practice writing”: the fusion of life and fiction

One of the most important functions of Virginia Woolf’s diary is to experiment with fiction, where the diary-keeping practice becomes a laboratory for writing. In an entry of August 3, 1922, Woolf writes a new resolution for her life: “Owing to the change of ink & the change of place, I here begin a new page. Twice a year I make good resolutions—in August & October. My good resolution for August is to work methodically, yet with the grain not against it” (D2 966/967). This decision of having a methodical work plan is highly influential in her life and something possible to be examined through her diary entries. Therefore, this sub-section aims at briefly demonstrating how Woolf used her diary for experimenting with writing.

The resolution of “working methodically” (D2 967) led to an essential feature of her writing career – her work schemes (“and now I must use this benignant page for making out a scheme of work” (D2 983)). These include reading plans, note-keeping on what she wanted to write about, stipulating dates and deadlines for her works, organizing writing routines and programing her essays or novels. Moreover, she added another important aspect to her diary in 1924: a calendar. The act of putting this in the diary already suggests an idea of programing duties and organizing life, and it makes the pages a space even more susceptible to help her in her working schedules. Woolf herself sees this as a progress in her life: “I have just introduced a great improvement in the cover of this book—a calendar” (D2 1045). The diary becomes, thus, a place to think out her life, where she could arrange her work and systematize her routine, as it follows:

I must get on with my reading for the Greek chapter. I shall finish the Prime Minister⁸ in another week—say 21st. Then I must be ready to start my Essay

⁸ Here, it is also possible to notice that at that time she was writing “The Prime Minister”, one of the short stories that would branch into the novel *Mrs Dalloway*.

article for the Times: say on the 23rd. That will take say till 2nd Nov.

Therefore I must now concentrate on Essays: with some Aeschylus. & I think begin Zimmern, making rather a hasty end of Bentley, who is not really much to my purpose. I think that clears the matter up—though how to read Aeschylus, I don't quite know: quickly, is my desire, but that, I see, is an illusion. (D2 984).

In this way, what she is reading/writing as well as what she wants to read or write about are extremely influential aspects in her life and diary. More than just planning, it also becomes a place where she could analyze and inspire new ideas to her novels. When she started to write *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, she confided in the diary how she wanted to anticipate the book as much as she could, using its space to this forethought: “I want to think out Mrs Dalloway. I want to foresee this book better than the others, & get the utmost out of it” (D2 985). The practice of using the diary as an experimentation laboratory for her fiction was something extremely important to her professional career. More importantly, it was an aspect that she was aware of, as she highlights in this entry of October 17, 1924:

It strikes me that in this book I practice writing; do my scales; yes & work at certain effects. I daresay I practised Jacob here,—& Mrs D. & shall invent my next book here; for here I write merely in the spirit—great fun it is too, & old V. of 1940 will see something in it too. She will be a woman who can see, old V.: everything—more than I can I think. But I'm tired now. (D2 1071)

This awareness made it possible for her to “practice her writing” and “do her scales” through the medium of the diary. Here, Woolf affirms that this practice was something that she did with *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and that she was planning to do with her next book at the time, *To The Lighthouse* (1927). In 1925, when she was beginning this last book, it is possible to observe how she kept her promise of “inventing” it in the diary.

She uses the space to examine ideas and experiment thoughts, such as when she confides that she desired the sea to be heard throughout the whole story: “But while I try to write, I am making up “To the Lighthouse”—the sea is to be heard all through it” (D3 1101).

Additionally, in another entry, the experimentation of the novel is even more explored as she uses the diary to transcribe the many thoughts that she had for the story:

But this theme may be sentimental; father & mother & child in the garden: the death; the sail to the lighthouse. I think, though, that then I begin it I shall enrich it in all sorts of ways; thicken it; give it branches & roots which I do not perceive now. It might contain all characters boiled down; & childhood; & then this impersonal thing, which I’m dared to do by my friends, the flight of time, & the consequent break of unity in my design. That passage (I conceive the book in 3 parts: 1. At the drawing room window; 2. seven years passed; 3. the voyage:) interests me very much. A new problem like that breaks fresh ground in ones mind; prevents the regular ruts. (D3 1102)

In this passage, she even uses the diary to separate her book in three parts, outlining the main themes of each one of them. As a result, ideas could be planned, sketched, examined and determined in the diary, which became what Lejeune describes as a “space where the self can momentarily escape social pressure, taking shelter in a bubble where it can open without risk, before returning, lighter, to the real world” (303). The diary was, thus, the place where she was able to think about her work, reflect upon probable outcomes and analyze the themes that she wanted to work with, in a lighter way, as she herself describes in an entry: “Why not write about it? truthfully? As I think, this diary writing has greatly helped my style; loosened the ligatures” (D2 1071). She also confides that it was easier for her metaphors to appear while diary writing: “I’m sure I’ve now got to work with my pick at my seam, if only because my metaphors come free, as they do here” (D2 1065).

“The violent moods of my soul”: the blisses and woes of writing

Throughout the years of 1922 to 1925, different aspects prevent Virginia Woolf from writing – depression (as she describes it), sicknesses (the flu, for example) and life events (such as her moving to London in 1924). As mentioned, not writing would often make her feel guilty; suggesting that the diary practice was an obligatory task, an overwhelming action at times. However, passages that show the happiness of writing in her life were also a constant appearance in her entries, demonstrating the joy that she could feel with it. In this way, this sub-section has the objective of understanding more effectively the novelist and published author behind the entries, by showing how the act of writing appears in two contrasting manners in Woolf’s diary – as a bliss and a woe.

The first aspect to consider in relation to writing and sickness is how when her health was unwell, she would often be forbidden to work (and thus, write) by orders of her doctor⁹. Right in the beginning of 1922, on January 22, when she “tumbled into bed with influenza” (D2 942), she explains how Dr Fergusson had forbidden her to write for work: “(Here mercifully I am compelled to stop in order to rule some blue lines. This is still influenza writing, or I’m inhibited by [Dr] Fergusson’s prohibition. No work for 2 or 3 weeks, he says)” (D2 943). This passage shows that when this restriction would happen, she had the diary as the medium to escape this prohibition, which would become the space where she could supply her need for writing. Therefore, when she was unable to write she would recur to the diary – either for confiding her feelings or for escaping from them. For this reason, one

⁹ This idea is related to the “rest cure”, a popular treatment of the time. Although in this part of her life she had the diary as a medium available for her to write, sometimes not even diary writing and letter writing were allowed. According to Virginia Woolf’s biography by Hermione Lee, her health was very unstable during this period, as follows: “she had been very unwell, with all the old symptoms, including even hallucinations, for most of the summer of 1921, and had thought for the first time about making her will. In the bitterly cold spring of 1922, she had had the ‘flu, and the GP Dr Fergusson had told her that her pulse was ‘insane’ and that ‘the rhythm of her heart was wrong’” (505).

month after she had gotten the flu, she used her diary to confide this anguish, as shown in this entry of February 18, 1922:

But after 6 weeks influenza my mind throws up no matutinal fountains. My note book lies by my bed unopened. At first I could hardly read for the swarm of ideas that rose involuntarily. I had to write them out at once. And this is great fun. A little air, seeing the buses go by, lounging by the river, will, please God, send the sparks flying again. I am suspended between life & death in an unfamiliar way. (D2 954)

It is only on March 6 that she is able to go back to writing and working again: “But I am back again, after 2 months this very day, sitting in my chair after tea, writing; & I wrote Jacob this morning, & though my temperature is not normal, my habits are: & that is all I care for” (D2 954). Interestingly, here Woolf seems to treasure more her work than her own health, which is suggested when she admits that she all she cared about were for her habits to be normal. Additionally, it is important to note here that even though the flu is what kept her from her working in these previous entries, depression¹⁰ is the main affliction keeping her from her activities, at least as described in the diary. Many times, Woolf ascribes her inability to write to this cause, such as when she felt unable to write *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in the middle of 1922, when it was still a short story: “I have left off Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street; & really why is it? I should very much like to account for my depression” (D2 969).

According to her diary, this “depression” started because Murry, a friend of hers, told her other friend Sydney that her writing was silly, who repeated this idea to her: “Sydney reproduced in his heavy lifeless voice exactly the phrases in which Murry dismisses my writing “merely silly—one simply doesn’t read it—you’re a back number” (D2 969). This

¹⁰ “Depression” is the word that Woolf herself uses to describe her inability to write. I do not intend to diagnose her or start a debate about mental illness, just to highlight the entries that illustrate how Woolf felt about her writing.

event was so powerful that even when *The Times* complimented her writing, she could still not feel happy because of it: “The Times (weekly) says my novels are by some thought among the finest of our time. Yet, yet, I am not quite past the depression of hearing Sydney repeat what Murry said” (D2 972/973). In the following entry of 1922, still depressed for the situation described above, she portrays how overwhelmed she felt by the inability to write:

Slowly the cloud withdraws. Not that I can put pen to paper at this moment; but the waters, which that great grampus dislodged, meet together again. I am once more washed by the flood, warm, embracing, fertilising, of my own thoughts. I am too feeble to analyse the psychology, which I guess to be interesting. Its as if some foreign body had dispersed reality for the moment; the foreign body being of some gross material, inimical to thought. And if I can only protect this for the present, I shall be able to write. (D2 971)

Even though her notebooks could serve as a space of comfort and support where she was able to confide her feelings when depressed, sometimes the writing itself would become a curse, unbearable at some moments for her. A special event described in the diary shows how sometimes she would have mixed feelings about the act of writing: the moving out from Richmond to London. Firstly, in June 19, 1923, she confided in an entry this wish that she had, although not bothering to give many details: “But one thing I do feel pretty certain about & here confide it to my diary—we must leave Richmond & set up in London. The arguments are so well known to me that I cant bother to write them down” (D2 1016). Next, two days later, the desire to leave the suburbs grew so intensely that she felt imprisoned and numb, unable to write anything and thus having to pretend that she was doing so:

This may be life; but I doubt that I shall ever convert L. & now sit down baffled & depressed to face a life spent, mute & mitigated, in the suburbs, just as I had it in mind that I could at last go full speed ahead. (...) But now I'm

tied, imprisoned, inhibited. All I can do is to pretend I'm writing something very important, or reading with a view to a book I shall never write. (I'm letting my pen fling itself on paper like a leopard starved for blood—and I must wash & dress—so do not, in years to come, look too harshly upon this first outcry, the expression of many yet unheard). (D2 1016)

In this first moment, the diary became the friend to whom she could confide her wish of moving to London, along with the intense feelings she had with that wish. The notebook was, then, the place that helped her survive the melancholy of living in a place she did not want to live anymore. It developed into something especially important because she felt that her husband Leonard could not understand her need to move out, as she confides in this entry of 1923: "Its my wish to live in London, no one elses. How far can this wish bear the weight of the removal, the expense, the less pleasant surroundings, & so on?" (D2 1035).

However, confiding her feelings to the diary became too overwhelming for her when, in November of 1923, finally searching for places to live in London, she could not buy the house that she desired: "No we didn't take 35 Woburn Square, & the colour has gone out of it, & I don't want to write about it at the moment" (1037). Correspondingly, the act of writing also started to seem as unimportant to her when compared to all the practical matters of leaving Richmond: "I've so much work on hand. Its odd how unimportant my work seems, suddenly, when a practical matter like this blocks the way. I see it as it appears to the world, from outside, not all cavernous & lit up as it appears from within" (D2 1045). The pleasure of writing only came back when she finally purchased her new home in London, in January 9, 1924, along with a new fountain pen: "I may say that coincident with the purchase of 52 Tavistock Sqre (how I like writing that!) is the purchase of a nine penny pen, a fountain pen, which has an ordinary nib, & writes—sometimes very well. Am I more excited by buying Tavistock Sqre, or by buying my new fountain pen?" (D2 1044).

Likewise, the burden of being a novelist and published author would sometimes appear in her entries. She would feel anxious for not being able to meet deadlines or having too much to do in a short period of time. In the only entry of March in 1925 and after almost two months of not writing in the diary, she describes this anguish: “This disgrace has been already explained—I think: two books to see through the press, mainly between tea & dinner; influenza, & a distaste for the pen” (D3 1080). The “distaste for the pen” is often related to a feeling of insecurity, where Woolf was unable to trust herself as a successful writer: “And I can only think of all my faults as a novelist & wonder why I do it” (D3 1111); or felt uninterested in what she was writing: “Now I lose interest in these facts, much as I do in writing my novels” (D2 1037). This would appear especially when she had to deal with the reception of her books or when she got bad reviews. In addition, although her methodical approach of writing along with her work schedules could help her greatly, it could also make her feel overwhelmed. When she was trying to finish writing *Mrs Dalloway*, she found herself consumed by the pressure of having a daily number of words to write: “If only I could get into my vein & work it thoroughly deeply easily, instead of hacking out this miserable 200 words a day” (D2 1062). Involved by this insecurity, she decided that the solution for this problem was not to write at all for one week: “But this slight depression—what is it? I think I could cure it by crossing the channel, & writing nothing for a week” (D2 1062).

Notwithstanding, however insecure and pressured Woolf felt, she demonstrated a great urge to keep writing: even though the act would sometimes overwhelm her, she would always go back to it. Such is the case of the anxiety she was feeling after she published *Jacob's Room* (1925). Fearing that she would get bad reviews about the novel, she confessed to her diary that this would not affect the way she felt about writing: “But I am perfectly serious in saying that nothing budes me from my determination to go on, or alters my pleasure, so whatever happens, though the surface may be agitated, the centre is secure” (D2

984). Hence, no matter how scared she felt, she would continue writing; an act that she considered “sacred”: “It is now after dinner, our first summer time night, & the mood for writing has left me, only just brushed me & left me. I have not achieved my sacred half hour yet” (D3 1083).

This “sacred” act also led Woolf to use her diary to write about the pleasure and joy of writing her novels. Many passages show how interested and enthusiastic she felt about the books she was writing, where she described many peaks of happiness and pleasure. To write fiction would give her strength and make her feel alive, as she expresses in this entry of 1923: “To get to the bones, now I’m writing fiction again I feel my force flow straight from me at its fullest” (D2 1015). Moreover, in the following entry, she also portrays a great feeling of pleasure for writing: “I am writing the first chapter of *Reading* with the usual fabulous zest. I have never enjoyed any writing more. How often have I said this? Does the pleasure last? I forget—I say I shall write the book in 6 months,—under the year, at any rate. For this reason, people are neglected, & accumulate” (D2 956). This delight made her fear the possibility of the joy ending (“does the pleasure last?”); leading her to prefer working to social life (“people are neglected, & accumulate”). When she finished writing *Jacob’s Room*, the glee of writing once again was illustrated: “I shall write next that I have never enjoyed any writing more, or felt more certain of success” (D2 968).

This passion for writing is also evident in many passages of her diary about inspiration, a constant theme that she portrayed in many entries. For example, in her notebook she would advise herself never to lose interest in her novels: “The great thing is never to feel bored with one’s own writing. That is the signal for a change —never mind what, so long as it brings interest. And my vein of gold lies so deep, in such bent channels. To get it I must forge ahead, stoop & grope” (D2 1051). In the same fashion, she would also give a glimpse of how her mind worked when she was writing fiction. In the following entry

August 3, 1924, when working on *Mrs Dalloway*, she seems to call the character Clarissa Dalloway by her name, as if she was a living person next to her: “Yes, I’ll run through the rain into the house & see if Clarissa is there. But thats a block out of my day, a long long novel” (D2 1063).

In this manner, inspiration and the love for writing were constant themes in her diary, such as when she described her mind bringing her clouds of ideas: “My mind sits in front of a fence & pours out clouds of ideas; I have to stick spurs in sharp to make it jump” (D2 1051); or when she felt that she could put all of these ideas into words: “I have now at least 6 stories welling up in me, & feel, at last, that I can coin all my thoughts into words” (D2 1085). Equally, in the following passage of when she was staying in a hotel in 1925, it is possible to note how a great summit of inspiration could come to her:

And then the whole hotel atmosphere provided me with many ideas: oh so cold, indifferent, superficially polite, & exhibiting such odd relationships: as if human nature were now reduced to a kind of code, which it has devised to meet these emergencies, where people who do not know each other meet, & claim their rights as members of the same tribe. (D3 1083)

The passion for writing was an aspect incredibly powerful to her, something she could beautifully express in her diary: “I can write & write & write now: the happiest feeling in the world” (D2 1074). Comparatively, it could also bring her a sense of safety, such as she describes in this entry: “Never mind, I say; once get my claws into my writing & I’m safe” (D2 1007). Thus, the written word could bring comfort to her, as well as inspiration and joy. Similarly, Lejeune exemplifies how many diarists would keep a diary simply because they were passionate about the act of writing:

“It is fascinating to transform words and sentences and inverting the relationship that one has with life by self-engendering. A notebook (...) is a

kind of symbolic body that, unlike the real body, will survive. The pleasure is even greater for being free. (...) One can choose the rules of the game. (...) Make the journal both the observatory of life and the meeting point of one's writings" (306).

This may suggest that Woolf's diary-keeping practice was also a part of her life purely because she loved it – she would write because she *adored* writing, she *needed* it and she felt *safe* with it. Therefore, even though sometimes the written word would seem overwhelming to her, it was also a bliss: something that would bring her glee, comfort and security. This is perhaps why she kept writing until the last day of her life.

“I prod it with my pen. I try to pin it down”: the obsession with time

In this last sub-section, a final aspect of Virginia Woolf's diary is highlighted: her musings about the nature of time, a recurrent theme that surrounded her entries. As mentioned before, her health was not well in the beginning of 1922 and, according to Lee, during this period of her life she “had been adjusting to the possibility that she might not have much longer to live” (505). The state of her health led her to reflecting about time, mortality, life and death: frequent matters that appeared both in the diary and in *Mrs Dalloway*, since it was the book she was writing at the time and it is a novel that is thematically and stylistically concerned with time. In this way, from 1922 to 1925 many passages show how time seemed to haunt her, which led to many attempts to write in order to interrupt it for an instant: “Why do I trouble to be so particular with facts? I think it is my sense of the flight of time: so soon Towers Place will be no more; & twigs, & I that write. I feel time racing like a film at the Cinema. I try to stop it. I prod it with my pen. I try to pin it down” (D2 944); “And now I have a multitude of pleasant jobs on hand, & am really very busy, & very happy, & only want to say Time, stand still here” (D2 987).

The passage of time becomes, thus, an aspect that suggest the link between diary and novel, once the subject permeates both of them. Simons believed that the passage of time was a “theme that was to haunt her all her life” (183); and, similarly, Lee emphasized that *Mrs Dalloway* was “powerfully affected by this brush with mortality” (506). Entries about time fill the pages of her notebooks in 1922, as the nuances of life and death were constant in her mind:

I meant to write about death, only life came breaking in as usual. I like, I see, to question people about death. I have taken it into my head that I shan't live till 70. Suppose, I said to myself the other day this pain over my heart suddenly wrung me out like a dish cloth & left me dead?—I was feeling sleepy, indifferent, & calm; & so thought it didn't much matter, except for L. Then, some bird or light I daresay, or waking wider, set me off wishing to live on my own—wishing chiefly to walk along the river & look at things. (D2 952)

Furthermore, Lejeune indicates that diarists would often write in their notebooks in order to conserve their memories: “the diary is a call for later reading: transmission to some lost alter ego in the future, or modest contribution to collective memory – bottle thrown into the sea” (303). This suggests the idea that even though Virginia Woolf felt sometimes unable to finish her novels, there was always the possibility of the diaries to remain as a trace of what she was not able to write. It also shows the reason her diary was filled with many passages about her age. An event that had a great impact on the way she perceived herself as a person and writer happened in 1922, when she turned forty. In July of the same year she confided how age was making her feel more mature and able to find her own voice in writing: “There's no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say

something in my own voice; & that interests me so that I feel I can go ahead without praise” (D2 966).

This connection between age and maturity as a writer repeats itself numerous times after this confession, where being forty seems to have come with much wisdom for her: “at forty I am beginning to learn the mechanism of my own brain—how to get the greatest amount of pleasure & work out of it” (D2 982); “No: I think one can be honest at my age” (1007); “I think I grow more & more poetic” (1059). According to Lee, turning this age made Woolf reflect about the “acute sense of the pressure of time, and of adult freedom” (506), when she felt that she was finally able to write about what she really wanted and with her “own voice” (D2 966). Woolf even considered that she had finally found the “secret of happiness” in middle age, as she confided in 1925: “I run out after tea as if pursued. I mean to regulate this better in future. But I don't think of the future, or the past, I feast on the moment. This is the secret of happiness; but only reached now in middle age” (D3 1102).

Nevertheless, although with age she gained wisdom and the attainment of her voice as a writer, she also developed an obsession with mortality and the idea of death. Lejeune indicates that the diary is “methodical, repetitive and obsessive” (343) and if so, the agony of death and aging is certainly one of the obsessions of her diary, due to the constant repetitions in the entries. The idea of becoming elderly would often frighten her too, as she describes in this entry of 1923: “Middle Age then. Let that be the text of my discourse. I'm afraid we're [Leonard and her] becoming elderly. We are busy & attach importance to hours. I have my correspondence to finish, says L. today. I don't laugh. I take it seriously. But we must not let our hobbies & pleasures become objects of fetish worship” (D2 994).

Because of this fear of the middle age, in 1923 she created a theory that she only had two options at that period of her life: “increasing the pace” or “slowing down” – “My theory is that at 40 one either increases the pace or slows down. Needless to say which I desire” (D2

01028). By choosing to increase her pace, the overwhelming weight of time would bring her many assumptions about her age. Sometimes, she would feel bored (“Yes, I am grown up. I give advice. I am taken seriously; & this no longer flurries me with excitement. I am a little bored indeed” (D2 1005)); others, ponderous (“We all grow old; grow stocky; lose our pliancy & impressionability” (D2 1033)); and others she would feel melancholically old (“Sometimes I felt old, & spent” (D2 1110)). This weight of mortality would often suffocate her, where many times she found herself in a persistent struggle of mortality, navigating between life and death in a constant fear that the end was near her: “A feeling of depression is on me, as if we were old & near the end of all things” (D2 1062).

Although Woolf perceived time as something dismally beautiful (“over all this the bloom of the past descends as I write—it becomes sad, beautiful, memorable” (D3 1084)), the weight of it would continually obsess her: “And death—as I always feel—hurrying near. 43: how many more books?” (D3 1113). The pressure of time, thus, was a very complicated matter that would haunt Virginia Woolf for all her life and, since it was a fixation in both diary and novels, it also became a point of connection between life and fiction.

The “other-text”: tracing the creative process of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in the diary

As shown in the previous section, Woolf would use her diary for many functions, including literary experimentation. Moreover, as mentioned, through the idea of genetic criticism the diary can be used to trace back the creation of an artwork, since it is often a place where ideas are stored and examined. In this way, now that some functions of the diary for Virginia Woolf have been explored, this second section of the research aims at tracing the creative process of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* in the diary. The section is divided in two parts: 1) the ghost of *Jacob’s Room* (1922), which will describe how the book she wrote before *Mrs Dalloway* would constantly pressure her in the creation of the last; and 2) from “The Hours”

to *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), where a timeline and a textual panorama of the creative process of the novel will be presented and discussed.

The ghost of *Jacob's Room* (1922)

I consider that, in a way, the creative process of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) starts with her reactions to having published *Jacob's Room* (1922), the novel that she wrote before that. Numerous entries show how she felt haunted by it, worried about two opposing ideas: the bad reviews repeating themselves and not being able to write another great novel. Since 1922 was the year that she published this book, the diary is filled with entries about it; especially from January to August. Next, she focuses on *Mrs Dalloway* in 1923 and in 1924 and 1925, when she is finishing the novel, the ghost of *Jacob's Room* reappears, hunting the reception of the new work in comparison to her previous one. Moreover, by observing how she compares her works, it is possible to analyze how the diary evolves from one novel to the other and how Woolf flourishes as diarist and novelist in this period of her life.

Firstly, it is possible to notice in the diary how Woolf would often feel insecure when a new book was published. The pressure of the public reception was a moment of great emotion for her, and she would often confide this feeling in her diary, as she did in an entry after releasing *Jacob's Room*:

Jacob, as I say, is being typed by Miss Green, & crosses the Atlantic on July 14th. Then will begin my season of doubts & ups & downs. (...) Now what will they say about Jacob? Mad, I suppose: a disconnected rhapsody: I don't know. I will confide my view to this book on re-reading. (D2 960).

In this passage, it is possible to note how she would confide in the diary her impressions about her books ("I will confide my view to this book") and what she expects readers to think about the work ("What will they say about Jacob? Mad, I suppose"). It is also suggested how Woolf was aware about her insecurity, calling the period of the reception of

her work as “the season of doubts & ups and downs”. This insecurity is even more evident when she shows how confident she felt that the novel would be a failure, as shown in this entry: “& when Jacob is rejected in America & ignored in England (...)” (D2 968). This idea developed so intensely that she even believed she could never write anything meaningful in her life:

“My proofs [of *Jacob’s Room*] come every other day, & I could depress myself adequately if I went into that. The thing now reads thin & pointless; the words scarcely dint the paper; & I expect to be told that I’ve written a graceful fantasy without much bearing upon real life. Can one tell? Anyhow, nature obligingly supplies me with the illusion that I am about to write something good: something rich, & deep, & fluent & hard as nails, while bright as diamonds.” (D2 976/977)

Likewise, Woolf also entrusted to the diary the fear that she felt while writing *Mrs Dalloway* due to the pressure of her previous novel. This happens mainly because some of her friends believed that *Jacob’s Room* was her masterpiece, something she could never overcome, as she describes: “Clive thinks it [Jacob’s Room] a masterpiece. Yet the private praise has been the most whole hearted I’ve yet had. They seem to agree that I have accomplished what in the other books I only got near accomplishing.” (D2 986); “People—my friends I mean—seem agreed that it is my masterpiece, & the starting point for fresh adventures” (D2 989).

This idea reappears once again in 1924, when she was finishing the manuscript of *Mrs Dalloway*, almost two years after the denomination of the previous book as a “masterpiece”. The ghost of *Jacob’s Room* thus comes back in August 2, 1924: “And then, as the manuscript [of *Mrs Dalloway*] grows, I have the old fear of it. I shall read it & find it pale. I shall prove the truth of Murry’s saying, that there’s no way of going on after Jacob’s Room” (D2 1062).

The anxiety of not being able to go on after such a great work would weigh hugely upon her, making her feel incapable to finish the next novel. Nevertheless, she manages to overcome this ghost and, a month later, in October 17, she writes in her diary about how *Mrs Dalloway* was different from her other books and that she had “exorcised the spell” of not being able to go on after *Jacob’s Room*:

But in some ways this book is a feat; finished without break from illness, wh. is an exception; & written really, in one year; & finally, written from the end of March to the 8th of October without more than a few days break for writing journalism. So it may differ from the others. Anyhow, I feel that I have exorcised the spell wh. Murry & others said I had laid myself under after Jacob’s Room. (1069)

By exorcising this spell, it is possible to observe how Virginia Woolf evolved from one work to another. During the years of 1922 to 1923, three main novels appear in the diary: *Jacob’s Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Through the analysis of these entries, one can notice how her diary matures as a place for experimentation, where Woolf immediately started writing a book after publishing the previous one, recording the reception of the last along with new ideas for the next. As shown before in the section of literary experimentation, after releasing *Mrs Dalloway*, she would keep track of the book’s “fate” (D3 1091), taking notes about the reception of the novel; however, she also started writing *To the Lighthouse*, setting up the themes and examining what she wanted to do with the book. This very specific outline of themes and the act of dividing the book into different parts was not something that she did with *Mrs Dalloway* – she only mentioned that she would like to “foresee the book” (D2 985), but she did not actually write about it with such specific details, as she did with *To the Lighthouse*:

“This is going to be fairly short: to have father’s character done complete in it; & mothers; & St Ives; & childhood; & all the usual things I try to put in—life, death &c. But the centre is father’s character, sitting in a boat, reciting We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel—However, I must refrain. I must write a few little stories first, & let the Lighthouse simmer, adding to it between tea & dinner till it is complete for writing out.” (D3 1089/1090)

The improvement of details and the evolution of the book scheme from *Mrs Dalloway* to *To the Lighthouse* suggest how she matures as a writer and a diarist from one book to another; increasingly using the diary as a place for literary experimentation and organization of her works. As described by Lejeune, the diary can be considered “a space for analysis, questioning, an introspection laboratory” (304); thus, by analyzing her own self, overcoming the weight of her previous novels and exploring new ideas, Woolf grew personally and professionally. Here, it was also possible to notice how the diary can be a space in which track the creative process of a book, which will be the focus of the next sub-section.

From “The Hours” to *Mrs Dalloway* (1925): constructing a timeline of the book in the diary

The final part of this research has the objective of highlighting and describing how we can trace the creative process of *Mrs Dalloway* in the diary entries from 1922 to 1925 (the drafting, writing, re-writing, revising proofs, publication, and early reception of the book). The focus will be on how the growth of the novel appears in the diary. To visualize this better, I have produced a table with the panorama of the creative process of the book, as follows:



Fig. 1 Timeline of the creative process of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in the diary entries of Virginia Woolf.

As shown before, Woolf used the diary to plan her novels by creating work schedules. The importance of these schemes and the objectiveness of planning her work and life can be perceived in an entry of August 28, 1922, when she was in the first stages of *Mrs Dalloway*. Here, it is possible to note not only how Woolf used to plan her readings and studies, but how she would stipulate dates and set up a schedule to work on her books:

I am beginning Greek again, & must really make out some plan: today 28th:
Mrs Dalloway finished on Sat. 2nd Sept: Sunday 3rd to Friday 8th start
Chaucer: Chaucer—that chapter, I mean, should be finished by Sept. 22nd.
And then? Shall I write the next chapter of Mrs D.—if she is to have a next
chapter; & shall it be The Prime Minister? which will last till the week after
we get back—say Oct. 12th. Then I must be ready to start my Greek chapter.
So I have from today, 28th till 12th—which is just over 6 weeks—but I must
allow for some interruptions. (D2 974)

Some days later, in October 4, she mentions in her notebook how she had succeeded in the assignment: “I have done my task here better than I expected. Mrs Dalloway & the Chaucer chapter are finished; I have read 5 books of the *Odyssey*; *Ulysses*; & now begin Proust” (D2 982). In overall, the diary was a space where she could plan her work schedule and objectively set up a scheme to write her books, which was of great relevance to this first part of the creative process of this novel.

Moreover, by considering the ideals of genetic criticism and Woolf’s diary as the space to comprehend this “other-text” (De Biasi 32), it is possible to outline a timeline of the novel’s creative process from her entries. The first mention of “Mrs Dalloway” in this period appears in June 23, 1922, where it was still an idea for a short story: “I shall produce Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street¹¹ as the finished product” (D2 960). In the next month, after

¹¹ Virginia Woolf published the short story “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” in 1923. Interestingly, the story begins

publishing *Jacob's Room* (1922), she started working more intensely on it, already confiding the feelings she was having at the time with her writing: "For my own part I am laboriously dredging my mind for Mrs Dalloway & bringing up light buckets. I don't like the feeling I'm writing too quickly. I must press it together" (D2 968). It is only four months later that the story develops into a novel ("Mrs Dalloway has branched into a book" (D2 983)). In this same entry, from October 14, she also analyzes and examines the ideas she had for the book, especially in relation to the character Septimus Smith (which was not present in the short story): "I adumbrate here a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane & the insane side by side—something like that. Septimus Smith?—is that a good name?" (D2 983). Some days later, she once again recurred to the diary, this time to confess how she would like to anticipate and schematize the book, by comparing it to *Jacob's Room*: "I want to think out Mrs Dalloway. I want to foresee this book better than the others, & get the utmost out of it. I expect I could have screwed Jacob up tighter if I had foreseen; but I had to make my path as I went" (D2 985). These entries are of great relevance because they show not only how the short story turned into a novel, but also how she first started using the diary to lay plans for it, by stipulating work schemes and analyzing main themes.

The name "The Hours", the novel's first title, initially appears in an entry of May 12, 1923: "They think of my next book, which I think of calling "The Hours", with excitement. This does encourage me" (D2 1011). Here, it is also indicated how she felt motivated by her friends' thoughts on her books. This excitement expanded largely in the following month, where Woolf was enthusiastically writing her book: "I am a great deal interested suddenly in my book. I want to bring in the despicableness of people like Ott: I want to give the slipperiness of the soul. I have been too tolerant often. The truth is people scarcely care for

with the words "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the gloves herself", whereas the novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1926) starts with the sentence "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself". This suggests that perhaps writing a short story before turning into a novel could also be an exercise of experimentation, which can be a subject for a subsequent research.

each other. They have this insane instinct for life. But they never become attached to anything outside themselves.” (D2 1012). In this entry, not only is she excited about the novel, but she also experiments another idea about it: how she would like to talk about “the slipperiness of the soul” in the book. According to her, this inspiration came from the “despicableness” of “Ott”, which, according to Lee’s biography of Virginia Woolf, refers to Lady Ottoline Morrell, a “domineering and garrulous” person that would become “an odd kind of friend” (520) of hers.

Throughout the process of writing the book, at times Woolf would feel very insecure about her writing, especially in relation to the “mad parts” of the book: the scenes with the character of Septimus Smith. As said before, when starting to write the book Woolf wrote how she wanted to explore “a study of insanity and suicide” (D2 983). Likewise, according to Lee, in her notebook notes for *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf wrote how she wanted “Mrs D. seeing the truth, SS seeing the insane truth” (508/509, qtd. in Lee). Although insanity through the character of Septimus Smith was one of the aspects she wanted to explore in the novel, these “mad parts” of the book would often make her feel very anxious and insecure: “Am I writing *The Hours* from deep emotion? Of course the mad part tries me so much, makes my mind squint so badly that I can hardly face spending the next weeks at it” (D2 1015). This uncertainty about these scenes of the book would stay with her during the whole process of the novel, where she felt insecure when she was revising it (“I am driving my way through the mad chapters of Mrs D. My wonder is whether book would have been better without them” (D2 1072)); and when she was anticipating the reviews after publishing it (“The reviewers will say that it is disjointed because of the mad scenes not connecting with the *Dalloway* scenes” (D2 1074)).

Her profound interest in writing “*The Hours*” marks the months of June to September of 1923. In these entries, it is possible to see *Mrs Dalloway* growing, evolving and

flourishing, as Woolf explores in the diary her perception of the book and what she desired to do with it. She would constantly highlight the themes and ideas she wanted to develop; as well as examine the act of writing itself:

But now what do I feel about my writing?—this book, that is, *The Hours*, if that's its name? One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoevsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No I think not. In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life & death, sanity & insanity; I want to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense.

(D2 1014/1015)

Virginia Woolf's enthusiasm about "The Hours" would grow more and more in the next entries. This amusement for her own writing and self-perception can be noted by the way she perceives and experiments *Mrs Dalloway* in the diary, as described by this passage, where she attributes to the novel words like "masterful" and "original": "I foresee, to return to *The Hours*, that this is going to be the devil of a struggle. The design is so queer & so masterful. I'm always having to wrench my substance to fit it. The design is certainly original, & interests me hugely. I should like to write away & away at it, very quick and fierce" (D2 1015).

In addition, it is also possible to identify how writing this novel would sometimes intrigue her, which would make her use the diary to confide her feelings and examine better the ideas of the book. In an entry of August 1923, she begins wondering what was wrong with the story, admitting that parts were "so bad" and others "so good": "I've been battling for ever so long with 'The Hours', which is proving one of my most tantalising & refractory of books. Parts are so bad, parts so good; I'm much interested; can't stop making it up yet—yet. What is the matter with it?" (D2 1027). In the next day, she realizes another aspect about her writing: how she used her characters to express "humanity, humour, depth" in her stories:

“I should say a good deal about *The Hours*, & my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. (D2 1028). In this same entry, another very important aspect appears in her diary: a foreshadowing of how the characters Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith were going to be connected in the book (The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment—” (D2 1028)).

On October 15, 1923, Virginia Woolf got to the hundredth page of the book and gets to the “mad scene” in Regent’s Park. At that moment, she was facing some trouble in relation to the character of Clarissa Dalloway (she thought Clarissa was too “glittering and tinsel” (D2 10325)). She also indicates the importance of her work schedules in the development of *Mrs Dalloway*, such as the routine of writing fifty words a morning and the need to re-write everything one day. All these ideas were confided in an extensive entry, where she writes about many aspects of the novel:

I am now in the thick of the mad scene in Regents Park. I find I write it by clinging as tight to fact as I can, & write perhaps 50 words a morning. This I must re-write some day. I think the design is more remarkable than in any of my books. I daresay I shan’t be able to carry it out. I am stuffed with ideas for it. I feel I can use up everything I’ve ever thought. Certainly, I’m less coerced than I’ve yet been. The doubtful point is I think the character of Mrs Dalloway. It may be too stiff, too glittering & tinsely—But then I can bring innumerable other characters to her support. I wrote the 100th page today. Of course, I’ve only been feeling my way into it—up till last August anyhow. It took me a year’s groping to discover what I call my tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of. (D2 1035)

In the beginning 1924, Virginia Woolf believed she had found her golden “mine” in “The Hours”: “I’m working at The Hours, & think it a very interesting attempt; I may have found my mine this time I think. I may get all my gold out” (D2 1051). Some months later, in May, while still enthusiastically writing the story, she prepared a very specific and organized work plan to think the novel long-term. In this entry, one can observe how Woolf was aware of how much time she needed to write and revise her book; stipulating even how many words she wanted it to have:

But my mind is full of The Hours. I am now saying that I will write at it for 4 months, June, July, August & September, & then it will be done, & I shall put it away for three months, during which I shall finish my essays; & then that will be —October, November, December—January: & I shall revise it January February March April; & in April my essays will come out; & in May my novel. Such is my programme. (...) I aim at 80,000 words this time. (D2 1058)

Here, it is also possible to perceive how she organized a three-month pause between finishing writing and revising the book, which suggests her self-awareness as a writer – how she acknowledged that she needed a break from the book before revising it. However, the enthusiasm of having find her golden “mine” decayed as she came nearer to finishing the book. In August 2, when writing the death of Septimus, the interest she had in the story turned into a sensation of failure: “A feeling of depression is on me, as if we were old & near the end of all things. (...) Then, being at a low ebb with my book—the death of Septimus,—I begin to count myself a failure” (D2 1062). Some days later, in the final stages of the novel, she examined and experimented ways that the ending could be done: “I think I can go straight at the grand party & so end; forgetting Septimus, which is a very intense & ticklish business, & jumping Peter Walsh eating his dinner, which may be some obstacle too” (D2 1064). In September 7, 1924, when effectively writing the end of the story, she once again used the

diary space to analyze possible ideas to finish the novel, which she suggests to be one of her best works:

It is a disgrace that I write nothing, or if I write, write sloppily, using nothing but present participles. I find them very useful in my last lap of Mrs D. There I am now—at last at the party, which is to begin in the kitchen, & climb slowly upstairs. It is to be a most complicated spirited solid piece, knitting together everything & ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to sum up Clarissa. Who shall say these things? Peter, Richard, & Sally Seton perhaps: but I don't want to tie myself down to that yet. Now I do think this might be the best of my endings, & come off, perhaps.

(1065)

In October of 1924 she finally finished writing *Mrs Dalloway*. She remarks in her diary how she managed to write the entire book with almost no pauses, which would perhaps make it different from her previous works, as already shown before. Next, from November of 1924 until the publication of her book in May 1925 she started the process of revision, which she considered to be “the dullest part of the whole business of writing” (D3 1080). While revising the book, retyping the whole novel from the start, she remarked and reflected upon many ideas about it. Although the “mad scenes” were bothering her, she believed that *Mrs Dalloway* was one of her most “satisfactory” works:

I am now galloping over Mrs Dalloway, re-typing it entirely from the start, which is more or less what I did with the V.O. [Voyage Out] a good method, I believe, as thus one works with a wet brush over the whole, & joins parts separately composed & gone dry. Really & honestly I think it the most satisfactory of my novels (but have not read it coldbloodedly yet). The reviewers will say that it is disjointed because of the mad scenes not

connecting with the Dalloway scenes. And I suppose there is some superficial glittery writing. But is it “unreal”? Is it mere accomplishment? I think not. And as I think I said before, it seems to leave me plunged deep in the richest strata of my mind. I can write & write & write now: the happiest feeling in the world. (D2 1074)

In May 1925, she published it and started recording the “fate of the book” (D3 1091) in the diary. In an entry of April 8, she confided the first reception of the novel, given by a friend of hers, Jacques Raverat: “He sent me a letter about Mrs Dalloway which gave me one of the happiest days of my life. I wonder if this time I have achieved something? Well, nothing anyhow compared with Proust, in whom I am embedded now” (D3 1082). Although she was completely enthusiastic about Raverat’s opinion, she did let herself completely enjoy that feeling by comparing herself to Proust and feeling inferior to him. In fact, the effect of Proust in the creative process of *Mrs Dalloway* can also be traced in the diary. She started reading this author in 1922, by the same time she was beginning the novel (“I have done my task here better than I expected. Mrs Dalloway & the Chaucer chapter are finished; I have read 5 books of the Odyssey; Ulysses; & now begin Proust” (D2 982)). In 1923, he was still present in her head and she even suggested the impact of the reading in her writing style: “Last Thursday, I think, I returned to fiction, to the instant nourishment & well being of my entire day. I wonder if this next lap will be influenced by Proust?” (D2 1003). Finally, due to the “party-going mood” (525) present in *Mrs Dalloway*, Lee explains how the themes explored in the book made Woolf write “like an English, female alternative to Proust” (525), illustrating another connection between the French author and the novel.

Although the initial reception gave her “one of happiest days of her life” (D3 1082), the situation altered when she read two bad reviews of the novel. On May 15, she expressed in her diary how badly she felt about seeing her own image linked to such bad reviews:

Two unfavourable reviews of Mrs D (Western Mail & Scotsman):
 unintelligible, not art &c: & a letter from a young man in Earls Court “This
 time you have done it—you have caught life & put it in a book...” Please
 forgive this outburst, but further quotation is unnecessary; & I don't think I
 should bother to write this, if I weren't jangled what by? The sudden heat, I
 think, & the racket of life. It is bad for me to see my own photograph. (D3
 1091)

After this, Woolf kept track of the various contrasting reviews of *Mrs Dalloway*.
 Some people would give very positive reviews, like “Raymond” in Paris who believed it to
 be quite beautiful (D3 1091); and others would not say anything at all (“He [T. S. Eliot, a
 writer and a friend] said nothing of my books. With great dignity, I did not ask for his
 opinion” (D3 1095)). The most precise and detailed review she remarked in the diary came
 from Lytton Strachey (a very good friend), which Woolf meticulously wrote down in an entry
 of great accuracy:

No, Lytton does not like Mrs Dalloway, & what is odd, I like him all the
 better for saying so, & don't much mind. What he says is that there is a
 discordancy between the ornament (extremely beautiful) & what happens
 (rather ordinary— or unimportant). This is caused he thinks by some
 discrepancy in Clarissa herself; he thinks she is disagreeable & limited, but
 that I alternately laugh at her, & cover her, very remarkably, with myself. So
 that I think as a whole, the book does not ring solid; yet, he says, it is a whole;
 & he says sometimes the writing is of extreme beauty. (...) Fuller of genius, he
 said than anything I had done. Perhaps, he said, you have not yet mastered
 your method. (D3 1099)

He also called her novel a “flawed stone” (DE3 1099), a fact that Woolf apparently did not seem to care (at least in the diary), since she confided that rather than feeling happy for the success she would like to acknowledge her effort: “None of this hurts me, or depresses me. (...) I don’t see myself a success. I like the sense of effort better” (D2 1099). In June 14, she wrote that the success of *Mrs Dalloway* had overcome the one from her previous work, *Jacob’s Room*; and that she gladly expected to sell two thousand copies of the book: “More of Dalloway has been sold this month than of Jacob in a year. I think it possible we may sell 2,000” (D3 1097). The final entry about the novel during this time period is recorded in December 7, 1925, where she wrote the opinion of Robert Bridges: “[he] likes Mrs Dalloway: says no one will read it; but it is beautifully written” (D3 1113).

Henceforth, all these entries show how Virginia Woolf used her diary as a space for organizing her books, tracing ideas, examining the problems she faced, planning a work schedule for her professional writing life and recording the “fate” of her other works. It is important to note here that the transition of the name “The Hours” to *Mrs Dalloway* was not clear in the diary. However, through this analysis, it was possible to trace back the creative process of *Mrs Dalloway*, from two short stories (“Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” and “The Prime Minister”) to “The Hours” to one of the most influent novels of modern literature.

Conclusion

This study intended to highlight the importance of the diary-keeping practice, a multifaceted action with many functions and characteristics. Since the diary is usually perceived as a “feminine”, and thus, less important as a genre, the objective of the present research was to break with this common perception and illustrate how diary writing can be highly influential and relevant to one’s life. To demonstrate this idea, the diaries of Virginia Woolf from the years of 1922 to 1925 were explored, showing how they played an extremely important role in her life – personally and professionally.

In the discussion, I argued that Woolf gave her diary for many functions. These included: to confide her wishes and emotions (the diary as a friend); to experiment with ideas connected to her literary endeavor; to examine her own self and evaluate her life (especially through the act of re-reading past entries); to attempt to “pin time down” (D2 944); to organize and plan her life and work; to inscribe her impressions about the world or keep track of recurring ideas; and to simply write for pleasure, for Woolf found a great joy in the act of writing. In this way, as described by Lejeune, the diary can have various functions (302), and Woolf’s notebooks can be a perfect example of this multifunctional character.

Besides tracing a profile of her diaries and how they influenced her life during those years, a special focus on using the diary as a laboratory for writing took place. Considering the ideals of genetic criticism and the understanding of the diary entries as “other-text” (De Biasi 32) to the published works, it was possible to trace back the creative process of the novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in the diary. She used her notebooks to explore ideas, “help her style” and “loosen the ligatures” (D2 1071) as Woolf herself describes in one entry. She would also use her diary to write about the problems she was facing in relation to the book, the insecurities and fears she was having at the time and how her previous novel, *Jacob’s Room*, sometimes hindered the writing of her next novel. In this way, it was possible to construct a timeline of the expansion of *Mrs Dalloway* from short stories, to “The Hours” to one of the most well-known works of modern literature.

Although the need to write daily would sometimes seem overwhelming to her and she would not write for some time, Woolf would always come back to her notebooks. The diaries were a part of her life, a “practice-ground” (Shannon 49) for her writing and a “downy pillow” (D3 1111) for when she needed comfort. It was a place where diary and fiction would connect (Lounsberry 1), where she could keep track of seductive ideas (Simonet-Tenant 14) and a place for self-perception and development of her “personal identity” (Abbott 86).

Thus, her diaries were an extremely important part of her life, and an example for negating the idea that the diary is something deprived of complexity. Further research can be done in comparison with other women diarists, in order to shed some light upon other functions that may be attributed to the diary and to explore how the practice can aid in finding one's literary voice.

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