

# **Sexuality in the Novels of Michael Cunningham**

Ivan Burda

---

Bachelor Thesis  
2009



**Tomas Bata University in Zlín**  
Faculty of Humanities

---

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně  
Fakulta humanitních studií  
Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky  
akademický rok: 2008/2009

## **ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE**

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Ivan BURDA**  
Studijní program: **B 7310 Filologie**  
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**  
Téma práce: **Sexualita v románech Michaela Cunninghama**

Zásady pro vypracování:

**Michael Cunningham v kontextu americké literatury.**  
**Vymezení zkoumaných oblastí sexuality.**  
**Analýza jednotlivých motivů a témat v románech.**  
**Zhodnocení role, kterou sexualita hraje v Cunninghamových románech.**

Rozsah práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Canning, Richard, ed. *Hear Us Out: Conversations with Gay Novelists*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Woodhouse, Reed. *Unlimited Embrace: A Canon of Gay Fiction, 1945–1995*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

Woods, Gregory. *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition*. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Young, Tory. *Michael Cunningham's The Hours: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Continuum, 2003.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

**Mgr. Roman Trušník, Ph.D.**

Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

**30. listopadu 2008**

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

**15. května 2009**

Ve Zlíně dne 12. února 2009



L.S.

prof. PhDr. Vlastimil Švec, CSc.  
*děkan*

doc. Ing. Anežka Lengálová, Ph.D.  
*vedoucí katedry*

# PROHLÁŠENÍ AUTORA BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Beru na vědomí, že

- odevzdáním bakalářské práce souhlasím se zveřejněním své práce podle zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, bez ohledu na výsledek obhajoby <sup>1)</sup>;
- beru na vědomí, že bakalářská práce bude uložena v elektronické podobě v univerzitním informačním systému dostupná k prezenčnímu nahlédnutí;
- na moji bakalářskou práci se plně vztahuje zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, zejm. § 35 odst. 3 <sup>2)</sup>;
- podle § 60 <sup>3)</sup> odst. 1 autorského zákona má UTB ve Zlíně právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití školního díla v rozsahu § 12 odst. 4 autorského zákona;
- podle § 60 <sup>3)</sup> odst. 2 a 3 mohu užít své dílo – bakalářskou práci - nebo poskytnout licenci k jejímu využití jen s předchozím písemným souhlasem Univerzity Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, která je oprávněna v takovém případě ode mne požadovat přiměřený příspěvek na úhradu nákladů, které byly Univerzitou Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně na vytvoření díla vynaloženy (až do jejich skutečné výše);
- pokud bylo k vypracování bakalářské práce využito softwaru poskytnutého Univerzitou Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně nebo jinými subjekty pouze ke studijním a výzkumným účelům (tj. k nekomerčnímu využití), nelze výsledky bakalářské práce využít ke komerčním účelům.

Ve Zlíně .....

.....

---

*1) zákon č. 111/1998 Sb. o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 47b Zveřejňování závěrečných prací:*

*(1) Vysoká škola nevydělečně zveřejňuje disertační, diplomové, bakalářské a rigorózní práce, u kterých proběhla obhajoba, včetně posudků oponentů a výsledku obhajoby prostřednictvím databáze kvalifikačních prací, kterou spravuje. Způsob zveřejnění stanoví vnitřní předpis vysoké školy.*

*(2) Disertační, diplomové, bakalářské a rigorózní práce odevzdané uchazečem k obhajobě musí být též nejméně pět pracovních dnů před konáním obhajoby zveřejněny k nahlížení veřejnosti v místě určeném vnitřním předpisem vysoké školy nebo není-li tak určeno, v místě pracoviště vysoké školy, kde se má konat obhajoba práce. Každý si může ze zveřejněné práce pořizovat na své náklady výtisky, opisy nebo rozmnoženiny.*

*(3) Platí, že odevzdáním práce autor souhlasí se zveřejněním své práce podle tohoto zákona, bez ohledu na výsledek obhajoby.*

*2) zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 35 odst. 3:*

*(3) Do práva autorského také nezasahuje škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení, užije-li nikoli za účelem přímého nebo nepřímého hospodářského nebo obchodního prospěchu k výuce nebo k vlastní potřebě dílo vytvořené žákem nebo studentem ke splnění školních nebo studijních povinností vyplývajících z jeho právního vztahu ke škole nebo školskému či vzdělávacímu zařízení (školní dílo).*

*3) zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 60 Školní dílo:*

*(1) Škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení mají za obvyklých podmínek právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití školního díla (§ 35 odst.*

*3). Odpírá-li autor takového díla udělit svolení bez vážného důvodu, mohou se tyto osoby domáhat nahrazení chybějícího projevu jeho vůle u soudu. Ustanovení § 35 odst. 3 zůstává nedotčeno.*

*(2) Není-li sjednáno jinak, může autor školního díla své dílo užít či poskytnout jinému licenci, není-li to v rozporu s oprávněnými zájmy školy nebo školského či vzdělávacího zařízení.*

*(3) Škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení jsou oprávněny požadovat, aby jim autor školního díla z výdělků jím dosaženého v souvislosti s užitím díla či poskytnutím licence podle odstavce 2 přiměřeně přispěl na úhradu nákladů, které na vytvoření díla vynaložily, a to podle okolností až do jejich skutečné výše; přitom se přihlédne k výši výdělku dosaženého školou nebo školským či vzdělávacím zařízením z užití školního díla podle odstavce 1.*

## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce analyzuje sexualitu v románech Michaela Cunninghama *Země zlatokopů* (Golden States, 1984), *Domov na konci světa* (A Home at the End of the World, 1990, č. 2005), *Stassosové* (Flesh and Blood, 1995), *Hodiny* (The Hours, 1998, č. 2002) a *Vzorové dny* (Specimen Days, 2005, č. 2006). Zabývá se tím, jakou podobu různé oblasti sexuality nabývají a jak se liší ve své důležitosti v jednotlivých románech. Práce dochází k závěru, že komplexní pojetí sexuality, které zahrnuje homosexualitu i heterosexualitu, dospívání, mateřství a otcovství, vyjímá Cunninghama z úzce pojaté „gay literatury“.

Klíčová slova:

Americká literatura, Michael Cunningham, gay literatura, asimilativní literatura, sexualita, dospívání, coming out, homosexualita, heterosexualita, rodina, mateřství, otcovství.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis analyses sexuality in Michael Cunningham's novels *Golden States* (1984), *A Home at the End of the World* (1990), *Flesh and Blood* (1995), *The Hours* (1998), and *Specimen Days* (2005). It also examines how various sexualities are portrayed and if they differ in their importance in the individual novels. The thesis concludes that the complex understanding of sexuality, which includes both homosexuality and heterosexuality, coming of age, motherhood as well as fatherhood, excludes Cunningham from "gay literature" in the narrow sense of the term.

Keywords:

American literature, Michael Cunningham, gay literature, assimilative fiction, sexuality, coming of age, coming out, homosexuality, heterosexuality, family, motherhood, fatherhood.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Mgr. Roman Trušník, Ph.D., the supervisor of my bachelor thesis, for his patience, goodwill, and for the invaluable help he provided me with.

**DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own and certify that any secondary material used has been acknowledged in the text and listed in the bibliography.

May 5, 2009

.....



## **CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1 SEXUALITY IN MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM'S NOVELS .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2 COMING OF AGE.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3 HOMOSEXUALITY .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4 HETEROSEXUALITY AND FAMILIES .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>5 MOTHERHOOD.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>6 FATHERHOOD .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>55</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Since the American writer Michael Cunningham is often labeled as an author that belongs to gay literature, more precisely to one of its subcategories which is known as assimilative fiction, it is supposed his work would deal at least to some extent with the matter of sexuality. The purpose of this thesis is to identify the individual elements of sexuality in the author's novels, find out how the elements are exploited, and evaluate importance of sexuality in Michael Cunningham's fiction.

Michael Cunningham as a writer emerged in 1984 with his first novel *Golden States*, which dealt with the coming of age of a twelve-year old boy, and was rather neglected. Another novel came six years later, and its title was *A Home at the End of the World*. As the book was written during the times when lots of homosexuals were dying of AIDS, its intention was to be a consolation for those mortally ill, who did not have anything they could to attach to.<sup>1</sup> However, *A Home at the End of the World* was read and appreciated also by heterosexual audience, so Michael Cunningham became a recognized writer. *A Home at the End of the World* was followed by another novel, *Flesh and Blood*, in 1995, and three years later with author's most successful one, *The Hours*, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1999. Up to now, the latest work by Michael Cunningham is *Specimen Days* (2005), which uses as its motive the American writer Walt Whitman.

The success of the novels did not remain unnoticed by film-makers, who became interested especially in *The Hours*. Stephen Daldry, a director, turned the novel into a movie of the same title in 2002, and it was a great success, since it won the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role – Nicole Kidman as Virginia Woolf. Two years later another movie adaptation of a novel by Michael Cunningham was released, *A Home at the End of the World*, directed by Michael Mayer. Although it can be seen just as a mere attempt to capitalize the previous success, the wider public, for whom the movie was intended, were not disappointed. However, Michael Cunningham's fans are more content with *The Hours*, as it follows the novel much more than *A Home at the End of the World* does.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Richard Canning, *Hear Us Out: Conversations with Gay Novelists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 92.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the film versions of Cunningham's novels, see, e.g., Ivan Burda, "From Books to the Silver Screen: Transformations of Michael Cunningham's Fiction," *American and British Studies Annual* 1(2008): 149-55.

This thesis is going to deal with importance of sexuality in all the five author's novels, rather than with quality of the movies or the titles themselves.

## 1 SEXUALITY IN MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM'S NOVELS

June 27, 1969 dramatically changed western society's attitude towards homosexuals and served as a first step, if not to their emancipation, then at least to great advancements in the way these people are dealt with and perceived nowadays. The events of that June night took place in a popular gay bar known as the Stonewall Inn, which can be found in Greenwich Village in New York City. The incident was a consequence of many years of oppression, during which the government of the United States deprived sexual minorities of their rights, and treated them unfairly due to their difference.

The Stonewall Inn, which was run by mafia and did not have an alcohol license, became a target of an unannounced police raid, because it had not paid protection money. Alcohol was confiscated and mafia members together with other inconvenient people, such as transvestites, were arrested. However, bar guests resisted the police fiercely and they were soon joined by many bystanders. This event encouraged sexual minorities to fight for their rights and resulted in establishment of lots of organizations which supported the idea of equality.

Stonewall Riots, as these events became known later on, have become a significant cultural and literary landmark, and they have also become a convenient milestone in later divisions of gay literature. Reed Woodhouse in his *The Unlimited Embrace* (1998) divides gay writing into "Five Houses of Gay Fiction," which are categories to which belong literary works that share similar qualities.

The first category, which serves as a core one, is called ghetto literature. It is surrounded by four satellites that are closet, proto-ghetto, assimilative, and transgressive literature.<sup>3</sup> Ghetto fiction, which is written "by, for, and about gay men,"<sup>4</sup> got its name by its position in literature, rather than from the background of authors who belong to it or from characters that can be found in their books. The position of ghetto fiction in literature corresponds with the position of real ghettos in New York, Los Angeles, or San Francisco, where homosexuality is not seen as something strange. It is represented for instance by Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance* (1978).

The main difference between ghetto and proto-ghetto literature is that characters in proto-ghetto books are set outside gay communities and, moreover, they are not referred to

---

<sup>3</sup> See Reed Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace: A Canon of Gay Fiction, 1945-1995* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 1.

as gays. A typical example of this category can be the novel *Narrow Rooms* (1978) by James Purdy.

Third out of the five categories is closet fiction, which had preceded both ghetto and proto-ghetto literature, however, it saw homosexuality as “something defining indeed, but horrifyingly so.”<sup>5</sup> Closet fiction is represented for example by James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), which Woodhouse calls “the closet novel *par excellence*.”<sup>6</sup>

Two remaining categories are called “assimilative” and “transgressive”; the latter is also referred to as “queer.” These two strands emerged as a result of post-Stonewall gay liberation, but have not much in common.

As Woodhouse points out, transgressive (or queer) writers are primarily queer and secondarily gays. In this context queer does not mean predominantly homosexual, but rather estranged or marginal.<sup>7</sup> Their work deals with such themes as horror, dissociation, and emotional dumbness. One of the most eminent queer writers is Dennis Cooper with his outstanding novels *Closer* (1989), *Frisk* (1991), *Try* (1994), *Guide* (1997), and *Period* (2000).<sup>8</sup> What is typical of transgressive writing is its obsession with sex; therefore the novels that belong to this category are often pornographic. As Woodhouse mentions, they “repudiate the straight world,”<sup>9</sup> and according to Young, this is why they “are unlikely to find large heterosexual readership.”<sup>10</sup>

In direct contrast to that is the last house – the category of assimilative literature, which is represented by some of the best-known American gay authors such as David Leavitt, Christopher Bram, and Michael Cunningham. Reed Woodhouse says that assimilative literature could be viewed as “fiction about gay men for straight readers.”<sup>11</sup> He also points out that the assimilation is connected to “artistic ambition and success.”<sup>12</sup> Once success becomes a goal, writers should ask themselves what people form the book-buying public. In America the main group of book-buyers is represented by a straight white middle-class woman.<sup>13</sup> As soon as this is clear, authors should consider carefully how and about what they can write in order not to be offensive. But as the name of the category

---

<sup>5</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> See Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Tory Young, *Michael Cunningham's The Hours: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> See Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 7.

indicates, the purpose of assimilative fiction is not to scandalize, it is to bring straight and homosexual people together and help them understand each other. Its strength lays “rather in an appeal to a common humanity.”<sup>14</sup> A typical representative of assimilative literature is Cunningham’s second novel, *A Home at the End of the World* (1990).

The five novels Michael Cunningham has so far written in his career as a writer are populated with many characters of different sexualities. Despite the fact that Cunningham has been labeled a gay writer, he declares he does not write only for gays.<sup>15</sup> He adds that perception of sexuality is a matter of one’s own idiosyncrasy, since “he did not come out until later in his life and was heterosexually involved in his twenties.”<sup>16</sup> This idiosyncratic view on sexuality is similar to that one which is held by Michael Foucault, who refuses to consider sexuality as something rigid; instead, he understands it as something fluid.<sup>17</sup>

Michael Cunningham was born on November 6, 1952 in Cincinnati, Ohio, but grew up in Pasadena, California. Nothing indicated that he would be some day awarded with one of the most distinguished literary prizes, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, since the family was not particularly interested in books.<sup>18</sup> He saw himself as a lazy person whose “adolescent ambition was to be a rock star.”<sup>19</sup> As a result of that, his books are rich in references to music. Once Cunningham finished high school, he enrolled for English at Stanford University, since he did not know what else to study. After graduation he spent some time traveling from San Francisco across Colorado and Nebraska, to Los Angeles, where he worked as a bartender. At that time he was accompanied by a woman he was in love with.<sup>20</sup>

From perspective of his future career as a writer, the first important moment in Michael Cunningham’s life was an encounter with Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) during his high school years. The second turning-point was a decision to spend two years at the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop. Cunningham says that before he enrolled in the graduate program in creative writing, he was thinking about becoming a writer, but the idea seemed too remote to him. After the two years spent in Iowa he felt to be more of a

---

<sup>14</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> David Bahr, “Interview with Michael Cunningham,” *The Advocate*, June, 2005, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 183.

<sup>17</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham’s The Hours*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham’s The Hours*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Young, *Michael Cunningham’s The Hours*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham’s The Hours*, 13.

writer, however, he points out that it were not lectures and seminars that was fundamental for his transformation. It was rather the environment created by a number of gifted people which helped him to figure out how to become a writer.<sup>21</sup>

In the beginning of the eighties Cunningham successfully finished the workshop and left for New York City. At that time he was nearly thirty with no novel published. In contrast to Cunningham's experience from the writers' workshop is what he says about his consequent literary attempts: "I'd published some stories, and kept starting novels and then abandoning them." He adds that he felt overwhelmed by the amount of work a novel takes to be written as well as he was discouraged by writers of great prominence such as Tolstoy, who could consider his attempt to do what they did as too daring, if they were alive.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Michael Cunningham met his objective to write a book by the age of thirty when his coming-of-age novel *Golden States* was published in 1984. Later on it was repudiated by the author, since he saw it as a warm-up rather than as a serious work. However, he admits the book fired him up, so he could continue writing.<sup>23</sup>

Six years later in 1990 *A Home at the End of the World* was published as a result of some toilsome work. As *Golden States* was written first of all for the author himself, the subsequent novel was dedicated to other people. In the interview given to Canning, Michael Cunningham says he wrote *A Home at the End of the World* for those of his friends who were mortally ill with AIDS, which emerged in the eighties.<sup>24</sup> He felt a need to do so, because these people "had time to read only five, maybe ten more books"<sup>25</sup> and "[t]here weren't enough books about gay lives that delivered something that felt emotionally true."<sup>26</sup> Obviously *A Home at the End of the World* is about AIDS; however, it is also about a need for a family, where an individual can look for compassion both in weal or woe.

Those who liked Michael Cunningham's second novel had to wait five years before another one was published in 1995. The book titled *Flesh and Blood* is thematically linked to the previous one, since it elaborates the issue of family through a hundred-year history

---

<sup>21</sup> See Philip Gambone, *Something Inside: Conversations with Gay Fiction Writers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 153.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Canning, *Hear Us Out: Conversations with Gay Novelists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 90-91.

<sup>23</sup> See Canning, *Hear Us Out*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> See Canning, *Hear Us Out*, 92.

<sup>25</sup> Canning, *Hear Us Out*, 92.

<sup>26</sup> Canning, *Hear Us Out*, 92.

of Stassos clan – a family of a Greek immigrant to the United States. Nearly a five-hundred-page novel which deals with the darker side of the American dream and portrays several characters of diverse sexualities was not especially well received and was also flayed by *The New York Times* book critic Michiko Kakutani.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, Michael Cunningham did not need more than three years to show the merciless and by many despised book critic that he was able to produce a work of finest quality. In an interview with Canning, the author said that *The Hours* was intended to be a “much more complicated”<sup>28</sup> novel in comparison to everything he had already written. He anticipated that not many copies would sell<sup>29</sup>; however, the book turned out to be a bestseller and a breakthrough in the context of gay literature, as Cunningham was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction in 1999.

Since he became a star literally overnight, there was huge public expectation connected with a novel that should have taken up to the success of *The Hours*. Cunningham admits that this book has been the hardest one to write in his life, because there were lots of those who expected it to be *The Hours Two*.<sup>30</sup> *Specimen Days* (2005) is made up of three mutually interconnected novellas of different genres, one of them a ghost-story set in the 19th century, another one a contemporary thriller, and the last one a science-fiction romance set in the future. Similarly as Virginia Woolf served as a pivotal character in *The Hours*, Walt Whitman, as it is also apparent from the title, is the one whom Cunningham chose for his latest novel in the same role.

When the novel was published, it received rather “mixed reviews,”<sup>31</sup> and Michiko Kakutani from *The New York Times*, who had already strongly criticized *Flesh and Blood*, came up to the expectations when she called Cunningham’s latest prose “gratuitous and pretentious blather.”<sup>32</sup> No matter what, readers received the novel warmly and their reviews, for instance at Amazon.com, are positive enough.

As it has already been four years since Michael Cunningham’s latest novel was published, readers apparently look forward to a new one. However, there has not been any hint their expectations are going to be fulfilled in the near future. The most recent project

---

<sup>27</sup> Allison Adato and Liza Hamm, “Man of the Hours,” *People*, February 10, 2003, 105.

<sup>28</sup> Canning, *Hear Us Out*, 93.

<sup>29</sup> See Robert L. Pela, “Pulitzer Surprise,” *The Advocate*, May 25, 1999, 83.

<sup>30</sup> See Gregory Kirschling, “Julia, Nicole, Julianne, And... Michael Cunningham?” *Entertainment Weekly*, June 17, 2005, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Coffey, “Michael Cunningham: New Family Outings,” *Publishers Weekly*, November 2, 1998, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Michiko Kakutani, “A Poet as Guest at a Party of Misfits,” *The New York Times*, June 20, 2005, E1.



Michael Cunningham has worked on is a romantic drama *Evening* (dir. Lajos Koltai, 2007), for which he co-wrote the screenplay with Susan Minot.

## 2 COMING OF AGE

Coming of age is considered in connection with human life as a defining stage of self-realization not only in regard to sexuality but also to one's views and position in the world. In the context of literature, a coming-of-age novel is also referred to as the bildungsroman. *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2006) describes bildungsroman as a "novel of growth," which depicts "personal development or educational maturation."<sup>33</sup> The roots of bildungsroman can be traced back to Germany where this literary genre emerged at the end of eighteenth century with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-96) which is considered to be a novel with the first character coming of age.

In British literature coming-of-age genre is represented, for instance, by Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917) or, in the context of gay literature, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming Pool Library* (1988).

In the United States there have been written lots of coming-of-age novels, out of which some, such as Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) or J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), rank among the best pieces of American literature. In the context of homosexual literature, the importance of coming-of-age or more precisely coming-out works is undeniable, since they "provide[s] mirrors in which people unsure of their sexual identity may recognize themselves, mirrors that have the capacity to enable newly emerging gay men and lesbians to acknowledge their sexuality sooner and with less confusion and pain than is likely the case in the absence of coming-out stories."<sup>34</sup> Some of the most significant homosexual novels dealing with coming of age are for example James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956), James Barr's *Quatrefoil* (1950) or Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* (1982).

Out of Cunningham's five novels the very first one, *Golden States* (1984), is distinctly dealing with coming of age. However, this theme is also present in other three of author's works.

The main character of *Golden States* is twelve-year-old David Stark, who lives in Los Angeles suburbs in an incomplete family with his mother Beverly, an older half-sister

---

<sup>33</sup> Peter Childs and Roger Fowler, *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 18.

<sup>34</sup> "Coming Out Stories," GLBTQ, [http://www.glbtq.com/literature/coming\\_out.html](http://www.glbtq.com/literature/coming_out.html).

Janet, and a younger sister Lizzie. The novel starts in the morning during a summer in the 1980s as David is watching his mother Beverly and a twenty-three-year-old sister Jane through the window of his room. At the same time he feels responsibility for the family, since his mother's first husband Ray was killed by a car and the second one, Frank, who turned out to be an aggressive individual apt to molest his step-daughter Janet and mistreat his own offspring, has moved out.

David finds himself in a position of a man, although he is still a boy standing on the threshold of adolescence. His behavior indicates he wants to be an adult man, strong and muscular, who could protect his family. This is also illustrated by the way he perceives his friend Billy: "Billy dressed like a soldier, in camouflage pants and a fatigue jacket. He was small for twelve, even smaller than David, but more squat, his head hunkered down on his heavy rounded shoulders. The first few brown hairs of a mustache rode his upper lip."<sup>35</sup>

David's wish to look like an adult is hampered by his own body that is still a body of a boy rather than of a man. Nevertheless, David's body starts to change, although the first signs of the transformation such as a hair near one of his nipples, cause more embarrassment than self-confidence. To compensate this, David tries at least to act as an adult, which is represented, for instance, by his reply "Can I have a sip of your coffee?"<sup>36</sup> when he is asked by Janet whether he wants some breakfast. Moreover, later on David asks Janet whether he could have a hit,<sup>37</sup> meaning the cigarette she is smoking when they are alone in their yard. Janet does not deny him the opportunity to get closer to the feeling of adulthood, and thus she admits his role of the only man in their family.

She finds herself also at the crossroads of life, since she has just turned down an already accepted marriage proposal by her boyfriend Rob, and wants to become a doctor instead. Therefore, she is grateful for David, a man who wants to protect her against her persistent boyfriend and against every possible threat, which he proves, for example, by tracing her when she goes out late in the evening to steady her nerves after speaking to her boyfriend Rob on the phone.

But David protects Janet not only because she is a sister of his, but also because he is attracted to her. One night he hears Janet leaving her room, so he gets up to look after her in case she goes out. Instead she goes swimming in the yard pool. As it is late, she is

---

<sup>35</sup> Michael Cunningham, *Golden States* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1984), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> See Cunningham, *Golden States*, 33.

wearing no swimming-suit and David can see her naked. Amazed and aroused by his sister's body, David can hardly get asleep. He loves Janet not only as a brother and as a head of the family, but also as a man. Love combined with sexual attraction makes him jealous of Janet's boyfriend Rob. That is why he answers the phone when Rob is calling and tells him Janet does not want to see him, and adds she is dating another guy.

Nevertheless, Janet is not the only one to whom young David is attracted. It is also Billy who makes him feel "a high dreamy rising in his belly,"<sup>38</sup> although David cannot recollect when this strange feeling started. He even thinks Billy might love him.

Janet's ex-boyfriend does not seem to give up easily and makes dozens of phone calls to learn the reason why he was dismissed. Soon afterwards he drives five hundred miles from San Francisco to Los Angeles in order to reverse Janet's decision or at least to learn her explanation. Janet is resistant; however, she gradually changes her mind and follows Rob to San Francisco, leaving her family just a note on the table.

David thinks that Jane left because of Rob's persuasive abilities rather than due to her love for her boyfriend. He is determined to save her and bring her home. His sense of responsibility is also supported by Beverly, David's mother, who thinks she might be seriously ill, and asks him whether he would be able take care of Lizzie if it was necessary. "But I am only twelve,"<sup>39</sup> Billy responds, realizing he has not been yet prepared to be in charge of real adult duties, but she adds "You're the one that guards the house, though, aren't you?"<sup>40</sup> And encouraged, he leaves to bring Janet back.

On his way to San Francisco David is helped by many people, he travels by bus, and gets off too early in Oakland. With no money left, he has to hitchhike. It does not take long before a man called Warren offers him a ride. David accepts it as well as a joint, and pretends to be fourteen instead of twelve. When Warren asks him whether he lives with his family, David replies he left his home a year ago, and says "Oh, you know,"<sup>41</sup> to Warren's question about what he does to earn his bread. David does not know what a boy of his age could do for money; however, Warren tells him "I think I probably do know,"<sup>42</sup> supposing David provides sexual services to men. As David gets stoned, he finds Warren attractive. He also accepts an invitation to stay at Warren's place, thinking a shower and a few hours

---

<sup>38</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 148.

<sup>40</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 148.

<sup>41</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 202.

<sup>42</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 202.

of sleep would be great. All of a sudden David is again betrayed by his own body, spotting another hair growing next to the first one near one of his nipples. He is embarrassed by manifestation of puberty and thinks no one would ever marry him.

As he gets out of the bathroom, still stoned, music is playing and Warren, wearing only jeans, tries to kiss him on the lips. David gets confused and shocked. “Why did you do that?” he asks Warren, who replies “Because you wanted me to.” At this moment Warren comes to realize David is not an underdeveloped fourteen-year-old, but a two years younger child utterly unaware of what is going on. He wipes off David’s tears and offers him help as he wants to leave. “Have a safe trip. If you feel like coming back when you’re older, you know where to find me. Drop in anytime,”<sup>43</sup> are Warren’s last words. This event can be viewed as David’s very first physical and sexual contact with a person of the same sex. Moreover, it might even be his first sexual experience at all.

Although David has got to San Francisco, he does not complete his quest, since he is held by the police, who are searching for him. Consequently, at a police station, he meets Janet, who puts him on a plane home. David learns Janet is determined to stay with Rob, and he hopes it will make her happy. On his arrival David is assured that his mother and younger sister love him, and he is hugged by his mom as a man, not as a boy. However, David’s sexual orientation is yet to be revealed, since in the course of the story he is exposed to situations when he is not sure about this aspect of his own personality. At the end he recollects his travel experiences and thinks that “Some day he would go back to San Francisco. Warren would still be there.”<sup>44</sup>

Out of Michael Cunningham’s five novels *Golden States* deals with the theme of coming of age to the largest extent. Yet, personal growth and self-realization are discussed also in other two of them – one of them is *A Home at the End of the World* (1990), Cunningham’s second novel. It tells a story of a common human desire – a desire for a family one can be a part of. However, it is not as simple as it may look, since the family, which is going to be created, will be formed by two men of different sexualities, and an older woman with her biological clock already ticking.

The novel, which is set in Cleveland, Ohio, starts in the sixties and is narrated in a first person through four distinct voices. First of them belongs to Jonathan Glover, who tells the

---

<sup>43</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 217.

<sup>44</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 239.

reader about himself as a single child that used to play with dolls, spent whole days with his mother at home, and tried putting on her lipstick. Another voice is that of Bobby Morrow, who was already in childhood exposed to adult issues such as sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll by his elder brother Carlton – and even to death, when Carlton tragically died during a family party. The other two voices belong to Jonathan's mother Alice and his close friend Clare.

As for Bobby and Jonathan, these two boys of considerably different upbringing meet at high school and become close friends. It does not take long before the adventures, they experience together, get to the sexual level. Although Reed Woodhouse, who in his *Unlimited Embrace* devoted a dozen pages to this novel says that coming out, especially in connection with Jonathan, is “left completely unexplored, as if uninteresting,”<sup>45</sup> the novel provides plenty of material for an analysis.

The first sexual experience of Bobby and Jonathan takes place shortly after the boys go swimming to a quarry early in the spring. Jonathan jumps into water, which is still ice-cold and is helped by Bobby to get out. At Glovers' place, when they get dry, Jonathan describes his first attempt to touch Bobby this way: “I reached out and laid my hand on his [Bobby's] forearm.” And he continues: “I began to stroke his arm with the tip of my index finger. Now, I thought, he will see what I'm after. Now he'll bolt in horror and disgust.” Instead “[h]is eyes were bright and unblinking as an animal's, his mouth slack. I could tell he was frightened too, and it was his fear that enabled me to move my hand to his bare shoulder.”<sup>46</sup>

Obviously, Jonathan is more sexually curious and therefore he explores what physical contact with a person of the same sex is like. This may be perceived as a first step to realizing his own sexuality, since he is pleased by what follows. “Quickly, because I lacked the nerve for deliberation, I moved my hand to his thigh.” And he continues: “Because I had no idea what to do, I replicated the strokes I'd used on myself. When he stiffened in my hand it seemed like a gesture of forgiveness.”<sup>47</sup> Consequently boys masturbate together regularly; however, Jonathan seems to be dominant and initiating in contrast to Bobby, who only submits to his friend.

---

<sup>45</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 177.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 52.

<sup>47</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 52.

From time to time Bobby stays at Glover's overnight and he meets Jonathan's mother Alice there. She is the third voice through which the novel is narrated. Mrs. Glover, who seems to be reconciled with her life of a housewife, shows her real nature when she dances with Bobby and, enchanted by his charm, accepts a joint he offers her. She perceives Bobby as a boy who showed her a way out of stereotypical life with her husband Ned. However, it is she who discovers the boys masturbating in a car and asks Jonathan if he does not spend too much time with his friend – an action that leads to a row between Alice and her son. Bobby, who is ashamed, avoids Mrs. Glover, yet they meet in the middle of the night when she cannot sleep and bakes a cake in the kitchen. He gets there just for a sip of water, wonders what she is doing, and wants her to teach him. Alice agrees and during the following year, when Jonathan leaves to study at a university in New York, he is perceived by her as a son. As Bobby's mother has swallowed pills and his father has burnt himself to ashes in bed, the orphaned boy moves to the Glovers' house and lives with them for the next few years, until they tell him "it is time to get out (and) on [his own]."<sup>48</sup> All that years Bobby spent at home with Alice and her husband Ned, taking care of the house and mastering the art of bakery. He is not interested in dating girls and does not have any special plans for the future. Instead, he develops a strong relationship to Alice and Ned, perceiving them as his own parents.

Since Bobby does not know where to go and what to do, he calls Jonathan and asks him whether he could come to New York. Moving to New York helped Jonathan to establish himself as a gay and it also looks as a beginning of Bobby's coming of age.

Although Jonathan meets men, he does not live with any; instead he shares a flat with an eccentric thirty-six-years old woman named Clare, who is the fourth narrative voice of the novel. Eleven-years-younger Jonathan says they are not lovers "in the fleshly sense,"<sup>49</sup> they rather share grief and joy. It is very likely Clare is Jonathan's substitution for the mother he left at home. Clare's life has been as varied as her gaudy clothes and crazy hairstyles. She, a girl of an upper-class origin, married early a man she met at Woodstock, got divorced and then had a relationship with a woman. The life she used to long for should have been settled and a shocking one.<sup>50</sup> Yet, in her late thirties she admits she

---

<sup>48</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 127.

<sup>49</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 109.

<sup>50</sup> See Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 142.

knows less than ever what she wants. It does not take long before Clare realizes she wants Bobby.

When Bobby comes to New York, he is amazed, confused, grateful, and not looking like himself,<sup>51</sup> at least according to Clare, who takes a long work of redoing him.<sup>52</sup> She starts with clothes, a new haircut, and advances to sex. Clare is surprised when she realizes Bobby is sexually innocent. Once in the evening when Jonathan is eating out to write a restaurant review for the paper he is employed by, or when he is out with his boyfriend, Clare asks Bobby whether he has ever slept with a woman.<sup>53</sup> He says he has not and leaves another question, whether he would like to, unanswered. They dance, smoke marijuana and Bobby is seduced eventually. Clare has to adopt a teacher-like attitude, since he is too submissive and reluctant. His impression from his first sexual experience with a woman does not seem to be different from that with a man – Jonathan – about which he says: “I’d made a kind of love with Jonathan because he’d wanted to, and because I’d loved him. I’d had orgasms that passed through me like the spirits of people more devoted to the body than I was. The spirits were pleasant enough in passing but truly gone when they were gone.”<sup>54</sup>

Soon after the sex with Clare, Bobby announces Jonathan: “Aw, Jonny. We’re, like, in love. Isn’t it amazing?” And he continues “The three of us. Man, don’t you see how great it is? I mean, it’s like, now all three of us are in love.”<sup>55</sup> Obviously, Bobby does not make any distinction between loving a man, a woman, or both together. Besides that, he is able to divide his feelings among two people. Though, Jonathan is not that much enthusiastic and he suddenly feels useless. He imagines Bobby and Clare as a couple with children and no need for a presence of a homosexual man. Due to this he leaves and lets Clare and Bobby to live their dream – after nearly a year they reunite, create a family of three and start a new life in Woodstock, where they bring up their newborn daughter Rebecca, and live in a house bought from money Clare has inherited.

As it has been already mentioned, the coming-of-age theme can be found in three of Michael Cunningham’s books. The third of them is *Flesh and Blood*. In Richard Canning’s

---

<sup>51</sup> See Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 148.

<sup>52</sup> See Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 147.

<sup>53</sup> See Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 167.

<sup>54</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 141.

<sup>55</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 177.



interview for his *Hear Us Out* – a book of conversations with gay novelists – Cunningham says that *A Home at the End of the World* and *Flesh and Blood* have much in common. He explains they form a series of two novels that were written in the years when AIDS epidemic was killing homosexuals in hundreds, if not in thousands. Therefore the books are about AIDS, about family, and need for love.<sup>56</sup>

The main character coming of age in *Flesh and Blood* is Bill. He is a second child of a Greek immigrant Constantine Stassos and Mary Cuccio, a girl of American-Italian origin. These two get married at the end of the forties, settle in New Jersey and start their pursuit for the American Dream. Although Constantine, who works as a construction worker, lacks professional training, he together with a man who becomes his business partner establishes a house-building company and gets rich quickly. However, he does not spend much time with his family, and when he is at home, he has fits of anger, scolds his wife Mary, and is aggressive to their children Susan, Billy and Zoe. The main victim of his aggression is Billy due to his naughtiness.

As Billy gets older, Constantine is disappointed that his only son prefers reading books to outdoor games and an interest in men's matters. One day when he asks Billy what is new in school and the son refuses to provide him with a satisfying answer, he gets mad. This is also ignited by Billy's making fun of his father's lack of education.<sup>57</sup> The two are constantly fighting about every possible matter; however none of them is blameless. For instance, when Constantine tries to discuss with Billy his too long hair and a flowered, girlish shirt, Billy replies it is his shirt, his hair, and his life. To make things even worse, he adds: "You didn't pay for this shirt, but listen. I'm going to give it to you anyway."<sup>58</sup> Surprisingly, Constantine is amazed by his son's rage, as he views it as a proof of manhood. Next year Billy moves to Cambridge to study literature at Harvard University. This enables him to leave home and develop his own personality.

There he lives with two women, Charlotte and Inez, who rename him Will, saying: "Whoever named you Billy wanted you to spend your whole life behaving yourself."<sup>59</sup> The new name may be viewed as a symbol of the new life that awaits him. One day Will is met by an elder man called Cody, who asks him strange, philosophical questions and finally

---

<sup>56</sup> See Canning, *Hear Us Out*, 91.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 47.

<sup>58</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 109.

<sup>59</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 117.

offers him sex. At this moment Will starts to admit his interest in men. He is nervous and humiliated; he feels swelling in his crotch. “He had always known what he wanted but he couldn’t imagine turning his desires into flesh and so he’d lived like an aesthete, a young disciple.”<sup>60</sup> The most likely reason for this behavior could be Billy’s fear that his father may realize his only son is gay. Since Will is attracted to Cody by his pleasant scent and a firm body, he accepts invitation to Cody’s apartment. There Cody provides Will with oral sex. The young man is scared and even disgusted – obviously due to his reluctance to admit he loves men – but as he leaves, he kisses Cody on his lips. He tries to see the event as an “episode that didn’t have to mean anything beyond simple curiosity,” but subsequently full of happiness and terror, pronounces loudly his new name realizing the new stage of his life has just begun – a stage he embraces as “a strange brother who’d been away for years and had suddenly returned, unannounced.”<sup>61</sup>

The most apparent feature common for coming of age of David Stark, Jonathan Glover, Bobby Morrow, and Billy Stassos is a journey. In case of Billy, it is necessary so that he can extricate from the sight of his quick-tempered and homophobic father. Billy cannot explore and admit his sexuality until he moves to Cambridge, where he can freely meet men and find a first lover. Jonathan Glover’s situation is less complicated; still, he needs to loosen up the bond between his mother and himself. In New York he starts a career as a journalist and is able to meet men. Nevertheless, he has been always accustomed to share his feelings with his mother, thus he lives with Clare, whom he perceives as a substitution for the parent. Compared to Jonathan, his friend Bobby feels no need to leave his hometown and abandon his asexual life. Despite that, he has to move to New York, where he falls in love with Clare and strengthens his bond to Jonathan. Bobby’s ability to love and be satisfied under any circumstances is indubitable. The last character coming of age is David Stark, the youngest one and probably the most frustrated by his life. Although David’s journey lasts only two days, it helps him to gain self-confidence since he feels useful and adult trying to save his sister Janet. His encounter with a gay Warren shows that time for his coming of age has not come yet. Though, when he returns home his mom welcomes him as a man, thus he thinks he is already able to take care of his family, in which he is the only man. But there is much more behind *Golden States* than just the story

---

<sup>60</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 122-23.

<sup>61</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 131.

of David Stark – the novel served as a literary coming of age also for Michael Cunningham, since as his first book it made him able to establish himself as a writer and provided him with enough self-confidence to continue writing.<sup>62</sup>

Besides Billy Stassos, there is another character coming of age in *Flesh and Blood*. It is his nephew Ben, though he will be analyzed in the chapter that deals with homosexuality to keep the thesis more cohesive.

---

<sup>62</sup> See Canning, *Hear Us Out*, 91.

### 3 HOMOSEXUALITY

Jonathan Glover and Will Stassos, two out of the four characters whose coming of age has been discussed above, found out they were gays. The sexual orientation of David Stark was not fully revealed, since the boy was too young. Three of Michael Cunningham's novels widely deal with people who are homosexuals. One of them is *A Home at the End of the World* with protagonist Jonathan. Although the novel is about homosexuals, it has been appreciated also by straight audience, because typical attribute of Cunningham's literature is assimilation.

Jonathan Glover begins his story recollecting his own childhood. When he says "I want to talk about my father's beauty,"<sup>63</sup> it looks like providing an explanation for being gay and even as an attempt to apologize.<sup>64</sup> His father Ned runs a cinema and does not spend much time at home with his son and wife Alice. Because of this Jonathan and his mother are able to form a firm bond. Reed Woodhouse describes this as a cliché: "The son, rejected by his father, is colonized by his mother: no wonder he becomes gay."<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, Jonathan's childhood is quite unusual. Besides the fact that he is fixed on his mother, he also tries her lipstick and indulges himself in playing with dolls. Jonathan's getting older and having a relationship with Bobby is viewed by Woodhouse as a compensation for his missing father.<sup>66</sup> Once Jonathan moves to New York and lives on his own, he randomly meets men, getting homosexual experiences this way. It does not present any difficulty, since his apartment is almost symbolically located in Greenwich Village, a part of New York, which is tightly connected with sexual minorities. Besides having occasional lovers, Jonathan retains a continuous sexual relationship with a bartender Erich. Nevertheless, he admits there is something sadistic in the way he chooses his lovers. "I chose ordinary men who would not refuse; who would feel lucky to have me."<sup>67</sup> Jonathan adds he is interested above all in sex, therefore he is not concerned with personal life of those he sleeps with. One evening when he is asked by Erich whether he is falling in love with him or not, Jonathan replies he isn't. The reason is the way he perceives love – as something that ruins parents and "deliver[s] them to a life of mortgage payments, and household repairs; to unglamorous jobs and the fluorescent aisles of a supermarket at two

---

<sup>63</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> See Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 176.

<sup>65</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 177.

<sup>66</sup> See Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 176.

<sup>67</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 118.

in the afternoon.”<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, it is this restrained attitude that brings on a mental breakdown when Jonathan asks himself what is wrong with his life that he feels so sad. Despite the fact he has a decent job, lovers and friends, his life of a gay man is described as a failure and he can be consoled only by Bobby and Clare.

Will, the son of Constantine Stassos in *Flesh and Blood*, is able to establish himself as a gay only after he moves to Cambridge, which can be seen as an analogy to Jonathan Glover’s moving to New York. Even their childhoods share certain similarities by which Cunningham supports the pattern Woodhouse rejects – a man brought up only by a mother becomes a gay.<sup>69</sup> Will is not the only child, though, he lives among women, his mother Mary and sisters Susan and Zoe, while their father is all days long away due to the business he runs. Even more, his mother admits to love Will most of her children. Once Will goes through his coming of age and graduates from university, he starts to work as a high school teacher in Boston. At that time he is also meeting men, one of whom is called Matt. At first Will cannot believe such a well-built and good-looking man would invite him home, but when he does, Will gets even more aroused, since Matt seems to be inexperienced and submissive. What may look as a nice evening turns out to be a disappointment, because Matt finally confesses he is getting married the next day and says “I did this just to see if I’d like it. A guy’s about to take on a lifetime commitment, he’s naturally a little curious. And you know what? It made me sick. This fag stuff makes me want to puke.”<sup>70</sup> However, Will’s sexual life is not only frustration, it is different from the life of Jonathan Glover, since he longs for love despite the fact he is afraid of it. One evening he meets a man called Harry in a bar. They exchange their telephone numbers and it does not take long before they realize they have much in common.

Will is reluctant to admit he has fallen in love, but once he does, he opens his heart to his mother saying: “Mom, I think I’m in love. His name is Harry.”<sup>71</sup> And after a moment of silence he continues “I figured you probably knew. About me. I feel pretty stupid, coming out at this age.”<sup>72</sup> Mary, Will’s mother, is aware she cannot hurt her only son; she cannot

---

<sup>68</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 172.

<sup>69</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 177.

<sup>70</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 216.

<sup>71</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 333.

<sup>72</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 334.

turn away or ignore him. Therefore she tells him “Tell me more about Harry.”<sup>73</sup> The way Mary receives Will’s homosexuality is similar to the way Alice received Jonathan’s in *A Home at the End of the World*. The only difference is that Jonathan was sixteen and Will is twenty years older. In contrast with that is the way Constantine, Will’s homophobic father, thinks of his son’s homosexuality.

While Will lives in Boston teaching literature, nothing remains the same for the rest of the Stassos family. His sister Susan gets married to a lawyer named Todd, who has great political ambitions, is busy, and does not care much about satisfying his wife. Susan cheats on him, gets pregnant and delivers a son Ben. The youngest of Stassos’ children, Zoe, leaves to New York where she works as a prostitute, gets pregnant and then becomes a single mother taking care of her son Jamal. She is helped by Cassandra, a transvestite man – a drag queen – who becomes a substitute for her mother. Neither the life of Stassos’ children, nor the life of Constantine and Mary is easy. Constantine finds a mistress and gets divorced. Mary, who is left alone, finds consolation in the company of Cassandra.

One day when all three children are invited to Constantine’s place, they come also with their families. Susan with her husband Todd and her son Ben, Zoe with her son Jamal and Will with his partner Harry. Everything seems to be alright until Will and Harry agree Jamal can sleep with them in a tent they have built in a garden. This is too much for homophobic Constantine, who does not want Jamal to sleep together with two gays. As Zoe, Jamal’s mother, witnesses the row, Will explains: “Dad’s afraid that Harry and I will molest Jamal if he stays in the tent with us.”<sup>74</sup> To prevent bloodshed Will and Harry leave. However, Constantine is not the only one who resents Will because of his homosexuality. The homophobic attitude is shared also by his grandson Ben, Susan’s son and Todd’s bastard. He confesses to his cousin Jamal: “Uncle Will gives me creeps.” “Why?” asks Jamal. “He just does. Grandpa doesn’t like him, either,”<sup>75</sup> Ben replies. Obviously Ben and his grandfather Constantine have a strong bond between themselves, but it is endangered by a secret Ben tries to hide and suppress – he is not interested in girls and what’s more, he is attracted to Jamal. He dreams about Jamal and gets possessed by him. Although he knows he would be rejected by his grandfather, Ben cannot control his urge. One day when the boys are at Constantine’s place, Jamal gets lost – he has probably gone to a beach – so

---

<sup>73</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 335.

<sup>74</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 394.

<sup>75</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 377.

Ben says he would find him, as he thinks Jamal may be there, where they share their secret for the past year. Ben also knows he should tell Jamal they better stop, but his desire is stronger than him. He finds Jamal and says he wants to talk to him. Then he drops to his knees whispering: "Come on. They can't see us." But Jamal refuses. "I don't want to do it anymore," he says. "I'm sorry. I'm not gay."<sup>76</sup> He really is not, since he has already been in a passionate sexual relationship with a girl. Ben and Jamal resemble Jonathan and Bobby from *A Home at the End of the World*. Both Jonathan and Ben are aware of their homosexual desires and get satisfied through a sexual relationship with a friend. Neither Bobby, nor Jamal are homosexuals, but only the latter is conscious of his heterosexual orientation, thus he refuses proposals of his homosexual friend actively.

When Ben is humiliated by his cousin's refusal, he is spotted by the grandfather, who comes to the shore searching for them. Constantine immediately realizes something has happened, so he asks Ben whether Jamal bothers him. He adds: "I'm not going to let you get screwed up. Not by anybody, not even certain members of your own family. Got that?"<sup>77</sup> It seems that Ben, a tough boy who finds pleasure in sailing, is for Constantine what Will has never been – a son he can be proud on. Ben is determined to discredit Jamal and to make him a stranger in the eyes of Constantine. As a result of that he and Constantine go sailing in the evening but this time without Jamal, whom they have left at home. Ben, who feels guilty because of his homosexuality, deliberately speeds up the yacht, which consequently gets capsized. Then he swims away from the boat, from his grandfather, and from the whole world. He hopes Constantine would sail to the shore and send Ben help, but he forgets the grandfather is not familiar with sailing. Ben is already too far from the boat when he realizes his mistake and gets drowned not having enough energy to swim back. Tory Young describes this as "[t]he most haunting death of *Flesh and Blood*,"<sup>78</sup> which resembles the suicide of Virginia Woolf as it is depicted at the beginning of Cunningham's novel *The Hours*. However, as it is obvious from what is written above, Ben's death was a result of his youthful thoughtlessness, rather than of a deliberate action.

*The Hours*, the most successful of Michael Cunningham's novels, consists of three interlaced, but seemingly independent stories that gradually turn out to be tightly

---

<sup>76</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 426.

<sup>77</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 434.

<sup>78</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham's The Hours*, 29.

interwoven. They are inspired by Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and thus Cunningham relies on intertextuality to a great degree. The first story shows Virginia Woolf writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, the second one portrays Laura Brown, an American housewife of the late 1940s, reading Woolf's masterpiece, and the last one set in the present narrates a story of Clarissa Vaughn, a book publisher living in New York, nicknamed Mrs. Dalloway by her friend Richard.

A day in a life of Virginia Woolf as it is depicted in *The Hours*, shows the writer during her stay in Richmond, where she has moved from London with her husband Leonard Woolf. Peace and quiet of Richmond are supposed to bring relief to Woolf, who suffers from mental illness, but she wants to move back to London – the only place where she can live. Although Virginia is married to Leonard, their relationship is often described as passionless. This might have been caused by the fact Woolf as a teenage girl was molested by her half-brother Gerald Duckworth. She recollects that times in her *Sketch of the Past* (1939): “I can remember the feel of his hands going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower, I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But he did not stop.”<sup>79</sup> Woolf's sexual orientation has been subject to lots of discussions; however none of the writer's relationships with other women “is known to have had a sexual component.”<sup>80</sup> If Cunningham wants to indicate Woolf's possible inclination to women, he does it when Virginia's sister Vanessa with her children comes for a visit. When they depart, Virginia kisses Vanessa on her lips and later on admits the kiss was not purely innocent – “it was full of a love complex and ravenous, ancient, neither this nor that.”<sup>81</sup>

A kiss plays an important role also in the life of Laura Brown, another major character in *The Hours*. The marriage of Laura and her husband Dan, a war veteran, seems to be perfect like the life in the Los Angeles suburbs of 1949. Laura is portrayed as a pregnant woman who indulges herself in reading and is not quite confident about her role of a mother and wife. Laura, who spends whole days at home with her small son Richie, is preparing a party for her husband's birthday. However, everything seems to be a failure – especially the cake she tries to bake. Suddenly she is visited by a neighbor Kitty whom she considers to be an ideal woman. Kitty is portrayed as “an attractive, robust, fleshy, large-

---

<sup>79</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* (Boston: Harvest Books, 1985), 63.

<sup>80</sup> “Woolf, Virginia,” GLBTQ, [http://www.glbtq.com/literature/woolf\\_v,2.html](http://www.glbtq.com/literature/woolf_v,2.html).

<sup>81</sup> Michael Cunningham, *The Hours* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998), 210.



headed woman several years younger than Laura.”<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, this image is shattered as Kitty says she cannot get pregnant due to some growth in her uterus. Laura feels sorry for her and wants to provide her with consolation. At the same time she finds Kitty attractive because of her beauty. Suddenly she kisses her on her forehead. “She is full of Kitty’s perfume and the crisp, clean essence of Kitty’s brown blond hair.”<sup>83</sup> Then they kiss once again. “Kitty lifts her face, and their lips touch. They both know what they are doing. They rest their mouths, each on the other. They touch their lips together, but do not quite kiss.”<sup>84</sup> However, Kitty pulls away. She is frightened and considers Laura’s behavior to be strange. It looks like she is shocked by a kiss from another woman.

Later on when Laura recollects the event, she is aware of her desire for Kitty. She loves her husband Dan, but describes his kisses and touches as “queasy.”<sup>85</sup> Instead she “dream[s] of kissing Kitty again someday, in a kitchen or at the beach as children shriek in the surf.”<sup>86</sup> In the end Laura leaves her family to live in Canada and work there as a librarian, since she cannot any longer stay in conservative and homophobic suburbs of America’s fifties. As Tory Young points out in her readers’ guide to *The Hours*, it is possible that Laura’s sexual orientation could have been repressed.<sup>87</sup>

Richie, the small son of Laura Brown, who was abandoned by his mother in his childhood, becomes a distinguished poet that is going to be awarded Carrouthers – a prize for life’s work. He lives in a shabby apartment in New York, where he has to be cared for by his friend Clarissa Vaughn, whom he calls Mrs. D or Mrs. Dalloway. Richard is not self-sufficient, because he is ill with AIDS. On the day he is going to receive the prize, Clarissa is preparing a party for him and his best friends. Though, Richard is not excited due to his conviction he would not get the prize if he were not mortally ill.

Although Richard and Clarissa are friends at the time of the story, they used to be lovers in the past when he was nineteen and she a year younger. Together with their friend Louis they stayed for a whole summer in a house on the outskirts of Plymouth.

---

<sup>82</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 102.

<sup>83</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 110.

<sup>84</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 110.

<sup>85</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 143.

<sup>86</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 143.

<sup>87</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham’s The Hours*, 59.

Richard recollects those times, telling Clarissa: “I was in love with Louis and I was in love with you.”<sup>88</sup> They shared love in a similar way like Bobby, Jonathan and Clare did in *A Home at the End of the World*. However, when Richard wanted Clarissa to stay with him, he was refused. The only recollection they have after all those years is of them two, Richard and Clarissa, kissing near a pond early in the morning. They thought it was the beginning of happiness, but as Clarissa realizes after thirty years, it *was* happiness.<sup>89</sup>

After that Richard lived with Louis in a homosexual relationship for a few years, but finally got abandoned because of Louis’ jealousy on Clarissa and because of his lust for “simpler passions.”<sup>90</sup> Louis happens to appear in New York and he visits Clarissa just on the day when Richard is to receive the prize. Although he is informed about Richard’s poor health, he does not get sorrowful; instead he retains the joy since he has fallen in love with a student of his. “He’s amazing,”<sup>91</sup> Louise explains, but in fact he and the student are having only an affair – they do not love each other. After a moment Louis starts crying: “I’m sorry. I feel like such an asshole,”<sup>92</sup> he sobs. There are more reasons for his dejection – shallow love with his student, Richard’s illness, the fact he abandoned Richard years ago. At this moment Louis resembles Jonathan who, afraid of love, rejects Erich and subsequently feels empty, useless, and alone.

Compared to that, Clarissa is quite satisfied with her life. She lives in a homosexual relationship with Sally, a woman with whom she fell in love nearly twenty years ago. Even after all those years “[t]hey are always generous with kisses.”<sup>93</sup> Together they have brought up Julia, Clarissa’s daughter, a girl with no father, a product of artificial insemination. Despite all that happiness Clarissa is sometimes not sure whether she lives the life she wants. She has qualms about her daughter Julia, with whom she does not have an ideal relationship and whom she deprived of a father. Now and then Clarissa thinks “[s]he could simply leave it and return to her other home, where neither Sally nor Richard exists; where there is only the essence of Clarissa, a girl grown into a woman, still full of hope, still capable of anything.”<sup>94</sup> She thinks that she might feel “briefly, wonderfully alone, with

---

<sup>88</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 199.

<sup>89</sup> See Cunningham, *The Hours*, 98.

<sup>90</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 139.

<sup>91</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 134.

<sup>92</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 135.

<sup>93</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 89.

<sup>94</sup> See Cunningham, *The Hours*, 92.

everything ahead of her,”<sup>95</sup> if she left her life behind. In this sense Clarissa shares certain qualities with Laura Brown and even with Clare from *A Home at the End of the World*. Both Laura and Clare finally leave their families, where they do not feel at home anymore.

As the day of Richard’s ceremony goes on, Clarissa visits him in order to “get [him] ready for the party.”<sup>96</sup> She finds Richard sitting on a window-sill, saying: “I don’t know if I can face this. You know. The party and the ceremony, and then the hour after that, and the hour after that.”<sup>97</sup> Richard continues telling Clarissa he cannot bear the illness anymore and before the quick movement that brings him closer to death, he says: “I don’t think two people could have been happier than we’ve been,”<sup>98</sup> reminding Clarissa of the unforgettable time they spent together in the summer thirty years ago. Richard’s last sentence, before he jumps out of the window, is the same Virginia Woolf wrote in a letter to her husband Leonard before she, with pockets full of stones, stepped into the River Ouse to commit suicide on March 28, 1941.

After Richard commits suicide, his mother Laura Brown comes from Canada where she fled years ago, leaving her family behind. In the meantime Sally and Julie help to clean everything that was prepared for Richard’s party. Clarissa realizes how much Sally and her daughter mean to her. “I love you,” Clarissa tells Sally, “but of course Sally knows.”<sup>99</sup>

Homosexual relationships as they are presented in Michael Cunningham’s novels bring satisfaction as well as disappointment. Jonathan Glover in *A Home at the End of the World* rejects love of his New York lover Eric and moves with his friends Bobby and Clare to Woodstock, where they want to form a family of three and bring up their daughter Rebecca together. Unlike Jonathan, Will in *Flesh and Blood* falls in love with another man, Harry, and they are able to be happy despite Will’s homophobic father. However, Will’s nephew Ben becomes a victim of his inability to accept his own homosexuality, since he considers it to be something shameful. Embarrassed and rejected by his cousin Jamal, Ben loses his life in the ocean. Probably the unhappiest homosexual in Cunningham’s fiction is Richard Brown in *The Hours*. As a child he was abandoned by his mother, later on rejected by Clarissa, and after that even by his lover Louis. Moreover he develops AIDS and commits

---

<sup>95</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 92.

<sup>96</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 195.

<sup>97</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 197.

<sup>98</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 200.

<sup>99</sup> See Cunningham, *The Hours*, 224.

suicide only a few hours before he is to receive a prize for his poetry – a prize he thinks he would not get if he were not mortally ill.

Richard's mother Laura, a repressed lesbian, is not happy either. She blames herself for leaving her husband and child. In the novel there are no hints whether she lived in Canada alone or accompanied by another woman. At least Clarissa Vaughn, Richard's former lover and lifelong friend, seems to be satisfied in her homosexual relationship with Sally. They have been together for nearly twenty years.

#### 4 HETEROSEXUALITY AND FAMILIES

From the analysis of homosexual relationships in Michael Cunningham's novels it is obvious they are not abundant with happiness. However, they do not seem to be much different from lives of heterosexuals, since even in the very first work by Cunningham, *Golden States*, Beverly, the mother of David Stark, suffered severe hardships. Her first husband Ray, with whom she has a daughter Janet, died after being hit by a car and the second one, Frank, the father of Beverly's other two children, molested his daughter Janet and consequently left the family to live with another woman in Spokane. As a result of that Beverly lives with her three children in an incomplete family.

Neither Beverly, nor her daughter Janet, has found much happiness in love with men. Janet has been in love with her boyfriend Rob, but she turns down his marriage proposal and leaves him, because she wants to study medicine instead of becoming a housewife. Although she changes her decision after being persuaded and reunites with Rob, their relationship seems to be far from ideal.

Jonathan's mother, Alice Glover, in *A Home at the End of the World* describes her marriage to Ned as "a date that was not going particularly well."<sup>100</sup> Ned, who runs a cinema and stays all days long away, is neither a good husband, nor a lover. Alice considers him to be unattractive not only because of his hairy back, but also due to the clumsy way he makes love with her. When she gets pregnant, she does not want to have another baby and has an abortion, although Ned disagrees. This step makes their relationship even colder and once they are left alone after Jonathan and Bobby move to New York, Alice feels like Ned's home nurse, especially when he is diagnosed with lung disorder. Although Woodhouse considers the Glovers to be asexual<sup>101</sup>, this may not be accurate for Alice, because after Ned's funeral she is able to live in a new, more energetic way – she gets a new haircut, throws away her old clothes and starts seeing a man, about whom she says: "He began teaching me a range of pleasures I had hardly imagined while married to Ned." Obviously Alice is not asexual. And she continues: "I seemed to be falling in love with an argumentative dark-skinned man who played the guitar and kissed me in spots Ned hesitated even to call by their names."<sup>102</sup> Despite the fact Alice was not satisfied in her marriage she did not cheat on Ned, because as she says, she promised

---

<sup>100</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 58.

<sup>101</sup> See Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 183.

<sup>102</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 287.

herself to be a faithful wife.<sup>103</sup> Thus she lives in fidelity until the day Ned has a heart attack and dies. Later on Alice admits she wanted to leave Ned, but he died literally as she was rehearsing her speech. Even more she confesses she wanted to leave him for more than three decades; however she did not know what she would do alone. The heterosexual relationship as it is presented through the Glovers' marriage does not seem to be satisfying – it is rather limiting and frustrating.

The most important family in *A Home at the End of the World* is the one formed by Jonathan, Bobby and Clare. They leave New York and settle in countryside in Woodstock, where they buy a house with money from Clare's heritage. The reason for this is that Clare is pregnant and does not consider New York to be the right place where her child should be brought up. However, she is not sure whether it is right for her children to have two fathers. She hesitates: "I should either be in love with one person, or I should have a baby on my own."<sup>104</sup> Once the baby – Rebecca – is born and the house is reconstructed, they also make their dream come true and start a business – open their own café. Everything seems wonderful until Erich, Jonathan's lover from New York, comes for a visit. At the very first sight it is evident something has gone wrong with him. He is unhealthily thin and as Jonathan says, holding him is like "holding a bundle of sticks."<sup>105</sup> Later on when Erich is asked how long he has been ill, he replies for more than a year. Jonathan is aware he himself may be infected, too, and gets afraid, because they did not use any protection when making love. He is consoled by Clare and Bobby, but unlike Bobby, Clare is not naïve, she realizes everything they have, may collapse in a single moment.

As Erich comes for another visit, Clare knows it is for the last time – he comes to die, because as he says, his family has rejected him completely.<sup>106</sup> In contrast with that Bobby pretends Erich has come only to relax and spend another few days out of the city. Although this may seem naïve, in fact, Bobby only does not want to make things worse by being pessimistic. He assumes this deliberately optimistic attitude also later on, when Clare is leaving the family and wants Bobby to come with her. Then he pretends not to understand, although he knows she will not come back. Compared to Bobby and Clare, who take care

---

<sup>103</sup> See Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 56.

<sup>104</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 255.

<sup>105</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 296.

<sup>106</sup> See Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 310.

of Erich, Jonathan is reluctant and resents him for being sick. However, he tries to do his best, since he knows he will need to be cared for sooner or later as well.

One day Clare realizes she does not want her daughter Rebecca, who is falling in love with Erich and Jonathan, to see dying those she has just started to adore. Clare also learns she is not as nonconforming person as she had thought, and instead longs for the archetypal family. As a result of that she decides to leave, saying she is going to visit her mother in Washington. Bobby is aware Clare will not come back; however when he is being persuaded to join her and leave together, he turns the offer down – “I have work to do. I have a roof to fix.”<sup>107</sup> Obviously, he knows Erich and Jonathan are going to need him and he cannot betray them.

Although the family of three failed, the main purpose of family is preserved – Bobby and Jonathan are able to provide Erich with help he needs in his last days. Erich and Jonathan also become aware of the mistakes they had made, which Erich comments saying that they “could have done so much more to make each other happy,”<sup>108</sup> if they were not afraid to admit love, if they were not cowards. This may be perceived as an appeal to readers – telling them they should not be reluctant in their emotions and instead should pursue love and live in the present rather than think of the future.<sup>109</sup>

As Cunningham’s third novel, *Flesh and Blood*, depicts a hundred-year history of the Stassos clan, the main focus is on a family. Constantine Stassos, a Greek immigrant to the USA, marries Mary Cuccio, an Italian-American girl. They have together three children – Susan, Billy, and Zoe. Although their beginnings are full of struggles, in the course of time they are successful in their pursuit of the American Dream. Constantine starts a house-building business and becomes a very rich man. On the other hand, his family life gets wrecked. As Tory Young points out, the Stassos’ home is the same façade as the cheap houses Constantine’s company produces, cutting every corner and violating every health law in the country.<sup>110</sup>

Mary, Constantine’s wife, regularly shoplifts and gets caught, while Constantine is aggressive and sexually abuses his oldest child Susan. Nor his relationship with Mary is

---

<sup>107</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 331.

<sup>108</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 317.

<sup>109</sup> See Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 342.

<sup>110</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham’s The Hours*, 27.

what it used to be. Whereas she becomes sexually uninterested, his appetite gets stronger. This may be seen as an analogy to the Glovers in *A Home at the End of the World*, whose marriage has worn off due to Ned's asexuality. As a result of Mary's lack of interest, he starts touching and molesting Susan. Consequently he also gets closer with his secretary, a passionate, well-rounded fleshy woman called Magda. It does not take long before Mary becomes aware of her husband's infidelity. She knows she has not been a perfect wife and that men are "driven by appetites."<sup>111</sup> However, she feels humiliated, because she had expected a girl much better than Magda. Soon afterward it is Mary, who does the final step, and she asks Constantine to leave their own house. Mary also explains that once they have raised kids, who are already independent, she needs to be on her own.<sup>112</sup>

However, family lives of the Stassos' children are not much more successful. The only one who has got married is Susan. As it has been already mentioned, Will is a gay and Zoe lives as a single mother raising her son Jamal in New York. Susan got married even before she was twenty, since she wanted to get away from her father. The life with her husband Todd, a law student at Yale, does not seem to be anything special. First problems emerge once Todd graduates, since he has grand ambitions and wants to become a senator. Because of this he neglects his wife, who lives in "material wealth but emotional poverty."<sup>113</sup> Moreover, their relationship is weakened by the fact they are unsuccessful in having a child. One day Susan meets a maintenance man who comes to her place to trim trees. She allows him to seduce her and they have a short, secret, and passionate affair that comes to an end once Susan realizes she is pregnant. Nine months later she delivers a son Ben. Todd never discovers the truth about the boy and after years he is abandoned by Susan, who later gets married to an older widower, with whom she has another child – a girl – at the age of forty nine.

Marriages, as portrayed in *Flesh and Blood*, suggest heterosexual relationships and family life are not successful and rewarding. The same is true also for the family in Cunningham's most distinguished novel *The Hours*.

In *The Hours*, Laura Brown and her husband Dan are supposed to be happy. They live in the late forties in Los Angeles suburbs, have a small son, Richie, and are expecting another

---

<sup>111</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 195.

<sup>112</sup> See Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 229.

<sup>113</sup> Young, *Michael Cunningham's The Hours*, 23.



baby. Dan, a war veteran, appears to be an ideal husband, since he is caring, always satisfied, and has a decent job. However, Laura, a suppressed lesbian, is not content with her role of a mother and wife. She does not want to have another baby and as she cannot bear such a life any longer, she leaves her family and moves out of the States.

From the analysis of heterosexual relationships and family lives in Cunningham's novels, it is apparent that any effort of such a kind is predestined to fail. The marriage of Beverly Spark failed due to her husband, who molested his daughter Beverly and eventually left the family. Similarly the first serious relationship of her daughter is shattered by her indecisiveness. In *Flesh and Blood* the central family of the novel falls into pieces, since its members do not respect each other, do not stick together and quarrel instead. Stassos' lives are also subordinated to incomprehensible run for money and sexual satisfaction. No wonder that Susan, the only child of the Stassos' that managed to get married, struggles with the same problems, and, because of emotional poverty, cheats on her husband and finally leaves him. Abandonment is a common motif that goes through most of the families in Cunningham's novels like a string. It is present also in *The Hours* in the family of Laura Brown, who leaves her husband and her small son, since she cannot identify with her role of a mother and wife. Even the new "family of three" that is formed by Bobby, Jonathan and Clare in *A Home at the End of the World* fails, as "biology finally wins out over choice"<sup>114</sup> and Clare leaves. Only Alice and Ned Glovers managed not to break their marital promise until they were separated by Ned's death. However, their marriage was far from a happy coexistence as well, since they lived one beside the other, rather than together. After all, Alice admits she had been thinking about leaving her husband for nearly thirty years.

Reed Woodhouse notices that "failure is the story" in Cunningham's novels. "All of his families – whether artificial or biological, gay or straight – are doomed from the start."<sup>115</sup> He concludes that in author's five novels there is not any family that would be successful. Although this analysis of families in Cunningham's fiction proves what Woodhouse claims, it is not appropriate and fair to describe the families as predestined and utter failures. For instance, Stassos managed to bring up three children before they got divorced, and also Glovers stayed together until Ned died. If this were considered as a

---

<sup>114</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 178.

<sup>115</sup> Woodhouse, *Unlimited Embrace*, 173.

failure, we should muse on our own society, since families in Cunningham's prose more or less reflect the way we live.

## 5 MOTHERHOOD

In her analysis of motherhood in *The Hours*, Tory Young remarks that although the issue is to the largest extent present right in this book, it can be found in all Cunningham's novels.<sup>116</sup> Beverly Stark, the mother in Cunningham's first book *Golden States*, is a remarried widow divorced from her husband and living with her three children. Relationships between her and her children are depicted as easygoing and she is not even prejudiced against her second husband Frank, who left her, and explains David and Lizzie they should stay with their father during summers even despite their reluctance. Beverly is aware two of her children are fully dependent on her, thus she is worried when she goes to a doctor and realizes something may be wrong with her. Although it is not explicitly mentioned, whether she is seriously ill or not, she tells David everything is alright. Though, she also asks him, whether he would be able to take care of the youngest Lizzie if she needed it.

Alice Glover in *A Home at the End of the World* is portrayed as a sensitive mother and a faithful wife; yet, the image of her motherhood is blemished by the fact she deliberately had an abortion when she was pregnant with her second child. "Mommy doesn't want to have a baby,"<sup>117</sup> young Jonathan explains to his father, who rejects such stories and instead replies he and the mother are very happy about the baby. Jonathan, who spends all days long with his mother, while the father is away taking care of his business, knows the truth – he knows his mother hates having another child and that only the father wants to. It does not take long before the parents go to hospital and explain Jonathan the baby was "a canceled ticket, a cake taken too soon from the oven."<sup>118</sup> This event may be also seen as a crucial moment that estranged Alice and Ned Glover.

Nevertheless, in other respects Alice is an exemplary mother. Compared to Ned she is able to accept her son's homosexuality, support him and also to stay faithful in the marriage, although she is both sexually and emotionally dissatisfied, and thinks of leaving her husband. Besides that, her broadmindedness is proved in lots of other situations – for instance, when she finds Jonathan and Bobby smoking weed or when she is invited to dance by a boy at the age of her son. Alice's liberal and open-minded personality can show itself to its full extent only after her husband dies – then she finds a younger lover with

---

<sup>116</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham's The Hours*, 55.

<sup>117</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 11.

<sup>118</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 13.

whom she can compensate everything she missed during the times when she was a caring mother and a faithful wife.

Considering open-mindedness in *A Home at the End of the World*, there is another woman whom this characteristic fits – it is Clare. At the time she lives with Jonathan in their New York apartment, she is already well over thirty. When Bobby comes to live with them, she and Jonathan are discussing a possibility of becoming parents. Although this may look like a mere play, Clare is completely aware her biological clock is ticking. Besides that she is an utterly down-to-earth person in this respect, saying: “Most parents aren’t lovers.”<sup>119</sup> As a result of that, she does not linger over seducing Bobby and to get pregnant. She suggests bringing up the child in the countryside rather than in New York, so she, Jonathan, and Bobby buy a house in Woodstock. This new model of a family seems to be convenient and Clare admits both men are good fathers. However, she soon realizes Jonathan’s bond with Rebecca is getting stronger than her own. Due to this Clare becomes jealous on him, since she thinks that although the child is cared for by all three of them, it would belong to mother-like Jonathan. Eventually, Clare takes her daughter and leaves forever, hoping that Rebecca would be one day grateful for this act of courage. She also admits that she has gotten what she wanted – a baby of her own. Yet, it is not only jealousy and selfishness, what makes her leave. Another reason is that Clare does not want her young daughter to see Jonathan and Erich die of AIDS, as Rebecca is getting in love with them.<sup>120</sup>

In contrast to Clare, who takes her child with her, Laura Brown in *The Hours* abandons both her husband and son. Despite this, she has always wanted to be a good mother and a loved wife who is able to “set a perfect table.”<sup>121</sup> However, she is not able to succeed in any of these roles, since she aims for perfectness, an apparent quality of the patriotic forties. Laura thinks that her husband Dan, a war veteran and a hero, deserves someone better than a foreign-looking bookworm. To please him, she decides to bake a cake for his birthday.

Once the cake is finished, Laura is visited by her neighbor Kitty, who comes to ask her for a favor. When Kitty sees the cake, she evaluates the product of Laura’s efforts only as

---

<sup>119</sup> Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 139.

<sup>120</sup> See Cunningham, *A Home at the End of the World*, 328.

<sup>121</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 101.

something “cute.”<sup>122</sup> Laura feels humiliated by this attractive and self-confident ideal of American femininity. Nevertheless, this image is shattered when Kitty admits she cannot get pregnant during some growth in her uterus. After Kitty leaves, Laura decides to bake a new cake that would be good enough to honor her husband. She tries to persuade herself she will be a good wife and mother, “devoted to her son, her husband, her home and duties, all her gifts.”<sup>123</sup> She also tries to persuade herself she wants the second child that is still in her belly.

As Laura is done with the cake, she has her son Richie looked after by a woman from neighborhood, and drives to a hotel. There she rents a room and can finally continue reading *Mrs. Dalloway*. This act seems to be a prologue to her later run away from the family.

The mother and the son meet again a few decades later when he, a poet dying of AIDS, commits suicide jumping out of a window shortly before he is awarded a prize for poetry. Despite all of this, as Tory Young points out, Cunningham does not want his readers to blame Laura of Richard’s unhappiness.<sup>124</sup> She herself as a suppressed lesbian, unable to success as a mother and wife has gone through lots of sadness. Besides that she also outlives her son, her husband and her daughter – the result of her second pregnancy.

Another mother in *The Hours* is Clarissa Vaughn, called Mrs. Dalloway by her friend Richard, the adult son of Laura Brown. Although she lives in a successful relationship with her partner Sally for nearly two decades, and has a decent job, she doubts her success as a mother. The reason for Clarissa’s anxiety is the fact that she denies her daughter Julia a father, having conceived her through anonymous artificial insemination.

Julia’s friendship with a fortyish militant lesbian Mary Krull seems to be a result of her need for a father. Clarissa does not understand why her straight daughter has chosen to spend time with such a person, and thinks Julia must hate her mother for depriving her of a father. However, as Tory Young remarks, Clarissa’s doubts are unnecessary, since at the end Julia, with the aim to help her mother, “handles the aftermath of the cancelled party with assurance.”<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 104.

<sup>123</sup> Cunningham, *The Hours*, 79.

<sup>124</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham’s The Hours*, 59.

<sup>125</sup> Young, *Michael Cunningham’s The Hours*, 58.

The pattern of father and husband absence is quite common in Michael Cunningham's fiction. Although this phenomenon is most evident in *The Hours*, it is present also in *Flesh and Blood*, where are three mothers out of whom two bring up their children with their husbands being mostly away, and one who lives as a single mother abandoned by the father of her child at all.

Mary Stassos, a mother of three children – Susan, Billy and Zoe – is portrayed as a housewife, whose “only” responsibility is to take care of the children, household and her husband Constantine who works hard to earn enough money. As a mother she is successful; however she fails as a wife due to her lack of sexual interest and her inability to fully appreciate her husband. At the beginning, the family struggle to get through, but later on Constantine becomes an influential businessman and the Stassos get rich. Besides that, he is also more nervous and gets in conflicts with his son Billy. Mary manages to protect Billy against his father's fits of anger, though she is not able to protect her daughter Susan against him molesting her. Because of this Mary is despised by Susan, who thinks her father started to touch and kiss her due to her mother's lack of sexual interest. As a person Mary is open-minded, since she as well as Alice Glover, can accept her son's homosexuality and also starts a friendship with a drag queen Cassandra – a man wearing woman clothes. Although Cassandra is a homosexual male disguised as a woman, her role in the life of Zoe Stassos and her son Jamal is fully maternal.

Zoe, the youngest child of Constantine and Mary Stassos, leaves her family in her late teenage years, moves to New York and becomes a prostitute. At the beginning of her career she meets Cassandra in a club and is advised by her about the profession. They get closer and later, as Zoe gets pregnant and is abandoned by the father of her child, Cassandra becomes a mother both for Zoe and her son Jamal. Besides that she also advises Mary Stassos in her maternal role and prompts her to spend more time with her grandson Jamal, saying they should know each other better, since Jamal may need her. The reason for this is that both Cassandra and Zoe have been infected with AIDS and they will pass away in the course of the novel. Tory Young views Cassandra as the most successful of all Cunningham's mothers, however some scholars disagree with her claiming that “Cassandra is a model of conventional maternal care for both Zoe and Jamal,”<sup>126</sup> since

---

<sup>126</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham's The Hours*, 29.

taking Cassandra out of her drag-queen context “diminishes the indebtedness of Michael Cunningham to the queer culture and also his revisionism of its founding concepts.”<sup>127</sup>

Definitely the most unconventional mother of Cunningham’s fiction is Catareen in his latest work *Specimen Days*. The book consists of three novellas with similar characters set in different times. Catareen, an alien lizard in the novella “Like Beauty,” is a refugee on the Earth, who comes from a planet, where inhabitants are called Nadians. She is remarkable, especially due to her past, since all her children were killed back on her native planet. In this respect Catareen’s history is similar to Susan’s from *Flesh and Blood*, who also loses her son Ben, when he drowns in sea.

In the second novella, “The Children’s Crusade,” the maternal parallel to Catareen is an African-American woman known as Cat. She works in New York City police department as a psychologist who answers calls of people threatening with terrorist bomb attacks. It happens that she gets closer to a child terrorist-to-be, and since she longs for children, she starts to care about him. As a result of her wish to become a mother she abandons her job and her duties, and runs away with the child to the countryside, where she hopes to live contentedly.

A character of a mother is present also in the very first novella called “In the Machine.” It is set in the industrial nineteenth-century America. Catherine is a pregnant woman, whose fiancée Simon has died in the steel works, having been pulled in by a machine. Catherine is remorseful, since Simon had realized she might have cheated on him. In fact she had been a prostitute and wants to marry Simon to get a father for her child. However, Simon had not been guiltless too, because he had had an affair with another woman. Regardless of the circumstances, the typical concern of motherhood is visible – to form a family and provide herself with a husband and her child with a father.

The most common pattern of motherhood as it can be seen in Michael Cunningham’s fiction is a mother abandoned by the father of her children or a mother who brings up her children without much assistance from her husband. Beverly Stark in *Golden States*, Clarissa Vaughn in *The Hours*, and Zoe Stassos in *Flesh and Blood* are those mothers who have to rely only on themselves. Mary Stassos, Alice Glover, and Susan Stassos belong to those who are not helped with their children by the fathers, since there are either busy as

---

<sup>127</sup> Roman Trušník, “A Drag Queen in Your Living Room: Michael Cunningham’s Revision of Assimilative Gay Fiction,” *American and British Studies Annual* 1 (2008): 100.

Constantine and Todd or apathetic as Ned. Moreover, there are also mothers such as Clare in *A Home at the End of the World* or Laura in *The Hours*, who leave their families either with their child or without it.



## 6 FATHERHOOD

Although motherhood plays a significant role in Cunningham's fiction, the role of fathers should not be left without notice, since they significantly influence the lives of their children, wives and families, no matter whether they are absent or present.

Frank Stark in *Golden States* is far from an exemplary father. He is a second spouse of Beverly Stark, since her first husband Ray was hit by a car and died. The main problem is that Frank is aggressive to his children and apt to abuse his step-daughter Janet. For instance, one of the rows begins with Frank ordering Janet to stay at home instead of slutting around. As she asks him in reply whether he would like her rather to slut around with him, he gets mad and beats both Janet and her brother David.<sup>128</sup> From this scene Janet may look as if alluding to something sexual. Later on she explicitly reveals what was going on between her and Frank, saying: "I mean, ever since my father died and you married that, well that *man*, I've just, I haven't really known how to relax with anybody, I mean, I can't seem to really *be* with men, like sexually, and I keep thinking well maybe if I met someone else and oh, God, it just isn't *fair*—" <sup>129</sup> Moreover, it turns out that Frank might be inclined to molest even his own daughter Lizzie, pinching her too hard all over the body. Due to this she and her brother David are reluctant to stay with their father during summers.

In relation to aggressiveness and molestation, Frank is similar to Constantine Stassos in *Flesh and Blood*. He also beats his children, especially his son Billy – for instance when Billy is disobedient and does not want to go to bed, Constantine smashes him and the child starts crying. Then his wife Mary asks Constantine what has happened to him and he replies he does not know, he could not control his rage. Thus Constantine seems to be a victim of his own fits of anger. He tries to suppress his aggressiveness, but is not always successful. Moreover, when the children get older and Billy, for example, makes fun of his father's lack of formal education, Constantine is not able to control himself and becomes aggressive again. As Billy is Mary's most favorite child, she protects him and calls Constantine a monster and a stupid bastard. At this point Constantine feels both rage and shame. He promises himself to be better, kinder, to work harder.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> See Cunningham, *Golden States*, 45.

<sup>129</sup> Cunningham, *Golden States*, 159.

<sup>130</sup> See Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 48.

However, his pains are not appreciated by his family – especially by his wife and his son. The only member of the Stassos family with whom Constantine sees eye to eye, is his youngest daughter Zoe. They together take care of a garden and at these moments Constantine can be seen as a loving father. Everything gets worse when Mary becomes sexually apathetic. Because of that Constantine focuses himself sexually on his elder daughter Susan, instead of his wife. One evening, when Susan, despite Constantine's hopes, does not become a queen of a dancing ball, he tries to console her and tells her she is his loved daughter. Yet, he is not able to control himself and kisses Susan on her lips. He becomes attracted to her and she becomes his substitution for his wife.

In less than a year, as Susan graduates from high school, she announces her family she is going to marry her boyfriend Todd. This act may be perceived as an effort to get away from her father. At the end of the wedding day Constantine starts weeping, and when Mary asks him what has happened, he replies: "I can't believe she's really gone." "She isn't gone, she just has a life of her own now,"<sup>131</sup> Mary tells him. But when Constantine says: "She's been mine," his wife understands, yet pushes the thought away. At this moment her failure as a mother is clearly visible even to her, since she becomes aware of the non-standard relationship between her daughter and Constantine. It may be too late to do something as well as too difficult to admit her failure as a wife.

Later on Constantine reveals what may have been one of the reasons for his harshness. He recollects his relationship with his own father, whose strictness made Constantine strong enough to get ahead in his life; however, that made him also leave Greece and go to America. Constantine realizes his son Billy may be doing the same, leaving his home to study in Cambridge, MA.

As Susan gets married and moves away, Billy goes to university and Zoe moves to New York, the relationships between Constantine and two of his children remain unsettled. He would like to set them right, at least with Susan, but when he thinks about visiting her, he finally rejects the idea, being afraid he would feel ashamed. Although he longs for love and sexual pleasure, he gets none. Thus he has an affair with his secretary, divorces from Mary and, eventually, gets married again. During the Reagan and Bush era Constantine's business gets into troubles; however, it survives and successfully recovers, which is in sharp contrast to the relationships with Susan and Billy that remain awry.

---

<sup>131</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 89.

Even though Constantine is not able to accept his son's homosexuality, he at least tries to put up with his daughter. When his grandson, Susan's son Ben, drowns in the sea, Constantine comes to Susan to console her and ask for forgiveness at the funeral. However, when he touches her, she loudly orders him to get his hand out of her. "You've paid your respects, you've seen what you came to see. Now go. I can't look at you anymore, I don't want you touching me,"<sup>132</sup> she adds. Susan's brother Will has probably already forgiven his father, since he prompts Susan to forgive him too, explaining she will kill their father, because he feels heavily guilty of everything.

Yet, Susan does not intend to do what her brother proposes – instead she publicly approaches her father and kisses him suddenly with open mouth, looking directly into his eyes to show him the reason, why he has not been and will not ever be forgiven.

Later on, as Constantine's youngest child Zoe – the only one who loved him – dies of AIDS, he realizes he has failed. "He hadn't loved enough, or had loved too much."<sup>133</sup> Not even his second wife Magda is able to tell him she loves him. Constantine's whole life can be seen as a dream that has failed, as the American Dream that has gone wrong. However, as Tory Young says, Cunningham in spite of all Constantine's "appalling qualities"<sup>134</sup> does not portray him as a despicable character, rather as a pathetic one, which may annoy those readers who look for clear distinction between good and evil.<sup>135</sup>

Like mothers, fathers are depicted without any idealism in Cunningham's fiction. They are aggressive, abuse their children and abandon their families. The most influential father of all Cunningham's novels is Constantine Stassos in *Flesh and Blood*. He molests his daughter, resents his son for being a homosexual, and cheats on his wife. However, Constantine should not be judged as a black-and-white character, since his deeds are caused by the world around him – he struggles hard to earn money, he is sexually dissatisfied with his wife. He simply "hadn't loved enough, or had loved too much."<sup>136</sup>

Constantine's behavior is similar to Frank Stark's in *Golden States*, though in this case not enough reasons for Frank's molesting his step-daughter and beating his children are explicitly depicted in the novel .

---

<sup>132</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 449.

<sup>133</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 454.

<sup>134</sup> Young, *Michael Cunningham's The Hours*, 28.

<sup>135</sup> See Young, *Michael Cunningham's The Hours*, 28.

<sup>136</sup> Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood*, 454.

Another significant feature common to most of Cunningham's fathers is their absence. A typical example of this phenomenon is Ned Glover, who, spending too much time at work, does not provide his son Jonathan with a parental model and with love. The absence of a father is determining also for the relationship between Clarissa Vaughn and her daughter Julia, since Julia has been conceived from artificial examination. Thus she lacks a father, and her mother Clarissa is remorseful she has deprived her daughter of him.

An exemplary father would not be found easily in Cunningham's five novels. Dan Brown, a war veteran and a minor character in *The Hours*, may stand up to this model, though. He takes care of his pregnant wife, is kind to his small son Richie, and does not have any excessive expectations. And he does not cheat, abuse, or molest anyone.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this bachelor thesis was to analyze all the five novels by Michael Cunningham from the perspective of sexuality.

Cunningham's very first novel, *Golden States*, is mainly a coming-of-age story about a twelve-year-old David Stark who is portrayed as a boy in the position of a man. David sets for the journey to bring his older sister back home from her boyfriend, and although he is not successful, this heroic act makes him able to feel more adult and responsible. A journey is a key feature for all coming-of-age characters in the author's fiction, not only for David Stark, since it serves well also for Jonathan Glover and Bobby Morrow in *A Home at the End of the World* or for Billy Stassos in *Flesh and Blood*. A journey away from their homes makes them able to realize their own sexual orientation and values, and consequently to organize their own lives according to what they have learnt.

Coming of age leads to one's awareness of one's own sexuality in all its forms, and in Michael Cunningham's novels there are characters who have realized they are homosexuals. Although the majority of them, such as Jonathan Glover, his lover Eric, Richard Brown, Will Stassos or his nephew Ben, are gays, there are also a few lesbians – Clarissa Vaughn, her spouse Sally or Laura Brown. Their lives, as portrayed in the novels, represent both grief and happiness. While most of them do not have much trouble accepting their own sexuality, there are also some, such as Laura or Ben, who try to suppress it and this ruins their lives. In contrast to that, a common problem homosexuals in Cunningham's fiction have to face is a lack of understanding from their families, especially from fathers. Besides this, their happiness is also hampered by AIDS, and tragic moments such as inevitability of death contribute to the verisimilitude of the novels. If compared to heterosexual relationships, as they are depicted in the five novels, it can be said that homosexual orientation does not determine, whether a couple is satisfied or not.

A feature common to all heterosexual relationships in Michael Cunningham's novels is that they are predestined to fail, since they suffer from a lack of love, from disrespect, infidelity, or an incomprehensible run for money. In fact, there is no marriage or heterosexual relationship that would be successful, with the only exception of Alice and her new partner, which is, however, mentioned only in a few words. The least satisfied family are the Stassos in *Flesh and Blood*, featuring an aggressive father, who beats his son and abuses his daughter, a displeased mother who tries not to see her daughter being abused, cheating, lack of love, quarreling, and a divorce. As far as families are concerned,

in *A Home at the End of the World*, there is an attempt to form a new type of family, when Jonathan, Bobby and Clare move to the countryside to raise their child there. However, even this desire for happiness fails, because Clare realizes it is not possible to live in a relationship of three, where no one wants to be the odd one. Thus she takes her daughter and leaves, thinking it would be better to have no father, rather than two.

In the context of the five novels, Clare definitely cannot be perceived as a typical mother, since the most common pattern of motherhood in Cunningham's fiction is a mother who brings up her children on her own, either because she was left by her husband, or that he works all days long.

As it has been already indicated, fathers are depicted without any idealism. They are absent, molest their children and cheat on their wives. Although there can be found some exceptions, motherhood and fatherhood, as they exist in Cunningham's works, are not idealistic, instead they reflect the everyday reality, which is also true for the other elements of sexuality that have been analyzed. In this way sexuality is a fundamental aspect of Michael Cunningham's fiction, since it makes virtually all readers able to relate themselves to the issues depicted in the novels. Besides that, Cunningham does not limit himself only to homosexuality; rather he addresses sexuality in all its forms, thus going beyond the borders of gay literature in the narrow sense of the term.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Adato, Allison, and Liza Hamm. "Man of the Hours." *People*, February 10, 2003.
- Bahr, David. "Interview with Michael Cunningham." *The Advocate*, June, 2005.
- Burda, Ivan. "From Books to the Silver Screen: Transformation of Michael Cunningham's Fiction." *American and British Studies Annual* 1 (2008): 149-55.
- Canning, Richard, ed. *Hear Us Out: Conversations with Gay Novelists*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Childs, Peter, and Roger Fowler. *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Coffey, Michael. "Michael Cunningham: New Family Outings." *Publishers Weekly*, November 2, 1998.
- "Coming Out Stories," *GLBTQ*.  
[http://www.glbtc.com/literature/coming\\_out.html](http://www.glbtc.com/literature/coming_out.html) (accessed March 7, 2009).
- Cunningham, Michael. *A Home at the End of the World*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990.
- Cunningham, Michael. *Flesh and Blood*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.
- Cunningham, Michael. *Golden States*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1984.
- Cunningham, Michael. *Specimen Days*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.
- Cunningham, Michael. *The Hours*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998.
- Gambone, Philip. *Something Inside: Conversations with Gay Fiction Writers*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "A Poet as Guest at a Party of Misfits." *The New York Times*, June 14, 2005.
- Kirschling, Gregory. "Julia, Nicole, Julianne, And... Michael Cunningham?" *Entertainment Weekly*, June 17, 2005.
- Pela, Robert L. "Pulitzer Surprise." *The Advocate*, May 25, 1999.
- Trušník, Roman. "A Drag Queen in Your Living Room: Michael Cunningham's Revision of Assimilative Gay Fiction." *American and British Studies Annual* 1 (2008): 97-103.
- Woodhouse, Reed. *Unlimited Embrace: A Canon of Gay Fiction, 1945-1995*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.
- "Woolf, Virginia," *GLBTQ*.  
[http://www.glbtc.com/literature/woolf\\_v,2.html](http://www.glbtc.com/literature/woolf_v,2.html) (accessed March 7, 2009).
- Woolf, Virginia. *Moments of Being*. Boston: Harvest Books, 1985.

Young, Tory. *Michael Cunningham's The Hours: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Continuum, 2003.