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A Queer Eye on the Straight Classroom

Norm-Critical Pedagogy on the basis of Cunningham's *The Hours*

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Abstract

Examensarbete inom lärarutbildningen

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Sammanfattning:

The aim of this study is to illustrate and problematise how the heteronorm is Othering queer people and how norm-critical pedagogy, in this case based on literary analysis of Cunningham's novel *The Hours*, can be used to counter-act homophobic tendencies in school. The study is conducted from a queer-theoretical perspective, largely through discourse analysis. The study focuses on heteronormativity, gender performativity, tolerance pedagogy, identity and providing alternate life-narratives to the heteronorm, all based on our analysis of *The Hours*. The study then provides a set of suggested didactic tools for working with norm-critical pedagogy in the subject of English as a secondary language. Norm-critical pedagogy, it is suggested, is a crucial tool in order to meet the demands of the fundamental values of the Swedish curriculum, which states that no one should be subjected to discrimination due to their sexual orientation or otherwise, and that the task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals.

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1 Introduction

As public institutions where children and young adults spend the majority of their days, schools play an essential role in the social development of pupils. It is impossible to ignore the responsibility and influence that teachers and other school staff have in the development of pupils. In this context, schools are also a contributing factor in the shaping of pupils' sexual identities. Sexuality is, for better or worse, to a large extent created at school. How teachers approach sexuality and different sexualities is therefore an important aspect of the teaching profession. Not only do educational institutions play a part in shaping the sexual identities of pupils and students; they also contribute to the ideologies and ideals of the children and young adults being educated. As such, teachers and other school staff have a great amount of power when it comes to changing social structures and societal norms.

As teachers of English at upper secondary level, we have experienced a certain level of discomfort from our colleagues when it comes to discussing sexuality with pupils in class. The belief that it is difficult to broach the subject of pupils who may not conform to the expected norms as far as sexual identity goes has, in our experience, led to an approach where sexuality is oftentimes not discussed by teachers at all. This experience has further been confirmed in both David Lifmark's book *Emotioner och värdegrundsarbete* (2010, *Emotions and Work with Fundamental Values*) as well as Janne Bromseth's and Frida Darj's anthology *Normkritisk Pedagogik* (2010, *Norm-critical Pedagogy*) where the authors describe teachers' discomfort with working with issues regarding their pupils' sexuality and their inability to criticise existing norms in the classroom.

In order to tackle this situation we intend to work out a set of tools for working with sexuality and sexual identities within the framework of English as a foreign language with the help of fictional texts. The text chosen for our study is Michael Cunningham's 1998 novel *The Hours*[1], as it to a large extent focuses on the themes of sexuality and identity. *The Hours* also paints a tender portrait, far from the monolithic view of LGBT[2] people as merely victims, of the many relationships people have, regardless of their sexuality and thus enables us to provide the vivid queer role models lacking in most heteronormative school material. A discourse analysis of the novel conducted on the basis of queer theory provides clear examples of how the book can be used to illustrate sexualities 'differing' from the norm. This

1 Cunningham, Michael (1999). *The Hours*. London: Fourth Estate.

2 LGBT is the common acronym for Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual and Transsexuals. The term sometimes also includes a Q for Queer, a term which includes most sexualities outside the heterosexual norm.

work can then aid teachers in their work with pupil's sexuality from a norm critical perspective.

By analysing *The Hours* from a queer theoretical point of view, we intend to show how, in part:

- The heteronorm is Othering[3] those who fall outside its structure
- Norm-critical pedagogy challenges the heteronorm and its Othering structure and can be conducted on the grounds of literary analysis
- Work with literature in the English subject can provide a good ground for discussion on matters of sexuality and sexual identity in class

[3] To Other, or Othering, is a term which comes from post-colonial theory, in which the subject views the object as something "Other", a stranger which can never be fully part of the same structure as the subject.

1.1 Background

The Swedish school has a relatively long history of working with issues regarding equality and preventive work against offensive behaviour. Despite this fact both the research conducted by David Lifmark and Janne Bromseth et al indicates that many teachers currently working in the Swedish schools are at a loss when it comes to how one should actually work with issues regarding sexual awareness. The teachers interviewed by Lifmark, for example, commented that "it is difficult, because the subject is so emotionally charged" (Lifmark 2010:253) and moreover specifically explained how they could not regard a homosexual life as a possibly successful or happy one (ibid:253), whereas Bromseth points to schools as (re-)enforcing societal norms by assuming their pupils' heterosexuality and in the creation of LGBT persons as the Other (Bromseth 2010:37).

Although the school curriculum clearly states that "the task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby be able to participate in the life of society by giving of their best in responsible freedom" as well as demands that "no one should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment or other degrading treatment" (Skolverket 2011:9), it appears obvious that teachers are not being given the tools to conduct this work.

Lifmark summarises the situation as such:

> On the one hand there has for many years been a ruling idea in the Swedish public sphere, represented by among others school authority, organisations that support lgbt civil rights, most political parties and scientists, a thought that I would like to summarise in two points: (1) The conviction that whom a person loves or has sex with is morally irrelevant, providing that the love or sexuality is voluntary, mutual and causes no harm. (2) Teachers should partly work in a preventive way, by working to make sure pupils implicate this judgement, party intervene whenever students are injured by harassment or discrimination. On the other hand there is the idea that too many teachers do not regard sexual preference in unity with this public ideal nor do they teach it.
>
> (2010:245, own translation)

One of the main issues at hand is the inability to criticise societal norms as they are expressed and reinforced in the classroom. Lifmark goes on stating that: "For one, the so called heteronormativity is not called into question enough neither in society as a whole nor among teachers, for another there are massive gaps of knowledge in schools due to shortages

in both teacher training as well as the continuous training of teachers" (2010:247). Bromseth et al in particular point out the need for working with a norm-critical pedagogy in order to avoid the risk of simply subjugating those outside the norms as 'the Other', a term used to point out someone as fundamentally different from the subject which embodies the norm and thereby impossible to fully sympathise with/understand. The effect of failing to actively confront homophobic fears and preventively work against discrimination is obvious: in a Swedish study conducted in 2004, it is reported that as much as "seven per cent of pupils expressed a high degree of intolerance towards homosexuals" (Östlund 2006:38). David Bleich, in discussing homophobia in American colleges and his experience as a gay professor, mentions the relation between homophobia and sexism, and describes homophobia as a "common [form] of domination" (Bleich 1998:151) and a popular value. In this context of domination, it is clear why teachers should discuss and confront homophobia in classrooms: in a school where everyone is supposed to be equal, there is no place for homophobic fears and forms of domination.

It seems that in order to meet the task of encouraging "all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals" (Skolverket 2011:9) a norm-critical pedagogy, among other things, is essential, as well as more nuanced LGBT role models that challenge the presumed view of LGBT persons as merely victims. The complete absence of this is something that Bromseth brings up: "the total domination of heteronormativity in subjects like history, English, physical education, etc. becomes something of a contradiction of what is explicitly stated as important equal opportunity goals" (Bromseth 2009:173). This total domination must therefore be counter-acted by means of questioning the heteronorm and by highlighting alternate life paths that fall outside the norm.

Whereas it is the general picture that teachers fail to do this Bromseth does however point out that "in Sweden there are today organisations and individual pedagogues who develop norm-critical and intersectional educational dispositions and method materials in their practice. There is, however, hardly any Swedish research on the topic of norm-critical work regarding sexuality- and gender norms in school and what happens in the classroom when hegemonic narratives are questioned and disrupted" (2010:39, own translation). In other words there is a need for further insight to the topic of norm-critical education regarding pupils' sexual identity as well as a need for well-balanced role models and nuanced relationships in the material teachers use in class.

In this essay we attempt to meet this challenge by providing both norm-critical tools as well as alternate life narratives on the basis of our analysis of *The Hours*.

1.2 Purpose and Aim

The purpose of this essay is to provide a set of tools for working with sexuality and sexual identity, through norm-critical pedagogy, in the subject of English, based in Cunningham's novel *The Hours*.

The aim is to illustrate how the heteronorm is Othering queer people and how norm-critical pedagogy, in this case based on literary analysis, can be used to counter-act homophobic tendencies.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

- Which themes in *The Hours* are suitable for norm-critical pedagogy?
- Which didactic tools can be produced from an analysis of *The Hours*

1.3 Theory

1.3.1 Introduction

In order to be able to work with queer theory, the term ‘queer’ must first be defined and discussed. As the purpose of this essay is to provide tools for working with sexuality with the help of norm-critical pedagogy within the classroom, certain ideas about sexuality and identity as well as the existence of heteronormativity and queerness within educational institutions need discussion and analysis. In order to be able to discuss heteronormativity and queerness in the classroom, the heteronormative tendencies existing within educational institutions must not be forgotten. Certain self-reflectiveness is required when attempting to achieve a classroom climate where society’s heteronormativity can be critically discussed. In analysing the Othering of certain sexualities, the relationship between sexuality and identity needs discussion as well. In this chapter, we present a few theories relating to heteronormativity and queerness in educational institutions, and sexuality and identity, as well as define the term ‘queer’.

1.3.2 Defining Queer

In the broadest sense of the term, something that is *queer* may be defined as anything which in a chosen society does not conform to the general ideas of that which is ‘good’ or regarded as ‘normal’ [i]sexuality. A queer sexuality, therefore, does not necessarily have to be identical with trans-, bi- or homosexuality, despite the word *queer* often being used to describe one or all three of the mentioned groups. It is entirely possible for forms of heterosexuality to be described as queer sexualities. Rachel Loewen Walker (2004) describes queer as a group as “[including] those persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and/or two-spirited, as well as those who feel themselves to be outside of any societal definitions of gender/sexuality” (Walker 2004:2). A queer perspective allows for critical analyses and interpretations and may, as such, be very useful within the context of discussing sexualities and norms in the classroom.

In Gayle Rubin’s (1993) circle-model showing the hierarchical system of sexual value that she describes as existing in modern Western societies, monogamous, reproductive sex is at the very centre of desirable sexuality. Other sexual acts have a lesser value; however, heterosexuality in every form ranks higher than homosexuality:

> Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top of the erotic pyramid. Clamouring below are unmarried monogamous heterosexuals in couples, followed by most other heterosexuals. Solitary sex floats ambiguously. […] Stable, long-term lesbian and gay male couples are verging on respectability, but bar dykes and promiscuous gay men are hovering just above the groups at the very bottom of the pyramid. The most despised sexual castes currently include transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models, and the lowliest of all, those whose eroticism transgresses generational boundaries.
>
> (Rubin 1993:11-12)

Rubin discusses the rewards of a 'desired' sexual behaviour in the modern Western society at large, and mentions legality, respectability, social and physical mobility and institutional support as some of the benefits of living as a heterosexual individual practicing monogamous, procreative sex. It is clear that despite legislation criminalising discrimination based on sexuality or sexual identity, only certain heterosexual individuals are truly accepted in society.

1.3.3 Queerness and Heteronormativity in Educational Institutions

The discrimination that practitioners of 'undesired' sex face is not to be underestimated: Rubin compares the hierarchies of sexual value to religious chauvinism, racism and ethnocentrism. As such, the role of educational institutions and teachers as role models and influences on the ideas and ideals of pupils cannot be stressed enough.

It may very well be assumed that very few of the world's sexually active individuals actually practise sex that fits the description of desirable sexual acts. As such, it may also be assumed that very few pupils in a classroom will fit the description or identify with the sexual identity that ranks at the top of the caste system. In such a situation, it may be possible to move away from the Othering of homosexual individuals, as a large amount of the pupils may be considered as the Other in terms of their sexuality or sexual practices.

The danger of "strategies that focuses on the Other is that they often do not visualise or problematize the norm that creates the oppression of the Other" (Bromseth 2010:37, own translation). Thereby, by placing queer people as fundamentally different from the heterosexual norm they are simple made into something that should be tolerated as deviants from the norm, without exposing the oppressive forces of the norm. They become, in effect, powerless victims to the oppressive forces of the norms who simply require our protection

and empathy. Furthermore, Bromseth claims, "'the Others' are stereotyped by a one-sided group-representation where the differences that exist within the group are made invisible" (2010:37, own translation). Not only are the Others, in this context embodied by queer persons, characterised as deviants from the norm, they are also assumed to be a homogenous group of people simply on the basis of their sexuality.

Much of the discussion about sexuality in schools that does exist takes a we/them-perspective, whereby a majority of the student body is assumed to belong to that which is considered the norm. A consequence of this is that the dialogue about individuals not belonging to the presumptive norm becomes one where these persons are described as constituting such a small minority that they may be attributed definitions such as deviant or abnormal, as well as existing only outside the classroom, contributing to a sense of a we/them-dichotomy as well as Othering. In such situations, the discussions of sexuality may lead to pupils (and teachers) consolidating their beliefs that anything outside of the conventional norm is not only uncommon, but also actually strange or even immoral.

A queer perspective in the classroom may contribute to discussions that breach the subject not only of homo- or bisexuality, but of sexuality at large, whereby pupils and teachers alike may become susceptible to the idea that the norms surrounding human sexuality in Swedish society today do not necessarily include every individual subscribing to the definition of 'heterosexual', but that they only truly include a very small portion of sexually active persons. That is, the distinction between 'them', the individuals differing from the norm, and 'us', who comply with it, may be made redundant and in end-effect contribute to a classroom climate where discussion of sexualities becomes an integrated part of education.

It is clear that heteronormativity exists in every part and aspect of society; therefore, it follows that educational institutions to some extent also reproduce heteronormative ideals. In fact, it may be true to claim that schools to some extent function as breeding grounds for not only heteronormativity, but also for homophobia. Smith discusses the situation in education in the United States:

> [G]ay and lesbian/feminist activism has made significant inroads since the late 1960s, both in the public sphere and upon the awareness of individuals. These movements have served a highly educational function, but they have not had nearly enough impact upon the educational system itself. Curriculum that focuses in a positive way upon issues of sexual identity, sexuality and sexism is still rare […] Yet schools are virtual cauldrons of homophobic sentiment, as witnessed by everything from the graffiti in the bathrooms and the put-downs yelled on the playground, to the heterosexist bias of most texts and the firing of teachers on no

other base than that they are not heterosexual.

(Smith 1993:101)

Although the situation in Sweden differs from that in the United States, it may be useful to reflect on the connection or relationship between heteronormative institutions and homophobia. Homophobic ideas or opinions stem from a heteronormative society; that is, without the framework of a norm discrimination or discriminating ideas cannot exist, nor is the creation of the Other without such a framework possible.

Fanny Ambjörnsson (2004) provides a clear example of how educational institutions in Sweden sustain or even enforce heteronormativity in her doctoral thesis "I en klass för sig" ("In a Class of Their Own") Ambjörnsson describes how an openly lesbian pupil at a secondary school is welcomed into her classmates' heteronormative fellowship once she dresses similarly to all other girls at the school. Upon choosing clothes that are interpreted as more 'feminine' than those that she has previously worn, the pupil is described as less obviously lesbian by her classmates. The pupil's sexuality as such was not the issue; rather, it was the assumed expression of that sexuality through gendered clothing. In this example, the heteronormative order is enforced not through hands-on discrimination of homo- or bisexuality, but through assumptions about the expressions of those sexual identities.

In fact, the normative ideal of heterosexuality seems to penetrate even research concerned with gender structure. Adrienne Rich (1993) discusses lesbianism in an academic feminist context, demonstrating, through an analysis of self-proclaimed feminist books, that homosexuality is marginalised in every aspect of society, including feminist academia:

> In none of [the books] is the question ever raised as to whether, in a different context or other things being equal, women would *choose* heterosexual coupling or marriage; heterosexuality is presumed the 'sexual preference' of 'most women', either implicitly or explicitly. In none of these books, which concern themselves with mothering, sex roles, relationships, and societal prescriptions for women, is compulsory heterosexuality ever examined as an institution powerfully affecting all these, or the idea of "preference" or "innate orientation" even indirectly questioned.
>
> (Rich 1993:229)

It is not so strange then that the heteronormative ideals are omnipresent in school as they are fully embraced even by the academic viewpoint. In a queer classroom, therefore, it is not only the heteronormative tendencies of educational institutions that are to be scrutinised; the multitude of differing homo- and bisexual identities and experiences also need to be highlighted as means to a successful life. It also follows that this investigation must examine

the ideal of monogamy and reproductive sexuality as well as the treatment of other sex acts that may be considered as 'undesirable'. Within this framework, the preconceptions about bi- and homosexual individuals (as well as those about other 'undesired' sexualities) may be deconstructed.

1.3.4 Sexuality and Identity

One part of the Othering of homosexual individuals is the assumption that their sexuality forms a greater part of their identity than it does in the case of heterosexual (or even bisexual) individuals. It is not uncommon to describe a homosexual person in terms of their sexuality; the same is not, however, frequent in the case of heterosexual individuals. Bromseth points out that for many "Homosexuality becomes a question of a complete identity package, where same-sex relations and a homo-/bisexual identity are presented as inseparable" (2009:162).

This does not only lead to the Othering of homosexual persons, but also implies that sexuality is less of an identity-carrying trait in heterosexual individuals. For as Bromseth points out: "homosexual or bisexual people rarely exist without being explicitly enhanced as such" (2009:166). Queer people are thereby usually identified as such whereas the rest are simply assumed as being heterosexual without explicitly pointing it out.

However, despite this, the insistence of someone's heterosexuality is not unusual when contrasted with homosexuality; that is, the mere mention of homosexuality may be seen as a threat to a person's heterosexual identity. Barbara Smith (1993) claims that "people are generally threatened about issues of sexuality, and for some the mere existence of homosexuals calls their sexuality/heterosexuality into question." (Smith 1993:100).

Why is it then that for many homosexuality carries a larger degree of identity than heterosexuality? First of all we would like to point out that we are not saying that homosexuality is more or less of an identity-carrying trait than heterosexuality, although it is often perceived as such: rather, sexuality, just like a myriad of other things, affects someone's identity. This however does not imply that every homosexual individual is the same as the other.

One of the leading voices of queer theory, Judith Butler, has written extensive works on the matters of identity, gender and queer sexualities. In *Gender Trouble* (1999), she asks if identity is static:

> What can be meant by identity, and what grounds the presumptions that identities are self-identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent? More importantly, how do these assumptions inform the discourses on

> ‘gender identity’? It would be wrong to think that the discussion of ‘identity’ ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that “persons” only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognisable standards of gender intelligibility.
>
> (Butler 1999:22)

Butler’s ideas of gender and identity primarily deal with what may be described as identity politics, where she problematizes the assumption that identities exist and that they require representation in politics. Butler claims that the links between identity and gender assume the category of ‘female’ or ‘women’ and that some kind of unity in this category exists. That is, in order to describe this category, it has to be homogenous; ‘woman’ or ‘female’ must be defined in the same terms or the same way by members of the category as well as those trying to represent, describe and interpret it. This, argues Butler, however dismisses or trivialises the experiences of those whose identities complicate this supposed unity in terms of sexuality, ethnicity or class.

Furthermore, the issue of identity in relation with sexuality is one that Butler explores. One main point she makes in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (1997) is that “although compulsory heterosexuality often presumed that there is first a sex that is expressed through a gender and then through sexuality” (1997:312) “there are [in fact] no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality” (1997:309). The implication of this is that sexuality can be understood as preceding any gender identity in order to bring into light the false assumption of people’s taken-for-granted heterosexuality. By placing sexuality at the core of human identity one avoids the trap of presuming its direction based on sex or gender identity. This viewpoint serves useful when conducting norm-critical pedagogy as it shows that it is the norms that we (re)create that defines our attitudes towards sexuality, not our sex or gender.

The context where “alternative sexualities” (as understood as alternative to the taken-for-granted heterosexuality) become deviant are then only in relation to the heterosexual norm. Heterosexuality is pitted, much like man as the opposite of woman, as the opposite of homosexuality, regardless of their inherent similarities. The heterosexual norm, Butler claims, is nothing but a continuous repetition of a performance that the contributors expect they have to maintain though there is, in fact, no original, true or authentic heterosexuality (1997:306f). LGBT-relationships are in turn interpreted (within the heterosexual norm) as failing copies of heterosexuality, an interpretation which Butler denounces as it builds on the presumption of heterosexuality as the origin, an origin which does not exist as heterosexuality is only a

continuously (re)performed activity (ibid:307). The subject of hetero-(or homo)sexuality cannot exist "as prior to rather than the effect of our actions" (Nicholson 1997:263) rather it is only after the action of performing your sexuality that it can be said to exist at all, which denounces the assumption of sexuality determining the actions of the individual.

The performance or heterosexuality as a norm, on the other hand, cannot be said to be voluntary, rather "it is a *compulsory* performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms bring with it ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions" (Butler 1997:309).

How then does sexuality relate to identity? Identity should, of course, not be understood only in the frames of sexuality. Moreover the identity that one's sexuality helps to construct is in itself not clearly distinguished. This, Butler claims, is very important as "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (ibid:301). The significance of the sexual identity should, Butler insists, remain "permanently unclear" (ibid:301) in order to avoid capturing a person's identity in narrow (and potentially dangerous) frames. Sexuality then, at most, can be a contributing force in the building of one's identity but, as pointed out, this identity is never a set structure but rather a continuously shifting and (re)creating process. This, however, does not hinder people from interpreting a person's sexuality as its primary determinative aspect, specifically in the case of LGBT people, which is what Butler tries to avoid by having the significance of a person's sexuality unclear.

Other researchers that discuss homosexuality in regard to identity are Margareta Lindholm and Arne Nilsson (2005) and they mention that

> applying a queer perspective [to the construction of identity] does not only entail a critique of heteronormativity […] but also the emphasising of the contradictive and multifaceted social contexts in which same-sex life is formed and lived. It entails, for instance, the research of conditions for the shaping and evolution of sexual identities, and thereby the contribution to the destabilisation of common preconceptions about sex and sexuality.
>
> (Lindholm and Nilsson 2005:289-290, own translation)

The discussion of sexuality and identity must thus assume that identity is continuously (re)constructed and not static, but rather changes with political and social changes and reforms.

1.4 Method

1.4.1 Choice of Study

As it is the intention of the writers of this essay to be able to provide an analysis which can be used in the context of a norm-critical lesson plan, a text providing both a field in which the heterosexual norms could be questioned, as well as alternate life narratives highlighted, is necessary. The text that we decided on is *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham, mainly because it is a tender portrait of human relationships and thereby a good starting point to discuss relationship in general though specifically within a homo/bisexual context. The novel also provides interesting images of people trapped in the performance of their expected gender roles, a cornerstone of the norm-critical perspective. Moreover, due to the many layers it holds, both in terms of the many layers of the heteronorm, as well as literary meta-layers that provide an interesting read and basis for analysis, *The Hours* prove useful. Because of the multitude of characters provided in the novel it is possible to both criticise the grand narratives of society as well highlight alternate lives as meaningful, which are the main objectives of the norm-critical pedagogy.

One aspect that *The Hours* does miss, however, would be the T in LGBT, as it does not contain any transsexual persons. This is a regrettable fact yet we consider the advantages that the *The Hours* holds in terms of alternate life narratives, a basis for norm-critical analysis and as examples of human relationships outweigh the disadvantage of not including transsexual persons. Yet another disadvantage could be the fact that most of the characters are middle-aged and have long ago come to terms with their sexual identity. This is a disadvantage, as Bromseth shows, because adults generally form the point of reference for queer personalities, suggesting that sexual awareness “comes later, not in youth” (2009:166), distancing queer persons from the pupils in the classroom. Still we know that *The Hours* is a book that is already being used in English education in upper secondary school and that they are thereby not strangers to these characters. As it is our intention to avoid Othering it is important to use material that do not point out the characters as fundamentally different from those found in the classroom. Even though the characters may differ in age and geographical position from the pupils, the inclusion of their inner thoughts, speculations and feelings make them altogether human and thereby identifiable. What we hope to achieve with the use of this book is empathy for the characters as human beings in relationships and the understanding that one’s sexuality is not the full basis for one’s identity.

1.4.2 Choice of Method

When conducting text analysis there are quite a few different angles from which one can proceed. Feminist perspective has for the last century provided us with a watchful eye on the oppressing forces of patriarchy, however one major point that they have missed is how an analysis of patriarchy fails to explain many other forms of oppression such as the heterosexual oppression of LGBT-people. Therefore it has come natural to us to conduct this norm-critical text analysis from a queer perspective on the basis of deconstruction.

Deconstruction in itself, Jacques Derrida[4] claims, is not a method as such, but it does provide a useful framework for analysing discourse. The object of discourse analysis, Ingrid Sahlin claims is "text, meaning and change" (1999:84 own translation) and in this essay we intend to use discourse analysis to show how the meaning we attribute to certain words and concepts influences our interpretations of them. This because "discourses denotes, constructs and constitutes the social reality by giving it meaning, while it is shaped by and expresses aspects of this reality" (Sahlin 1999:85 own translation). A prime example of this type of discourse analysis is Butler's explanation of gender and gender identity in which it is only when we presuppose that we have a gender that we (re)create it. Furthermore, in discourse analysis "you do not read the texts to find out what it is that the author is trying to say, rather you scrutinize them in order to investigate what they imply, make impossible, and implicate respectively" (Sahlin 1999:91 own translation).

This is useful in our analysis as we are not trying to find out what purpose it is that Michael Cunningham might have had in mind when writing his novel, but rather how we can use it in order to visualize norms as well as provide alternate life narratives. Using discourse analysis also provided us with the different themes of our analysis, that is heteronormativity, Othering and alternate life narratives, which in turn lead to the didactic tools that we suggest. These themes arose as we saw them repetitively expressed both in the novel as well as in secondary sources focusing on norm-critical pedagogy.

In sum discourse analysis "entails taking up a critical and interpretive attitude towards the use of language in social settings" (Tonkiss 1998:245) much like deconstruction entails "a theoretical approach that [...] subverts the prejudices and received ideas of rationalist ideologies which are firmly rooted in everyday consciousness" (Zima 2002:30). Both approaches, in other words, question the basis of our knowledge as well as the meanings that

[4]Derrida was the first to conceptualise deconstruction and he claimed that it was more a theoretical framework (Zima 2002: 29)

we take for granted in certain concepts, phrases and words.

Discourse analysis is moreover a qualitative approach in that "the analysis should contribute to an understanding of the prerequisites and origins of the discourse in a specific societal context and/or its consequences through the social constructions of the reality that it creates and upholds" (Sahlin 1999:89). As we are conducting a qualitative analysis on the basis of a chosen text, this approach to the text is useful. Qualitative research, however, runs the risk of not being subject to generalisation but, in a sense, the results of discourse analysis are subject to generalisation as, as Sahlin claims "the results of the analysis are, in comparison to other qualitative methods, relatively open to 'intersubjectivity tests': other can study the same texts in order to investigate if supposed meaning and patterns appears (1999:90 own translation).

As for the validity and reliability of the results we would like to point to Steinar Kvales (1997) wider definition of validity in which he claims that "validity stretches from whether a method actually investigates what it intends to investigate, to 'the reach in which our observations really reflects those phenomena or variables that interests us'" (Kvale 1997:215). Within this wide span it appears to us that the results of a discourse analysis actually analysing discourse and thereby visualizing norm is valid. Still, much like Kvale also points out, due to the constructive view of validity that is inherent in both discourse analysis and deconstruction 'validity' in itself takes on a post-modern meaning and thus becomes relative and open to interpretation (Kvale 1997:217). What this interpretation might actually entail is a question best left to those studying the field of science philosophy[5]. Rather, like Kvale claims, the question of validity "lays with the scientists' *skill*" (Ibid) in arguing their case as well as their ability to stay self-critical (Kvale 1997:218). Hopefully our results are skilfully enough executed to meet the demands of their validity. The same goes for reliability, our result are reliable to the extent that they are constructed on the basis of previously published research and are subject to further examinations.

The obvious advantage of deconstruction is that the context in which the character exists in is not taken for granted, rather it is scrutinized and picked to pieces and leaves in the end the tale of a society that is simply (re)creating its own hollow ideals, showing us once and for all the structures that creates the oppression of those who fall outside its boundaries.

Yet, disadvantages to using deconstruction or discourse analysis could include that it takes on a narrow language-based perspective that fails to acknowledge structures that can be

[5] Of which perhaps Nils Gilje and Harald Grimen's (2007) *Samhällsvetenskapernas förutsättningar*. Göteborg: Diadolos, is a prime example.

found in for example Marxist perspectives in which class decides the possibilities of the individual. Seen from a deconstructionist or discourse analysis perspective, however, it is the meaning that we give to concepts like Marxist structures that (re)creates them and by scrutinizing what the concepts entails we find how it is that the structures come about, meaning that the two are not mutually exclusive. From a philosophical standpoint the situation can be described as that of: “Which came first, the hen or the egg?”

Another risk that one runs, as Sahlin points out, is the danger of not being able to fully see and criticize the structure of which one oneself is part (Sahlin 1999:91-92). She, however, dismisses this objection on the basis that if one is simply self-critical (an idea also supported by Kvale (1997:218) this should not pose any serious problem.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

Although this study does not involve actual participants there are still ethical considerations that need to be made. One main such point is the implication of working from a norm-critical perspective in a classroom with underage pupils. It goes without saying that it is not the intention of the authors to in any way criticise heterosexuality as such, yet for some it could still seem like the case when one criticises the heteronorm. There is no intended political agenda with the intention of making queer seem superior or to portray heterosexuality as a 'bad choice', rather the intention of this paper is to question the structures that create alienation and make out the heterosexual married couple as the only possible way to a happy life.

There is of course a very large responsibility for teachers when they are dealing with the issue of their pupil's sexuality. On the one hand it is important to remain a positive role model and on the other it is important not to, perhaps, get too involved with the pupil's personal life. There is a delicate balance when it comes to these questions but the most important thing to keep in mind is that it is the teacher's responsibility to actively work towards the goal that "no one should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, […], transgender identity or its expression, [or] sexual orientation, […] or other degrading treatment" (Skolverket 2011:9). In order to do so it is essential that the alienating or Othering structures of the hetero-norm are made visible, scrutinised and questioned. As Stefan Nordberg and Joakim Rindå points out in *Bryt! (Break!)* "one has to visualise and question why people are being discriminated, not merely pity them and help them once the deed is done" (2008:8). On this basis it is possible to question the heterosexual norm without questioning heterosexuality or seemingly portray queer as a superior option. It is, however, important that queer is, once and for all, made a visible and liable path of life.

One problem that might appear in this situation, as Thomas Östlund points out in *Tyst i klassen?* (*Quiet in the classroom*? Östlund 2006:13), is that the fundamental values of the school, which includes non-discrimination regardless of circumstances, might clash with the fundamental values of the parents of the pupils. The main thing to do, in this situation Östlund says, is to "conduct a dialogue with the parents and listen to their opinions. But it is also important to be clear when it comes to the school's fundamental values" (2006:13). Although conflict might appear the school's fundamental values must be conveyed and part of this includes questioning heteronormativity and highlighting alternate life narratives.

2. Material

2.1 Summary of *The Hours*

Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* paraphrases Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway* in many ways. For instance, much like *Mrs Dalloway* summarises the entire life of a woman in a single day, so does *The Hours* describe the three parallel lives of Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughan during the course of one day. The reader simultaneously gets to follow a day in Virginia Woolf's life in the 1920's as she begins writing *Mrs Dalloway*, along with her thoughts and speculations on the book and life in general; a day of Laura Brown's life in the 1940's as she panics and escapes her daily chores to a hotel in order to read Mrs Dalloway and realises the possibility of escape through suicide, as well as Clarissa Vaughan's preparations for her party in honour of her dying friend Richard later that day in the 1990's.

All three women explore their own, as well as human relationships in general, in different ways; Virginia does so by speculating over both her own life, as well as the fictional life of Clarissa Dalloway, who "will have had a love: a woman. Or a girl, rather; yes, a girl she knew during her own girlhood; one of those passions that flare up when one is young" (Cunningham 1998:81); Laura by reassessing her marriage after having kissed her friend and neighbour Kitty; Clarissa by meditating over the way her life has turned out after leaving her former lover Richard and meeting her current partner Sally with whom she shares a daughter named Julia. Each character is sympathetically explored as we get to visit their inner thoughts, dreams and fears in the context of their daily lives. Throughout the story we discover how *Mrs Dalloway* connects the three lives as Virginia writes it, Laura reads it and Clarissa is nicknamed from it by her old lover and good friend and poet Richard.

We also discover how the character's relationships are influenced by the norms that they break and the consequences of their actions. Laura, for one, choses to leave her husband and two children after realizing that the life of a housewife means nothing more than death to her. Virginia, on the other hand, takes her own life at the beginning of the novel; an action that we are then led to understand by an exploration of her schizophrenia. Clarissa, for her part, lives in a homosexual relationship with a woman named Stella and ultimately loses her friend Richard to suicide at the end of the novel. At this point the reader is also led to understand that Laura is in fact Richard's mother and that her decision to leave her family is what had influenced his poetry throughout life. All in all, the novel explores all kinds of human relationships, between family members, friends and lovers both hetero- bi- and homosexual.

2.2 Analysis

2.2.1 Introduction

“The School is a 'heterofactory'”

(Bromseth quoting Kumashiro 2009:156)

The above quote points to the very core of today’s school situation – an institution which continuously (re)creates, imposes and upholds the heterosexual norms and the heterosexual matrix. Despite efforts to implement work on the subject of equal opportunities and social rights, the school as an institution continues to provide only one narrative: that of the heterosexual reproducing monogamous couple as the only path to a successful and happy life. If pupils are to discover their own uniqueness, other life narratives must be provided and “in order to produce other narratives about society, we need to question master narratives and see what social messages they convey” (Bromseth 2009:174). The first step is, in other words, to question the successful/happy heterosexual relationship as norm. Furthermore this needs to be done from a perspective which does not solely point out unhappy relationships as the consequence of ill-matching personalities, but rather by scrutinizing the consequences of the heterosexual norm.

In this analysis we intend to begin by a close examination of the heteronormative narrative, as expressed within the novel, and by interrupting and questioning it on the basis of our analysis of the characters in *The Hours*. First attention is paid to possible reactions to characters failing their gender performance in order to visualize the norm. Yet another way of visualizing it is by showing how it changes over time. We will then move on to an analysis of how ‘tolerance pedagogy’ leads to Othering and compare it to attitudes that can be found within already Othered characters *The Hours*. Finally we will turn our attention to how one can highlight alternate life narratives and show queer relationships as fundamentally relationships, thus steering away from discussing homosexuality solely in terms of civil rights, something that Bromseth points out happens far too often in school (2009:163).

2.2.2 The Heteronormative Narrative

Few would doubt that society has a way of shaping its inhabitants in more ways than one. Society’s expectations and norms decide what lines of professions are desirable, what hobbies

are acceptable and whom you are allowed to love. Moreover, they decide how you should act in the role that you are given. From the point of birth you are classified as either male or female and should act accordingly, complete with a certain costume and certain possibilities. This is the performance that Butler claims (re)creates our ideas and expectations of gender (Butler 1999:22). While opportunities to step outside the previously very rigid structures have increased, we still hold certain expectations of how people should act in certain situations. If a person fails to perform according to their expected gender role many tend to experience discomfort and some even take this as an excuse to ostracise or punish the person who has stepped out of their assigned role.

In *The Hours* there are a few characters that evoke these feeling in discomfort in us. Virginia, an author suffering from schizophrenia in the 1920's, who at the beginning of the book we find commits suicide, does not quite know how she should act in every day social situations, evoking discomfort with the reader as one worries over the effects of her disease. Similarly Laura, a young housewife in 1949 fails in her performance as a mother, evoking an intended uneasiness that the reader is expected to feel as they read about her troubles. By focusing on our reaction to these women we begin to see the narrowing structures of the norm.

Another way of visualizing the norm is, as mentioned, to point out how it changes over time and place. Clarissa Vaughan, a middle-aged author and mother in the 1990's for example, performs her roles in a largely unproblematic way but falls out of the norm by her choices to have a child on her own and by living in a homosexual relationship. By comparing her possibilities to those of the other characters the relativity of the norm is exposed, which leads to better tools on the matter of questioning the norms.

2.2.2.1 Gender Performativity

In the case of Laura, the reader finds that although she is a mother of a three-year old boy and is expecting another child she proclaims that "she can't always remember how a mother would act" (Cunningham 1999:47) showing that it is not clear to her what it is she must do in her expected role as a mother. As she is alone with the child in their house most of the time, the reader is expected to worry about how she is supposed to care for the child. These passages easily touch our own presumed attitudes of what motherhood means and what attitudes a mother is expected to have. We find that she acts out of term with the expectations of her gender role and more explicitly in her role as a mother and the discomfort that it evokes in us signal our innate knowledge of how a mother should act, our expectations of how one

should perform. This is the performance that, like Butler points out, "is a *compulsory* performance" (1997:309) as we instantly identify anyone who steps out of the expected role. It is furthermore in instances of people stepping outside of their expected role that we can begin to identify the structures that make up the performance.

It is easy enough for a person within the structure to begin to point fingers at the individual who is 'failing her responsibilities' rather than question the framework that is demanding a role that perhaps does not suit her. Often enough it is the individual who stands to answer for her failure to comply to society's demands, not the structure of society itself. The fact that the 'shocking revelation' by the end of the book is that Laura ends up leaving her family only makes our expectations of gender roles clearer. Yet it is by questioning why we feel uncomfortable when we read about Laura's failed attempts at motherhood that we begin to question the structure. The key to identifying the structures narrow demands is to identify our own discomfort with failing gender performativity.

As mentioned, another character that cannot clearly grasp her own role in society (albeit not as a mother) is Virginia, who, in the end, surrenders to the pressure and commits suicide. She frequently worries over her responsibility as the wife of the house and her position as employer of the maid:

> Why is it so difficult dealing with servants? […] Why is it so difficult to be firm and kind with Nelly; to command her respect and her love? Virginia knows just how she should enter the kitchen, how her shoulders should be set, how her voice should be motherly but not familiar, something like that of a governess speaking to a beloved child. *Oh, let's have something more than pears, Nelly, Mr Woolf is in a mood today and I'm afraid pears won't do nearly enough to sweeten his disposition*. It should be so simple.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:87)

Although her role is perhaps even more distant to the contemporary reader than that of the 1950's housewife, her uneasiness with social situations can also aid us in our search for structures that narrow the possibilities of people's lives. It is again a question of failed performance, of not being able to live up to the role that you are expected to bear. What is interesting in this situation is that because she suffers from schizophrenia it becomes very easy for the reader to simply write off her failed performance as a side effect to her disease. Because she deviates from the norm due to her disease, the blame of her inability to cope with society's expectations simply falls on that fact. Again the inability to perform according to expectations falls on some shortcoming on the side of the character. If one pauses, however, and turn introspectively, we can find that it is not necessarily Virginia herself, who simply

wishes not to have to be put in the awkward situation of employer, that is at fault, rather it is the expectation that everyone must act according to their assigned role that it is askew.

We are not suggesting here that all people should act totally according to their own will, that would imply chaos, we are however offering an opportunity to question our own grand narratives and the possibility of whether the choices that we think we have are infinite or infinitely narrow due to the silent agreements within society's norms. Bromseth points out that "in teaching, it is necessary to repeat heteronormative 'truths' in order to make them visible and interrupt them when they occur in the classroom and in textbooks. But it is also necessary to add something new" (2009:178). The first step, in other words, is to identify the structures that we take for granted in order to interrupt them and search for alternate narratives. Nordberg and Rindå point out that "the heteronorm is one of the strongest and most basic norms in our society" (2008:12), this not only because it determines whom one is expected to love but rather because it structures men and women as dichotomies. This dichotomy in turn sets up the structure of the heterosexual dichotomy which does not allow for individuals to desire one another, but only for the expected dichotomy of man/woman to desire their opposites. This because, as Butler points out, gender assumption and the heteronorm are intricately connected as the assumption of a person's gender directs his/her assumed sexuality (Butler 1997:312). The consequences of this has not only been the persecution of LGBT-people but moreover of harsh judgement of people failing their gender performance such as Laura and Virginia in *The Hours*.

2.2.2.2 The Many Layers of the Heteronorm

That the heteronorm is one of the strongest norms in society has already been established, yet one important thing to remember, however, is that society's norms, much like so many other things in life, are not static. Furthermore the norms are not flat; rather they hold many layers and degrees. A person can live up to parts of the norms, such as for example the heterosexual part yet at the same time revolt against another by choosing a partner with whom one has a large age-difference or by having multiple partners at the same time. Rubin's "erotic pyramid" (1993:11) identifies the structure of the heterosexual norms and at the top of this is the married reproductive heterosexual couple.

A change in norms that has happened over the last century is the view we have of the single mother. While perhaps still not an idealised way of achieving parenthood most single mothers (of the western) world no longer experience the ostracism previously connected with having children out of wedlock. It is therefore quite possible for Clarissa (albeit not single in

the literal as she does partner up with Sally after having had Julia) to have a child without a male partner. In doing so they gain a large degree of respectability, though not as much as those who are at the top of the "erotic pyramid" (ibid).

The changes of norms over time gives us clues to their relativity and it is quite useful to identify how they change over time. Clarissa's thoughts on the matter provide us with a clear example of what the norms of motherhood were like not very long ago, and perhaps even more so of how the heterosexual matrix still influences them:

> Even if you've been defiant all your life; if you've raised a daughter as honourably as you knew how, in a house of women (the father no more than a numbered vial, sorry, Julia, no way of finding him) – even with all that, it seems you find yourself standing one day on a Persian rug, full of motherly disapproval and sour, wounded feelings, facing a girl who despises you (she still must, mustn't she?) for depriving her of a father.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:157)

Although Julia has been raised by loving parents in socially and financially good circumstances, Clarissa assumes that she still misses the taken-for-granted father figure that is part of the heteronormative reproductive relationship. Still, Julia is one of the more content characters of the novel and an example of how it has been made entirely possible for a single (or gay) woman to have children outside the heterosexual matrix. This sheds a light on the relativity of the norms and if norms are relative they begin to lose their power as limiting structures.

Yet we must remember that many of us unconsciously (re)create norms in our gender performance. Perhaps more so in school than other places whereby Bromseth point out that: "It is in many ways a paradox [...], that the school space continues to uphold the heterosexual reproducing couple as the singular way to happiness, in a way that also implies excluding and Othering non-heterosexual and transgender bodies" (2009:171). If norms are relative and change over time and according to place we must become better at identifying and questioning them. Once one begins to question the grand narratives the alternatives begin to seem much less limited.

Yet, even if one does manage to live happily outside the norm the many layers of it still continues to influence the performances that we act out. Within the context of *The Hours*, Clarissa lives in New York City with Sally, her long-term partner. Their relationship appears to be monogamous and stable, and does to a large extent fit the heteronormative ideal of the monogamous couple: That is they are two in the relationship, they live together on relatively equal terms and they share a child, the only exception is that Sally and Clarissa are of the

same gender. As such, Clarissa in particular is interesting to investigate, as she functions as a bearer of certain norms. She is an example of how heteronormative ideals penetrate every corner of society – even those where seemingly norm-breaking relationships and individuals exist.

Heteronormativity can be seen as influencing several layers of our identity, whether we largely comply with it or not. The character of Clarissa may be interpreted as expressing heteronormativity, despite her lesbian identity; she is arguably the character most clearly reacting to and (re)producing heteronormative standards. Her self-professed yearning for "the ordinary" (Cunningham 1999:203), which, within the framework of *The Hours*, is understood to be the image of monogamous heterosexuality, can be understood as her (re)producing heteronormative ideals within her own homosexual relationship. Clarissa's own relationship(s) therefore uphold the heteronormative standard by repeating actions that she (and possibly her partner(s)) assumes that she has to perform in order to maintain their own inherent image of a 'successful relationship'.

Clarissa is, as it were, both a victim of heteronormative ideals because of her homosexuality, and also a (re)producer of the same ideals. In Butler's words, "[c]ompulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that 'being' lesbian is always a kind of miming" (Butler 1997:306), which means that although Clarissa's relationship can never be anything but a copy of the 'original heterosexuality', the fact that she is a continuous (re)producer of norms implies that she is both victim and upholder. She is upholding her own worth by abiding to the rules of Rubin's model where "stable, long-term lesbian and gay male couples are verging on respectability" (Rubin 1993:12) and conforms to a large degree to the type of relationship favoured by the heterosexual matrix. In doing so, she is performing more or less what Butler classifies as the (re)creation of norms that are taken for granted, norms which only exist as long as we continue to (re)create them as they do not, in fact, have any point of origin (Butler 1997:306). Other characters are not necessarily uncritical towards this or unaware of it, however:

> [Richard] had a habit of asking about Sally after one of his tirades, as if Sally were some sort of utterly banal safe haven; as if Sally herself […] were harmless and insipid in the way of a house on a quiet street or a good, solid, reliable car. Richard will never neither admit to nor recover from his dislike of her, never; he will never discard his private conviction that Clarissa has, at heart, become a society wife […]
>
> (Cunningham 1999:20)

Despite being in a homosexual relationship, that is, a relationship that deviates from the norm of the heterosexual monogamous couple, she manages to uphold the ideals of this norm without actually existing in it and applies this ideal onto others. Clarissa's (re)creation of the heteronormative concept of the monogamous couple comes into light specifically when she reflects on her daughter's friendship with her college professor Mary: "Clarissa's daughter, this marvellous, intelligent girl, could be some cheerful wife, shepherding her husband through a day of errands. She could be a figure from the fifties, if you made a few relatively minor alterations" (Cunningham 1999:159). It seems impossible for Clarissa to regard her daughter's relationship with her professor in any other light than that as a romantic couple, despite Julia's obvious non-interest in Mary. Despite her own sexual liberation she fails to shed her norm-coloured glasses.

At the same time it is not our intent to say that Clarissa is completely living a heteronormative life within a homosexual framework; to do so would be to join those who claim that homosexual relationships are but failing copies of heterosexual ones. Rather this point is made to illustrate the many layers of the heterosexual norms. It is important to point out, however, that Clarissa and Mary represent two entirely different ideas of lesbian identity and the struggle for liberation from heteronormative oppression. Butler's discussion of specificity and derivativeness in a lesbian context may aid the understanding of these two characters:

> To argue that there might be a *specificity* to lesbian sexuality has seemed a necessary counterpoint to the claim that lesbian sexuality is just heterosexuality once removed, or that it is derived, or that it does not exist. But perhaps the claim of specificity, on the one hand, and the claim of derivativeness or non-existence, on the other, are not as contradictory as they seem. Is it not possible that lesbian sexuality is a process that reinscribes the power domains that it resists, that it is constituted in part from the very heterosexual matrix that it seeks to displace, and that its specificity is to be established, not *outside* or *beyond* that reinscription or reiteration, but in the very modality and effects of that reinscription.
>
> (Butler 1997:303)

Clarissa, thus, does not exist in a relationship that is a copy of a heterosexual one; nor is her sexuality, in Butler's words "heterosexuality once removed" (ibid). Although Mary seems to believe that Clarissa's relationship is derived from the heterosexual matrix and that her own (that is, Mary's) existence and lesbian sexuality is created outside of heteronormative domains, these two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. While the two characters of Clarissa and Mary are set up to be each other's differences and clearly view each other as

opposites, their existences as lesbian women do not, according to Butler, create a dichotomy or cancel each other out. In fact, it seems possible to Butler that the two could co-exist in an attempt to challenge the heteronormative order and power domains that exist by existing within these domains and 'rewriting' the norms that exist within them from the inside.

Mary seems to believe that Clarissa is acting 'heterosexually', trying to be a part of the heterosexual matrix – "[a]nything's better than queers of the old school, dressed to pass, bourgeois to the bone, living like husband and wife." (Cunningham 1999:160) – and that Clarissa therefore is less susceptible to seeing the structures oppressing certain sexual identities. In fact, Mary goes so far as to almost assume Clarissa's detachment from her lesbian identity, despite the fact that she would obviously in the crucial moment fall under the category of 'deviant' :

> Clarissa Vaughan is not the enemy. Clarissa Vaughan is only deluded, neither more nor less than that. She believes that by obeying the rules she can have what men have. She's bought the ticket. It isn't her fault. Still, Mary would like to grab Clarissa's shirtfront and cry out, *You honestly believe that if they come to round up the deviants, they won't stop at your door, don't you? You really are that foolish*.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:160)

Mary's assumption that Clarissa no longer believes herself to be a 'deviant' is interesting in that it trivialises Clarissa's experiences as a lesbian woman; though Mary seems to only criticise the fact that Clarissa's life in many aspects reflects that of the heteronormative ideal, she does, in doing so, partly indicate that the relationship between Clarissa and Sally is only a pseudo-heterosexual one, a (failed) copy of the 'desired' ideal. Clarissa herself is very aware of the implications that she is no longer leading a life that questions these ideals or oppressive norms; however, she indicates that she does not agree with these implications:

> [N]ever mind the fact that she and Sally do not attempt to disguise their love for anyone's sake, or that Sally is a devoted, intelligent woman, a producer of public television, for heaven's sake – how much more hardworking and socially responsible, how much more dramatically underpaid, does she need to be? Never mind the good, flagrantly unprofitable books Clarissa insists on publishing along the pulpier items that pay her way. Never mind her politics, all her work with PWAs.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:20-21)

It is made clear in this quote that Clarissa, despite not working quite as obviously against the norms, does attempt to lead a life that does not comply with them. Clarissa's lifestyle can thus be read in multiple ways: while she does, to a large extent, exist in a relationship which can be

interpreted as following heteronormative norms, and although she to some extent forces heteronormative ideals upon herself as well as other people, Clarissa is not unaware of the criticism this lifestyle gains, nor does she necessarily believe that it deserves such judgement:

> You grow weary of being treated as the enemy simply because you are not young anymore; because you dress unexceptionally. You want to scream at Mary Krull that it doesn't make that much difference; you want her to come inside your head for a few days and feel the worries and sorrows, the nameless fear.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:23)

It is indicated both in the quote above and in others that Clarissa lived a more 'exceptional' life as a young woman. The institutionalised monogamy that she now is a part of did not exist in her dalliances with Richard and Louis in her twenties:

> It was 1965; love spent might simply engender more of the same. It seemed possible, at least. Why not have sex with everybody, as long as you wanted them and they wanted you? So Richard continued with Louis and started up with her as well, and it felt right, simply right. Not that sex and love were uncomplicated. Clarissa's attempts with Louis, for instance, failed utterly. He was not interested in her nor she in him, for all his celebrated beauty. They both loved Richard, they both wanted Richard, and that would have to do as a bond between them.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:96)

Clarissa's life has, it seems, taken a turn from being relatively unorthodox – or at any rate not one that followed any sort of rules set by the heteronormative matrix – to being, with some reservations, part of the norm. It may be interpreted as her having let the gay community at large down (Mary Krull certainly thinks so); she is part of the very structures that view anything other than monogamous, procreative heterosexuality as somewhat perverted or at the very least deviant. Although Clarissa is, as mentioned above, aware of this, she continuously relates intimate relationships to ideas about ownership or belonging. Perhaps she simply falls back into the comfort of the norm of the monogamous couple after her own seemingly exhausting experiences with Richard: "[s]he did not require fidelity of Richard – god forbid! – and she was not in any way extorting property that belonged to Louis." (Cunningham 1999:96). Acting outside the heterosexual norm does after all come with the price of "ostracism, punishment, and violence" (Butler 1997:309) as Butler points out, if not from your immediate surrounding then perhaps from the possible inner conflict that is caused in the clash with the norms that society has expected of you throughout your life.

In sum heteronormativity and its consequential gender performativity continuously (re)create the structures of the society in which we live. It is all part of a performance in

which most of us are unconsciously but actively playing our (taken-for-granted) role. Even when a person steps out of their expected role to some degree, they can, like Clarissa, uphold other layers of the expected norms, thus visualizing the intricate weave of which the norms are made. In other cases a person can fail at their expected role performance and make us aware of norms by paying attention to our own discomfort and explanations to their 'erratic' behaviour. By focusing on these characters and on Clarissa in particular we identify the norms that are creating structures that alienates and Others those individuals that cannot comply to their expected role. In the following chapter we will investigate the consequences of not challenging the norm and the Othering in which it results.

2.2.3 Tolerance Pedagogy and Othering within Othered Groups

One of the foremost aspects of norm-critical pedagogy is, as the same suggests, to criticise the (heterosexual) norms that are present in society. The reason for doing so is, among others, to disrupt the Othering that is caused by placing LGBT-persons as opposites to heterosexual persons. This Othering is part of the unfortunate result of the previous (and to a large extent current) 'tolerance pedagogy' which essentially, despite the best of intentions, is a pedagogy that teaches that LGBT-persons "can be tolerated, but are not encouraged as possible happy lives" (Bromseth 2009:160). By placing LGBT-people as (first of all a unanimous group) to be 'tolerated' one runs the risk of enforcing the very prejudice that one seeks to counteract. In this chapter we will investigate types of Othering within *The Hours* in order to make Othering tendencies more visible and thereby create the possibility of interrupting them.

2.2.3.1 Othering of and within Marginalised Groups

In *The Hours*, it is implied that Richard, and, to some extent, Clarissa, are somewhat disdainful of gay men who express their sexuality in what may be described as a 'stereotypical' fashion, partly because they are hypocritical in the face of their own previous vulnerability: "[y]ou see men like Walter all over Chelsea and the Village, men who insist, at thirty or forty or older, that they have always been chipper and confident, powerful of body; that they've never been strange children, never taunted or despised" (Cunningham 1999:17). There is a sense that Richard in particular dislikes these kinds of men because they are 'shallow' and lacking cynicism and wit; however, in reading the descriptions of these men in the novel, it may also be interpreted that they are, in fact, men who are acting in a 'typical gay' manner, that is, acting in a way which is expected of them from the heteronormative

society. As such, they conform to a presupposed image which puts them at the very edge of acceptability in society, as described by Rubin as "promiscuous gay men […] hovering just above the groups at the very bottom of the pyramid" (1993:12), and do, therefore, contribute to the continuing discrimination of individuals existing outside of the monogamous heterosexual matrix. Unlike Clarissa, these characters do not conform to the norm of the monogamous couple; however, their assumed actions or manners do, in a fashion similar to Clarissa's, uphold this norm by being in accordance with a projected image of themselves. While Richard (and Mary) believes Clarissa to attempt a heterosexual life, he assumes that Walter (and Walter's peers) is leading a stereotypical gay life.

This assumed 'stereotypical' life which Walter leads may be interpreted as contributing not only to the discrimination or marginalisation of homosexual individuals in society; it may also, as a consequence, widen the gap between those existing within the heterosexual matrix and those existing outside of it. As such, those on the outside may never become a part of the wider society and may, in the best of situations, only become bodies to be tolerated, not included. Bromseth (2009) discusses the problems with such a tolerance within the framework of education: "[i]n spite of teachers' often good intentions to encourage tolerance towards lgbt-people, the strategies based on a discourse of tolerance constitute queer bodies as distant, pitiful and problematic, and non-heteronormative lives as having no future." (Bromseth 2009:172). These distant bodies can only be tolerated or accepted, but never truly included, in a society where heteronormative ideals govern the reflections on and assumptions about sexualities, relationships and identities. Tolerance does not only indicate tolerance of that which is outside the system, that is, the Other, but moreover also to a degree tolerates the intolerance within the system as it does not criticise the Othering which the system in its structures creates. The Othering then creates a framework in which the Other cannot fully be understood and sympathised with, only pitied. This victimises LGBT-persons in a dual sense, partly as the victims of homophobic hate-crimes and partly as the necessary sacrifice the heterosexual norm must push out in order to create the illusion of its supremacy.

Within the novel, the idea that 'tortured' homosexual children and young adults have grown up to become copies of those who taunted them early in life – that is, that the object has become the subject – is a point made several times by Richard: "if Richard were still himself, untouched by illness, [he and Clarissa] could be together now, arguing about Walter Hardy and the quest for eternal youth, about how gay men have taken to imitating the boys who tortured them in high school" (Cunningham 1999:19). Richard's disdain for Walter and similar characters may be interpreted as sometimes sliding over into pity, as though he feels

sorry for those 'less enlightened' than himself: "Richard argues that eternally youthful gay men do more harm to the cause than do men who seduce little boys, and yes, it's true that Walter brings no shadow of adult irony or cynicism, nothing remotely profound, to his interest in fame and fashions, the latest restaurant." (Cunningham 1999:18). Thus, Richard does not only contribute to the Othering of certain gay men, but also in doing so assumes that these men all share the same identity: he does, in a sense, make distinctions between himself and his identity, and other homosexual individuals, but still manages to place Walter and his peers in a category where the assumption is that every member shares an identity. It is thus clear that there are more than *one* single gay identity, even within the framework of *The Hours*; although Richard seems to ignore the differences that exist between Walter and other characters that Richard assumes shares the same identity, he clearly believes his own way of being homosexual, that is, his own identity as a gay man, deviates from that of Walter's.

The absence of a conforming homosexual identity has been discussed at length; in "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong'", for instance, Martha Vicinus mentions that "[l]esbian desire is everywhere, even as it may be nowhere. Put it bluntly, we lack any general agreement of what constitutes a lesbian." (Vicinus 1993:433). That there is no broad or general agreement as to what the words *gay* and *lesbian* entail is interesting both in the context of Richard's Othering of other gay men and in the discussion of sexuality as an identity in a wider sense – if there is no one way of being gay, both the Othering of gay men in general and Richard's Othering of Walter and his peers become entirely impossible. Othering assumes one unified identity within the Otherered group, and if that possibility does not exist, Othering as such is made impossible or unrealisable.

Although Richard himself deviates from the heteronormative ideals of the society in which he lives, he (re)produces some of these ideals and projects them onto other homosexual individuals; thereby, he, like Clarissa, is upholding certain oppressing structures. This contradiction – there is no *one* gay identity, yet many gay males are assumed, by Richard, to share the same identity – is also observed by Vicinus, who paraphrases Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick:

> [M]ost of us hold contradictory notions in regard to sexual preference without attempting to revolve them: we recognise a distinct group of homosexual peoples or individuals, and also understand that sexual behaviour is unpredictable, various, and strongly influenced by both same-sex and opposite-sex desires and influences.
>
> (Vicinus 1993:433)

It is possible to interpret Richard's ideals as stemming from his age; that is, as an early baby boomer, he grew up with the American ideals of the 1950s. Although Richard took part in the sexual revolution of the 1960s, it is very possible that he has internalised certain ideals from his childhood. Although his mother left him and his father when Richard was still very young, it would arguably have been very difficult for Richard to shut the ideals of his surroundings out completely. As such, it may be relevant to discuss that Richard lived in a very normative surrounding until his mother left; although clearly unhappy and dissatisfied in her relationship and family life, Richard's mother did seem to be the quintessential woman of her time, doing exactly what was expected of her:

> She makes good coffee carelessly; she takes good care of her husband and child; she lives in this house where no one wants, no one owes, no one suffers. She is pregnant with another child. What does it matter if she is neither glamorous nor a paragon of domestic competence?
>
> (Cunningham 1999:107)

Suppose, then, that Richard to some extent has internalised the ideals which existed during his childhood and in the home in which he grew up; if that is the case, it may be relevant not only to discuss his relationship to his own identity as a gay man, but also how this affects his relationship to other individuals identifying with sexualities other than heterosexuality. In considering the possibility that Richard is struggling with his own sexuality, even as a middle-aged man, it may be important to note that he is suffering from AIDS, adding a dimension to his identity. In internalising some, if not all, of the ideals of his upbringing, Richard must experience an internal conflict between the oppressive attitudes that come with the norms of his childhood and his own sexuality. In addition, Richard's illness seems to be that which finally pushes him to commit suicide: "there are still the hours, aren't there? One and then another, and you get through that one and then, my god, there's another. I'm so sick." (Cunningham 1999:197-198). It is possible to argue that no matter how Richard himself views his illness, and how he relates to it, AIDS has become a symbol of pollution and disease arguably unprecedented, and Richard's attitude(s) to his own identity as gay a man suffering from AIDS must be seen in light of that of society at large, from which he arguably cannot distance himself completely. Steven Seidman (1988) claims that

> AIDS is read as revealing the essence of a promiscuous homosexual desire and proof of its dangerous and subversive nature. The reverse side of demonisation of homosexuality is the purity of heterosexuality and the valorisation of a monogamous, marital sexual ethic.
>
> (Seidman 1988:189)

Essentially, this means that those suffering from AIDS, who experience this presumed 'promiscuous desire', are made out to be representatives for the entire homosexual population, thus implying that even those who are *not* suffering from AIDS are promiscuous and polluted. In effect, this viewpoint assumes heterosexuality as good (that is, unpolluted), meaning that it, too, contributes to the Othering of homosexual individuals. In addition, this view assumes that heterosexual individuals are not susceptible to HIV (and, by extension, AIDS); as heterosexuality is 'good' and 'unpolluted', the possibility of a person identifying as heterosexual being infected with HIV seems to fall out of the discussion. Richard thus constitutes the Other in several ways (as a homosexual man *and* as a homosexual man suffering from AIDS) but at the same time contributes to the Othering of other gay men.

Othering is, as is made clear from above examples, a complicated issue that involves presupposed groups constituting a subject which can Other. Still, as we have seen in the context of *The Hours*, these perceptions of identity are fluent and even those within marginalized groups can Other. Tolerance-centred pedagogy includes the unfortunate consequence of Othering those outside the taken-for-granted norm. Apart from Othering, and thereby creating a greater gap between the subject which tolerates and the object which is to be tolerated, such pedagogy fails to problematize 'tolerance'. Nordberg and Rindå (2008) effectively shed a light on the insensitivity of simply 'tolerating' other people and their choices or life-styles. In asking participants of an exercise to take turns in tolerating aspects of the other person without adding any words of appraisal the participants are left to experience what simple 'tolerance' entails (2008:51). It is not difficult to imagine that simply being tolerated is not in itself a desired goal, as Östlund points out, "the gay pupil in upper secondary school hardly wants to be tolerated. He/she does however want to be respected" (2006:64 own translation). In order to create a classroom in which such respect can be cultivated, alternate life narratives, which challenge the presupposed norm of the successful heterosexual couple, are essential. In the following chapter we will illustrate such narratives on the basis of *The Hours*.

2.2.4 Alternate Life Narratives

One of the main points – if not the main point of *The Hours* is the exploration of non-heterosexual relationships. As described above, these relationships exist both within and outside of the heterosexual matrix; nonetheless, they are all relationships that to some extent

differ from monogamous heterosexual ones. They are, as it were, displayed as clear alternatives to heterosexuality; monogamy; or both. These relationships are not necessarily entirely sexual or romantic in nature, but do to some extent challenge the heteronormative matrix – some display the unhappiness that conforming to heteronormative ideals may entail and some provide alternate relationships. Within the framework of teaching, the novel therefore becomes a valuable tool: Bromseth (2009) mentions that when working with norm critical pedagogy in the classroom, "alternate story lines must be produced" (Bromseth 2009:178).

2.2.4.1 Julia and Mary

Throughout *The Hours*, the majority of relationships described are somewhat sexual or romantic in nature; the characters themselves also seem to, to a large extent, long for the kind of intimacy often found in these kinds of relationships, be they poly-amorous or monogamous. Clarissa Vaughan's daughter Julia, however, displays very little interest in romantic or sexual relationships at all and is portrayed as perfectly content with her status as a young woman without any partner(s). Her friendship with Mary Krull is clearly platonic, despite Mary desiring Julia:

> Mary lingers a moment behind Julia, allowing herself a view of Julia's broad, graceful back, the twin moons of her ass. Mary is almost overwhelmed by desire and by something else, a subtler and more exquisitely painful nerve that branches through her desire. Julia inspires in her an erotic patriotism, as if Julia were the distant country in which Mary was born and from which she has been expelled.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:161)

Julia may be "in thrall to a queer theorist" (Cunningham 1999:23), but she has no interest in Mary as anything other than a non-sexual companion: "Mary hurries after her, hopelessly, in agony (Julia does not love her, not like that, and never will), on her way to buy new boots" (Cunningham 1999:162); this fact, however, almost seems to puzzle her mother. Clarissa reflects on Julia as a sort of homemaker, willingly following Mary's lead: "Clarissa's daughter, this marvellous, intelligent girl, could be some cheerful wife, shepherding her husband through a day of errands. She could be a figure from the fifties, if you made a few relatively minor alterations." (Cunningham 1999:159). Thus even this relationship, this friendship, despite the fact of its many norm-breaking qualities such as them being two women with a considerable age difference, is compared to heteronormative ones and described in similar terms. In fact, that which Clarissa seemingly wants for her daughter may very well be interpreted as the heteronormative ideal; Clarissa's desire for 'the ordinary'

seems to influence her hopes for Julia as well. This is obvious not only when Clarissa reflects on Julia's friendship with Mary, but also in the description of Julia's body:

> Clarissa passes a shop and thinks about buying a dress for Julia, she'd look stunning in that little black one with the Anna Magnani straps, but Julia doesn't wear dresses, she insists on spending her youth, the brief period in which one can wear anything at all, stomping around in men's undershirts and leather lace-ups the size of cinder blocks.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:21)

Clarissa's dislike of Julia's dress sense is arguably partly due to Mary Krull – it is very possible that Clarissa views her daughter's clothing style as a side-effect of her friendship with Mary, and that Julia has, as it were, become an angry queer activist herself. It is possible to interpret this as a way for Clarissa to further distance herself from criticism of heteronormativity and, therefore, her lifestyle; another way to view Clarissa's apparent dislike of Julia's choice is that she views this choice as an extension of Julia's decision to live alone. That is, Clarissa's interpretation of Julia's life as such reflects her heteronormative ideals; here, too, she attempts to project her desires for 'the ordinary' onto her daughter, and therefore views Julia's choices as reactionary. Her 'non-feminine' dress sense simply becomes part of this attempt to distance herself from the very norm that her mother to some extent upholds.

What Clarissa seems to expect from Julia is an expression of gender based on gendered clothing; much like in the aforementioned example from Fanny Ambjörnsson's thesis, it is the idea of someone breaking gender 'rules' in some way – in this case by choosing a particular set of clothing – that seems to disturb the gender order and therefore become a symbol of this hierarchy. Although Julia is in no way indicated to be a lesbian character in the novel, her mother interprets this breaking of the 'rules' as a clear violation of the heteronormative order. Much like Mary Krull seems to disturb this order and is therefore interpreted as being "too despotic in her intellectual and moral intensity" (Cunningham 1999:23) by Clarissa, has her daughter only chosen her clothing as a result of being 'enthralled' by Mary.

It may be speculated that Clarissa views Julia (and, by extension, her choice of both clothing and friends) as an 'unreal' woman; that Julia does not (re)produce the gender expectations placed on her by her mother (and society at large) is clearly displayed in Clarissa's attitude towards her daughter. A relevant question to ask may thus be what exactly these gender expectations entail, that is, what Clarissa assumes a woman to be. Monique Wittig (1993) takes Simone de Beauvoir's idea of women being "culturally imagined and not

born" (Wittig 1993:103), and describes lesbians, by extension, as not being women; as heterosexuality works within a two-gender system, lesbians cannot exist as 'women'. This is interesting when discussing the gender expectations Clarissa displays – she promotes a heteronormative idea of the 'woman', but, according to Wittig, would not herself be one. Judith Butler partly discusses the same non-female existence for lesbians: in Fanny Ambjörnsson's (2006) interpretation of the heterosexual matrix, the only positions available for individuals are the categories of 'man' and 'woman', which are opposites both in terms of body and behaviour; these two opposite categories or positions are expected to desire each other (Ambjörnsson 2006:112-113). By extension, this would mean that a woman who desires another woman fails to (re)produce the expected norms and is thereby unsuccessful in her attempt to become or be a woman at all. Despite this, Clarissa apparently struggles for what she describes as 'the ordinary'; something which, as a 'non-woman', would be out of reach for her.

Much like the lesbian pupil in Fanny Ambjörnsson's doctoral thesis (2004) was considered to have chosen her clothing because of her sexuality, Clarissa seems to assume that Julia's gendered clothing – and resulting breaking of 'gender rules' – is a consequence of her friendship with Mary, under whose influence Julia has decided not to, for instance, wear dresses. At no point in *The Hours* does Clarissa assume that Julia herself finds her clothes attractive and chooses them as a result of their appeal to her; it is the fact that Julia is 'enthralled' by Mary which determines her appearance. Julia, it may be said, deviates more from the heteronormative ideals of the society in which she lives than does her mother – at the very least, Julia does not successfully (re)produce the gender norms that are expected of her. Clarissa, on the other hand, "[dresses] unexceptionally" (Cunningham 1999:23) and desires a "relatively ordinary life" (Cunningham 1999:203), and although she occasionally displays an awareness of her conforming to heteronormative ideals, she fails to consider the possibilities of these ideals influencing her view of Julia.

2.2.4.2 Mrs Dalloway, Laura and Kitty

There are several obvious examples of relationships that may serve as the 'alternate story lines' that Bromseth discusses in *The Hours*; one is the plot involving Clarissa, Richard, Sally and Louis described earlier, but many more are to be found. Virginia Woolf's reflection on her heroine in Mrs Dalloway is an additional example:

> Clarissa will have had a love: a woman. Or a girl, rather; yes, a girl she knew during her own girlhood; one of those passions that flare up when one is young –

> when love and ideas seem truly to be one's personal discovery, never before apprehended in quite this way; during that brief period of youth when one feels free to do or say anything; to shock, to strike out; to refuse the future that's been offered and demand another, far grander and stranger, devised and owned wholly by oneself, owing nothing to old Aunt Helena, who sits every night in her accustomed chair and wonders aloud whether Plato and Morris are suitable reading for young women. Clarissa Dalloway, in her first youth, will love another girl, Virginia thinks; Clarissa will believe that a rich, riotous future is opening before her, but eventually (how, exactly, will the change be accomplished?) she will come to her senses, as young women do, and marry a suitable man.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:81-82)

Although *Mrs Dalloway* is not discussed in detail within the framework of *The Hours*, Clarissa Dalloway does, eventually, marry this 'suitable man'. She is not necessarily happy in this union and in reading *Mrs Dalloway* it on occasion becomes clear that she still longs for the feelings she had for Sally Seton, feelings she no longer experiences at all, and whose existence, Mrs Dalloway believes, is dependent on her and Sally's gender: "The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women" (Woolf 1996:38-39). A certain kind of eroticism may be interpreted to exist between Clarissa and Sally in *Mrs Dalloway*; similarly, Laura exhibits evidence of being supremely unhappy in her marriage in *The Hours*. It is interesting to note the wording in the quote above: Mrs Dalloway will 'come to her senses' and marry someone 'suitable' (that is, certainly not Sally Seton) – in no way is it indicated that this future union will be based on love, sexual desire or even mutual respect. In Sally, she finds a person whom she loves; whether she feels the same for her husband is not discussed within the framework of *The Hours*. In Virginia Woolf's reflections on the character of Clarissa Dalloway within *The Hours*, it is clear that Mrs Dalloway is aware of the norms to which she is expected to conform; she knows, quite clearly, that she must uphold the ideals that govern her life – she too, in a sense, must, through the eventual marriage to this 'suitable man' and their subsequent life together (re)produce these heteronormative ideals.

Laura Brown, in her brief dalliance with her neighbour Kitty, displays a kind of desire which does not seem to exist in her relationship with her husband. As such, Laura becomes a useful example both of homoeroticism and of the negative sides of existing within the framework of the norm of the monogamous heterosexual couple. Laura is desperately unhappy in her marriage; she leads the life which is expected of her, but is in every way

unfulfilled and dissatisfied – so much, in fact, that she attempts to take her own life. Though she claims to love her husband, this claim is followed by reservations and traces of doubt: "[w]hy did she marry him? She married him out of love. She married him out of guilt; out of fear of being alone; out of patriotism" (Cunningham 1999:106). There is no sense of eroticism or sexual love in Laura's relationship to her husband; the love she feels rather seems to stem from a sense of duty or need.

The one instance in the novel where Laura displays what seems to be genuine sexual desire occurs during Kitty's visit, initially described as something akin to anxiety – "Laura swallows a pang of excitement and something stronger than excitement, something that resembles panic" (Cunningham 1999:101) – and then, later, as a true yearning for Kitty and her body:

> Kitty snakes her arms around Laura's waist. Laura is flooded with feeling. Here, right here in her arms, are Kitty's fear and courage, Kitty's illness. Here are her breasts. Here is the stout, practical heart that beats beneath; here are the watery lights of her being – deep pink lights, red-gold lights, glittering, unsteady; lights that gather and disperse; here are the depths of Kitty, the heart beneath the heart; the untouchable essence that a man (Ray, of all people!) dreams of, yearns toward, searches for so desperately at night. Here it is, in daylight, in Laura's arms.
>
> (Cunningham 1999: 109-110)

Although the above quote is an attempt from Laura's side to comfort Kitty, it is obvious from the passages before that she experiences a certain amount of romantic or erotic feelings for her; this is also clear in the novel's next moment:

> Kitty lifts her face, and their lips touch. They both know what they are doing. They rest their mouths, each to the other. They touch their lips together, but do not quite kiss.
>
> It is Kitty who pulls away.
>
> "You're sweet," she says.
>
> Laura releases Kitty. She steps back. She has gone too far, they've both gone too far, but it is Kitty who's pulled away first.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:110)

Laura's friendship with Kitty contains certain sexual or erotic elements – at least on Laura's side – as well as elements that may be described as love. This may be contrasted with the relationship between Laura and her husband Dan, where Laura seemingly expresses no sexual desire:

> When she enters the room he will look at her as if he is surprised and happy to see her here, his wife, of all people, about to remove her robe, drape it over the chair, and climb into bed with him. That is his way – boyish surprise; a suave, slightly

> abashed glee; a deep and distracted innocence with sex coiled inside like a spring. She thinks sometimes, can't help thinking, of those cans of peanuts sold in novelty shops, the ones with the paper snakes waiting to pop out when the lids are opened. There will be no reading tonight.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:213)

Whether Laura truly desires Kitty in sexual terms or if she finds her attractive because of what Kitty, according to Laura, represents is certainly debatable. Laura's assumed sexuality may be questioned, no matter if that sexuality is considered to be gay or straight. Laura clearly does not feel any sort of erotic lust towards her husband, despite showing a fondness for him – "This, she reminds herself, is a virtue. It is part of his loveliness (she would never use that word in his presence, but privately she thinks of him as lovely, a lovely man, for she has seen his most private moments […])" (Cunningham 1999:100) – however, whether this lack of desire has to do with him being a man or not is disputable. Similarly, Laura's desire for Kitty may not have anything to do with Kitty's gender but rather with Kitty functioning as a representation of a person who successfully (re)produces gender expectations. Although Kitty is as much an active agent in the kiss as Laura is, she "pulls away first" (Cunningham 1999:110), possibly implying that she is more aware of the societal repercussions a kiss between two women could have than Laura. This is an important point to make, as Laura as a character is relatively socially awkward and finds her role both as a mother and a wife difficult to 'act', as referred to earlier:

> Alone with the child, […] she loses direction. She can't always remember how a mother would act.
>
> (Cunningham 1999:47)

Laura Brown is, in a sense, an unsuccessful performer of heteronormative ideals; Kitty, on her part, can (re)produce heteronormative gender expectations, whereas Laura often feels at a loss as to how she should act. She seems to be intellectually aware of that which is expected of her; however, she oftentimes fails to act in accordance with expectations and ideals. This may, of course, be a contributing factor in Laura's unhappiness; her failing attempts at (re)produce gender expectations cause mental strain and uneasiness.

It may also be noted that the possibility of Laura herself being uncertain of her sexuality exists. In this context, her struggles to act according with gender expectations seem even more prominent; to be uncertain of your sexuality may result in an unstable identity as such and a difficult relationship to sexuality at large. That sexual identities are dependent on dichotomies and their inherent opposites and are present in societies where heteronormativity exists is particularly interesting when considering Laura Brown's difficulty with her own existence.

Fanny Ambjörnsson (2006) describes this co-dependence as such: “It is only possible to know that one is heterosexual when realising what one is *not*. It is therefore possible to claim that the existence of heterosexuality is *dependent* on the existence of homosexuality (just as homosexuality is dependent on heterosexuality).” (Ambjörnsson 2006:67, own translation). In addition, many societal structures are dependent on the same dichotomy and the possibility to categorise people; a person is either man or woman, and possesses the corresponding assumed or expected genitalia, gender behaviour and sexuality (Ambjörnsson 2006: 118). Laura’s possible confusion about her own sexuality would thusly not only affect her own identity and construction thereof, but also the societal order in which she exists. In a wider sense, this would imply that other individuals who were made aware of Laura Brown’s own unstable sexuality might find it difficult or relate to her as the categorisation of her person would be made more complicated than that of individuals successfully (re)producing expected gender norms.

In sum, *The Hours* provides a myriad of characters who challenge, to varying degrees, the grand narratives of society. They are interesting, not only due to their norm-critical qualities, but rather as individuals expressing emotions and thoughts with which one can easily identify. What they create is the sense that people are at the core individuals, and much more than the narrow categories in which they run the risk of being placed.

2.3 Didactic Tools

As we have already pointed out in the analysis, with support from Bromseth et al, the previous tolerance-centred way of conducting pedagogic on the subject of sexuality simply does not suffice if we are to achieve the goals set up in the school syllabus. The heteronorm must be questioned in order to get to the core of the problem: the structures that alienates and causes Othering, rather than only dealing with its consequences.

In order to achieve this we propose a set of didactic tools that teachers could use when working with Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* from a norm-critical perspective.

2.3.1 Question the Norm

The first step in norm-critical pedagogy is always to question the norm and in our analysis we have pointed out people who fail to live up to the expectations of gender performativity, but we have done so in order to identify our own reactions to this. The thing to be identified and questioned is our responses, not the individuals themselves.

By identifying the norm we can begin questioning it. Once we have identified our reactions to Laura and Virginia's social awkwardness, we can begin discussing what the norm is, how we expect people to act and how we react when someone falls outside the norm. This makes us question our own reactions, rather than whatever falls outside the norm.

In their method material *Bryt!* (2008, *Break!*) Norberg and Rindå urges us to remember that "when we speak of heteronorms the conversation easily slip in to a conversation about bi- or homosexuality instead. We won't spot the heteronorm then, it is just there" (2008:13, own translation).

Nordberg and Rindå furthermore suggest that in order to identify and work with the norms one can do activities such as guessing a person's sexuality judging by a picture of them and thereby visualise our own prejudice. Similarly one can work with our own prejudice by erasing the names and gender of different characters in *The Hours* in a pre-reading exercise and then by letting pupils guess whether they are male or female. The conclusions they make then work as grounds for discussion about gender performativity and heteronorms.

2.3.2 Identify the Changes over Time

Norms change over time and depending on place. It is important to realise this in order to question the norms which one is part of (re)producing and (re)production. In *The Hours* the norms, and thereby the opportunities, differ between the three ages in which the story is set. Identifying changes of the norm over time visualises its relativity.

In another method material called *Tyst i klassen?* (2006, *Quiet in the Classroom?*) Östlund suggests that the norm-critical perspective can be a part of all subjects in school and that in History, for example, one can compare the view of family, homo- and heterosexuality over the last century. Furthermore the participants are asked to consider what the contributing forces to this view were and how the heteronorm has changed (Östlund 2006:69). Similarly, one can create an exercise of comparing the possibilities of the characters in *The Hours*, as well as how the heteronorm has changed over the (near) century in which the novel takes place. This will both visualise the heteronorm and, moreover, make its relativity apparent. A following discussion on how norms change and what their contributing forces are would be useful.

2.3.3 Challenging Prejudice and Tolerance-Centred Pedagogy

Of course, simply identifying and questioning norms will not be sufficient in order to create change or to challenge the prejudice which norm entails. In order to challenge prejudice and Othering we must first identify what they are without qualifying them as valid, perhaps by turning people's prejudice against themselves in a close examination of heterosexuality (rather than homo- or bisexuality). It is useful, as Nordberg and Rindå suggests, to turn the table and "focus on the norms that result in some people being viewed as deviant while others are regarded as normal" (2008:8). What one achieves in doing so is not only seeing the structures, but also how differently they distribute power. Prejudice is ultimately about who has the power to say what about whom and by questioning the base of this power the prejudice loses its legitimacy.

As mentioned earlier, one method that Nordberg and Rindå suggest is an exercise in which the participants are asked to tolerate each other, for example while role-playing as someone else (2008:58f). In the context of *The Hours*, the roles can be assigned from characters in the novel. Participants can then take turns and tolerate their respective choices, from everything

from Julia's choice of clothing to Laura's decision to leave her family. If the participants are familiar with each other, one can take the exercise a step further and allow them to tolerate each other as the persons they are, from everything they choose to wear to their hobbies and interests. A discussion about how it feels to be tolerated and what that implies in terms of power over others should follow this exercise.

As a contrast to tolerance-centred pedagogy one can read out the fundamental values listed in the syllabus and lead a discussion of how one can interpret those demands.

2.3.4 Identity

Much of our analysis has been about the importance of identity and what is implied by identity-carrying factors such as gender and sexuality. It is our belief that homosexuality is no more an identity-carrying factor of a person's complete identity than heterosexuality is, but that it is regarded as such by society at large. In order to challenge this prejudice, exercises that focus on identity both in terms of gender and sexuality within the norms are useful.

In the context of *The Hours* it could be useful to discuss the characters in terms of the many layers of the heteronorm as our analysis shows that the characters tend to comply to them in varying degrees. This is useful because it help create a basis of what the norm is by which one can later discuss whether anyone ever fully complies to it or not. Other aspects such as gendered clothing are useful in the discussion of identity versus gender performativity. Nordeberg and Rindå provide us with examples such as trying to guess a person's sexuality from a picture (2008:17-30) as well as discussing gender roles from both political propaganda (2008:36-37) and commercials old and new (2008:39-41). Altogether the point of this exercise is to illustrate the myriad of factors that contribute in shaping a person's identity and how it is norms that categorise them, rather than perhaps the individuals themselves.

Again, following discussions on identity one can lead a discussion about the task of "encourag[ing] all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals" (Skolverket 2011:9) and the possibilities of achieving this within heteronormativity. Such a discussion may also contribute to pupils' fundamental understanding of heteronormativity, where not only sexuality but also on monogamy, reproductive sex etcetera may discussed.

2.3.5 Relationships, Sexual and Platonic

Several authors such as Bromseth (2009:163) point out the lack of representation of same-sex relationships, rather than discussions about civil rights, within teaching material. *The Hours* is, in itself, quite useful in challenging this, Yet, rather than only focusing on heterosexual or homosexual love interest we would like to propose that one tries to view people as primarily in relationships. Relationships can constitute a myriad of feelings and attitudes and can take on many different shapes.

In *The Hours*, the characters and their interplay are hugely influenced by their relationships. One can start by mapping out the different kinds of relationships the characters have and how it seems to influence them and their lives. Additionally, one can then move on to listing the meaningful relationships in one's own life. The discussion that then follows is: what is it about the people in your relationships that is important? This also provides a good foundation for discussions about what characteristics one would expect from friends, parents, lovers et cetera, as well as a discussion about gender performativity.

2.3.6 What Constitutes a Successful Life?

Following a number of classes focusing on book discussions from the perspectives and exercises that we have listed above, it could be useful to ask pupils to write a thematic essay. The theme of the essay that we suggest is, 'What constitutes a successful (alternatively happy) life?' The pupils will then be asked to reason about the question with support from the characters in *The Hours*, in relation to the fundamental values of the Swedish school, and on the basis of previous class discussions. Linguistically the essay will be judged on the pupil's ability to structure their written production as well as draw support from outside sources in their arguments.

2.3.6 Practical Considerations and Implications

As perhaps is clear by the suggestions above, the allotted time for conducting these exercises must be considerable. Before beginning to work with the novel (and norm-critical pedagogy) it is necessary to conduct a pre-reading exercise in order to prepare the pupils for the work

that is to be done. The pupils will then be allotted time for reading the novel but we suggest discussing the book throughout the process of reading it. It can also be useful to provide the pupils with study questions in order to aid their reading comprehension. The different exercises can then be conducted throughout the process of reading the novel and we suggest that one asks the pupils to read a number of chapters before each exercise. As suggested the study of the novel can be concluded in a written production but it does not necessarily have to be on the topic above. These exercises will allow for working both from a norm-critical perspective but will also allow for a multitude of exercises in the study of English.

2.4 Discussion

In this essay, we have analysed and discussed a number of themes in *The Hours* which may be used within the framework of norm-critical pedagogy: primarily, we have looked at Othering of and within certain groups of people (in this case, queer individuals); sexuality and identity; and life narratives within the novel that may be described as 'alternate'. *The Hours* thus contains a number of themes that may both be analysed on a queer-theoretical basis as well as in a norm-critical context.

In our analysis of *The Hours*, we have pointed to examples of Othering not only *of* homosexual individuals from (assumed) heterosexual individuals – that is, Othering of an assumed minority by an assumed majority – but also *within* Othered groups. Richard's Othering of Walter illustrates this clearly: Richard is, by all means, a marginalised person, but all the same contributes to the Othering of other members of 'his' marginalised group. He is therefore a useful example for the classroom; Richard illustrates Othering and the myriad of ways it can be applied to individuals. Thus, he also illustrates a certain kind of privilege, albeit not a heterosexual one. The Othering of someone assumes that you have the privilege to Other them – that is, the Othered must be less desired than the Othering party. In a norm-critical classroom, pupils and teachers alike must be aware or made aware of the numerous forms not only Othering can take, but also the extent to which norms penetrate the existence, thoughts and beliefs of individuals, even those who may be considered to deviate from the norm. In this context, the presentation of Richard in *The Hours* becomes a useful tool.

Although the characterisation of Richard in *The Hours* to a large extent focuses on Othering, it may also be used to discuss norms and their influence on individuals' lives. In this essay, we have attempted to display that the heteronorm impacts the existence of everyone existing in a society where the heteronorm still decides the hierarchy of sexualities and the expressions thereof. A perhaps more obvious example of this than Richard in *The Hours* is the description of Clarissa Vaughan; her projection of the heteronorm onto both herself and her relationships with other characters as well as onto others and their relationships makes her a useful case to study in the classroom. In challenging the norms that penetrate a society (and therefore exists within the four walls of a school), individuals must first become aware of the existence of these norms within themselves. In discussing Clarissa's (re)producing of norms, despite her deviating from the heteronorm, it may be possible to interrupt the (re)production of such norms within the classroom as well. While becoming aware of Clarissa's inability to exist outside of the heteronorm, pupils may be able to shed

light on their own possible (re)production of the very same norm(s).

In providing life narratives alternate to those displayed by the heteronorm, the possibility to discuss lives differing from this norm as something other than 'unsuccessful' or 'deviant', thus giving pupils the opportunity to reflect on their own lives and identities. The examples provided do not necessarily have to be examples of happy lives, however; in our analysis of *The Hours*, we have, for instance, discussed the life (or lives) of Laura Brown, who may be described as a primarily unhappy and dissatisfied character. This is useful in that her unhappiness seems to stem from her inability to (re)produce expected gender norms, as well as her marriage, which to a large extent follows the heteronorm. As such, Laura as a character may be used to illustrate the existence of individuals living within the heteronorm but who are not necessarily at their happiest living within this norm. The fact that Laura leaves her family may too be touched upon, and the factors leading up to her leaving. This may provide pupils with examples of the extent to which norms influence and affect lives, sometimes to particularly devastating effects. Similarly, the life of Clarissa Dalloway (within the context of *The Hours*) may be used to illustrate the effects of conforming to ideals when not particularly wanting to.

Within the context of *The Hours*, Julia is, as opposed to Laura Brown and Clarissa Dalloway, a character who generally appears to be at peace with her life and existence, despite her to some extent living outside of the heteronorm. The fact that Julia is single and seemingly uninterested in living according to the norms and ideals that her mother to some extent inhabits may be contrasted with the lives of Clarissa Dalloway and Laura Brown, and is therefore useful when attempting to illustrate happy alternate life narratives.

When discussing sexualities and sexual identities with pupils, doing so on the basis of a novel or other fictional text may be useful as such texts may illustrate non-heteronormative lives and sexualities without the pressure of having to use examples from within the classroom. *The Hours* contains a number of characters, relationships and situations that would be useful in this context; the novel does, however, require a certain amount of analysis from teacher(s) and pupils alike as well as some pre-reading understanding of queer theory as well as norm-critical pedagogy. Such an understanding may then shed extra light on the novel's plot, characters and relationships and aid pupils when attempting to read *The Hours* with norm-critical glasses.

We have previously discussed the ideas gathered under the umbrella term 'tolerance pedagogy', where the primary goal when discussing differencing factors between pupils (such as sexuality, race, class, gender, religious beliefs etcetera) in the classroom is that pupils on a

fundamental level at the very least tolerate each other's differences. We hold this to be a genuinely flawed pedagogical strategy, as it assumes a pedagogy of difference rather than inclusion; within the framework of tolerance pedagogy, an assumed majority is given the privilege to 'tolerate' an assumed minority, which seldom – or never – is given the same opportunity in turn. This is problematic not only for the assumed minority, which is never truly included, but also for the assumed majority, which is then considered to be a consistent unit without differences between its members. Tolerance pedagogy therefore not only marginalises the assumed minority, but also the differing experiences and identities of the assumed majority. As tolerance pedagogy generally accepts one identity for the entire assumed minority, it contributes to the Othering of those considered to belong to this minority. Classroom strategies must therefore include didactic approaches that do not primarily work with ideas of tolerance but rather with ideas of inclusion.

One way of approaching the (re)producing of heteronormativity may be to discuss the differences between members of the assumed (heterosexual) majority in a classroom. It may be useful to simply point out the differences between all pupils in a classroom in order to move away from the ideas of assumed minorities and assumed majorities and underline the facts other than sexuality (or factors such as class, race, gender and religion) that distinguish pupils from each other. This may not only assist pupils in the deconstruction of sexual identities, but would also make the construction of we/them dichotomies impossible, as pupils would be alerted to the fact that they share as many differences as similarities, and that sexuality is only one of several ways to divert from ruling norms. A point to be made here may therefore also be the whiteness that is implied in the construction of the heteronormative ideals.

In confronting heteronormativity in the classroom, teachers must assume that homophobia exists within every student body and conceptualise strategies to handle them on several levels. We have already made clear that homophobia stems from heteronormative ideals; it may thus be important for teachers to reflect on homophobia as a consequence of the heteronormative matrix. In this context, confronting homophobia and deconstructing assumed sexual identities becomes part of a larger struggle to come to terms with a range of social domination(s), which tie into heterosexism and homophobia; in the classroom, discussing these intersections may function as clear illustrations of not only how norms are constructed within a society, but also how layered and multifaceted they are. As such, pupils who clearly distance themselves from homosexual individuals or display signs of homophobia may realise that they are part of another level of social domination. This, too, may assist teachers when attempting the

deconstruction of assumed sexual identities.

A number of questions have been raised during the writing of this essay; similarly, our own reflections on the role(s) we take as teachers, particularly in relation to norm-critical pedagogy, have changed over time. Although we were not unfamiliar with the term 'norm-critical pedagogy', our understanding of the concept as well as the practical implications of working norm-critically has transformed during the writing of this essay. The idea of tolerance pedagogy and its consequences in particular was new to us, and in reflecting on our own work as teachers as well as the work of colleagues, in addition to the views on sexuality and sexual identities textbooks provide, our understanding of our own preconceptions has grown, which may contribute to a more critical approach in our teaching profession in the future. In addition to a greater understanding of how heteronormativity penetrates educational institutions at large, the fact that ideas of tolerance rather than inclusion govern much of work within schools is now clear to us, as well as the extent to which educational institutions therefore contribute to the Othering of certain individuals. This understanding means not only that we have been more aware of the multitude of ways in which heterosexual privilege is displayed at school, but also that the complexity of the heteronormative matrix has grown.

The understanding of the above named concepts that we have gained has influenced our reading and analysis of *The Hours*; in particular tolerance pedagogy and its contribution to the Othering of individuals has contributed to the analysis of certain characters and relationships in the novel. It is clear that reading a novel from a certain perspective produces certain analyses; although it is possible that our analysis of the novel would have produced the same results had we not had the concepts of norm-critical pedagogy as a background, we cannot be sure that this is true. Similarly, it may be possible to work norm-critically in the classroom without being familiar with the theoretical concept of norm-critical pedagogy; there is, however, something to be said for choosing classroom strategies with a particular pedagogical theory in mind. Being able to connect the work in the classroom to theory as well as analyse it in the context of theories is valuable, as it provides both a linguistic framework for discussions about work with pupils and teachers with an awareness of and explanation for the choice of classroom work and strategies.

Work with norm-critical pedagogy is not yet particularly widespread in Sweden. There are a number of possible explanations for this, one of which may be that material providing teachers with classroom strategies and examples is scarce. Although academic research on the topic is conducted on a few universities, most of the material we have been able to read provides few concrete examples of working norm-critically, in particular for teachers teaching

subjects that do not traditionally broach the subject of sexuality and sexual identity. In this essay, we have provided an example of how to work norm-critically within the framework of English as a foreign language, but more examples are needed. Further research that focuses on norm-critical pedagogy in all subjects (rather than just the 'traditional' Biology and Physical Education), as well as research that adds to that which already exists on tolerance pedagogy – and perhaps discusses tolerance pedagogy not only on a classroom-based level but in a larger societal context – may support teachers in working norm-critically.

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