

The details of the  
minutes of the hours:  
how mise-en-scene  
creates narrative  
conn...



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Details of the Minutes of The Hours In the film The Hours by Stephen Daldry, the various of elements of the Mise en Scene are used primarily in order to define and maintain the structure of the overall plot. The structure is set up so that there is one overarching plot, then three subplots following three different lead female characters. The mise en scene elements upheld this structure in multiple ways including foreshadowing of emotional character development, parallels that helped establish timeline and connections between the plots following each character. It made clear, the notion that there were three separate ongoing storylines, but that they were all connected by the same central theme and ideas. There were a few elements of mise en scene that helped to define the story structure through the establishment of the timeline in the film.

The first element would be the use of on-screen text, which is used very early on in the film in order to establish what era and area each story is set to be in. Prior to the introduction of each main character, there were shots of the setting and at the bottom of each shot, was the name of the setting and the year. The first one that was introduced was Las Angeles 1951, followed by Richmond, England 1923 and lastly New York 2001. This is how the audience knew that there were three different stories and timelines being represented in the film. While the use of on screen text is primarily what helped to definitively establish that there were different timelines in terms of era, it was the use of parallels that made the audience aware that the stories were being told as if they were in sync. While they took place in different eras in time, they still had the same time frame in terms of how long it took for each main character for to experience all the events that they did

throughout the film. For each character, their stories took place over the course of a single day. The first indication of this was when the film provided parallels between the way in which each leading ladies day starts off. It showed them all lying in their bed, with faint sunlight streaming in from windows behind them, having just woken up. The shots are constantly changing in terms of which lead character is being focused on and while Virginia and Clarissa both get out of bed and start getting ready for the day, Laura is shown having chosen to stay in bed with her book. Eventually, they are all shown having conversations about eating breakfast which is a further indication of how this is the start of each lead character's day.

Shots like the ones previously mentioned are continuously used to maintain and keep the audience aware of the timetable of events; it is still the same day, it is simply later on in the day. Just as there were shots to establish it being early morning, there are shots that worked to establish once it was afternoon. All the lead characters are paralleled as referencing the fact that it's now afternoon, so the audience is once again reminded that the timetables are in sync, though the shots are still different in terms of action. For Virginia, there was a scene where she is discussing lunch with her cook, Clarissa told Luis she had a beautiful morning which indicated that the morning had passed for her and Laura greeted her neighbor with " Good afternoon" when she dropped off Richie. This could also be viewed as an example of how the film follows the structure of three separate stories making one overarching story. It puts emphasis on the fact that it was simultaneously three separate plots and one story of the events of a single day, happening in different eras. The shots that parallel the lives of Virginia

Woolf and Richard Brown are another way in which mise en scene elements maintain the story structure in terms of keeping up with the notion that the stories are connected and it also foreshadows the character development of Richard through the past actions of Virginia. The opening scenes of the film follow Virginia Woolf as she goes to the river to kill herself and due to all of the parallels between her and Richard, his suicide is heavily implied as many of his actions mirror that of Virginia. Early in the film, Virginia has a conversation with her husband where he questions about having eaten breakfast and notes that it's at the insistence of her doctors. Shortly after this, Richard has almost the exact same conversation with Clarissa and he has the same uninterested reaction that Virginia has.

A more direct example of foreshadowing via mise en scene was when Virginia had a conversation with her husband that the visionary and poet in her novel must die, and shortly before this scene occurs, Clarissa is discussing how Richard's novel is the work of a visionary and true poet. There's another crucial instance where Richard has a parallel experience to Virginia closer to the end of the film. When Clarissa went over his house to help him get ready for the party, he is sitting on a windowsill and tells her that he has only been living for her and that she needs to let him go, which mirrors Virginia's train station scene. She had planned on leaving the city and when her husband begged her not to, she responded by pointing out the same thing Richard had. She had been living the way she had because it was what he wanted and that he needed to let her go. After this happens, Richard repeats a line which Virginia had written in her suicide letter to her husband. He tells Clarissa that he doesn't think anyone could have been as

happy as they have been. And just as Virginia did when she was done writing that line in her letter, Richard killed himself after having made that verbal statement.

The structure of the story being told and the characters in the film were certainly driven by elements of mise en scene more than anything. It is what allowed for there to be three different plots that still made sense in relation to another, which made for a single compelling story overall. The elements of mise en scene worked not only to draw the audience in, but also to give hints about the way in which the different stories were actually connected to one another; this occurred through the use of elements including parallel frames and shots and foreshadowing via character action and dialogue.