

The hours essay



The Hours In his 1998 Pulitzer-prize winning novel, Michael Cunningham juxtaposes the events that transpire between three women in different eras, all of which share a presentiment to the hideous triviality and desperation that runs rife in the everyday routine. These women exist in the persons of English novelist Virginia Woolf, while in the process of writing her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*; an early fifties-era housewife Laura Brown, in the midst of reading Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*; and Clarissa Vaughn, a homosexual woman in the twentieth century presented as the embodiment of the modern day *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel was adapted to the screen in 2002 by Stephen Daldry, and proceeded to win various awards including ' Best Picture' at the Oscars. The film was able to capture and incorporate the beauty and inventiveness of Cunningham's prose on screen, and stayed largely faithful to the novel's plot; including the overlapping sequence of events that occurred between the three women. Much as in the book, the opening scene in the movie follows Virginia Woolf's final attempt at suicide by drowning herself in a pond and successfully offing herself. Nicole Kidman, who plays Mrs.

Woolf, is heard reading from her suicide letter while she fills the pockets of her dress with rocks to weigh her down in the water. The letter to her husband Leonard Woolf begins, Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again: I feel we can't go through another of these terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and can't concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be..

. I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work... you have been entirely patient with me, and incredibly good..

. everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been. – V. So sets the tone and mood of the movie, the certainty that Virginia Woolf will kill herself, or already has. But brief events in her life before its culmination in suicide will be shown throughout the extent of *The Hours*, both in the book and movie, overlapping with the events in the life of two other women, in different generations. Laura BrownA suburban housewife in the year 1949 (but in the film is moved up to the early fifties era), Laura Brown faces anxiety when she fails to bake a perfect birthday cake for her husband, among other things which seem to be unraveling from everywhere around her.

To clear her mind, she decides to take off while her husband is at work, leaving her son with the neighbor, and afterwards checking into a hotel, with only her bottle of pills and the copy of book she's been reading: Mrs. Dalloway. Alone in the room, her thoughts running constantly on the course her life is taking, Cunningham describes that the prospect of her future as a suburban housewife on the verge of having another child, will be forced to live a life consigned to solely to domestic duties is entirely suffocating and overwhelming for Laura Brown, like the ocean tide rising, flooding every part of her flesh and bones, engulfing her entirely. This description in the novel is translated in the literal sense on screen. In the movie, we see Laura Brown lying on the bed, eyes closed, clutching Mrs. Dalloway with both hands on her chest, completely normal, and completely dry, and in a matter of

minutes, water rises from under the bed, toppling the bedside lamp, lifting small furnitures from off the floor, submerging everything in sight, and drowning her entirely. It captures the words literally, but comes off as pure visual poetry. Of course, Laura wakes from her reverie, considers the living being in her stomach, and d husband, before he gets home from work to celebrate his birthday.

Clarissa VaughnCunningham's contemporary ecides not to end her life as abruptly; not with the prospect of killing a baby in her hands. She would have to go home, like he promised his son, and bake another cake for her version of Mrs. Dalloway, the Clarissa Vaughn in the movie is as much attuned and aware of the hopelessness and richness of life as the Clarissa Vaughn in the novel. The scene where Clarissa Vaughn meets his friend, Richard - a poet stricken with AIDS who is about to receive an award for his life's work in literature - follows through almost every line in the book. From dialog to their demeanor, to the way they regard each other - " Ah, Mrs. Dalloway, always giving parties to cover the silence." Ultimately, the movie was a gorgeous rendition of the book, and was able to translate Micheal Cunningham's prose into a weave of visual poetry regarding life's hopelessness, and the pursuit of a better version of it.