

Discuss the presentation of modernity, illness, consumerism and suicide in 'mrs d...

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Discuss the presentation of modernity, illness, consumerism and suicide in 'Mrs Dalloway' and 'The Hours'. The topics of suicide and illness are very prominent throughout both 'Mrs Dalloway' a novel written by Virginia Woolf and 'The Hours' a film based on the novel. Throughout 'The Hours' it shows the suicide of Virginia Woolf in 1941, in the 1950's housewife Laura Brown's, decision to not commit suicide and Clarissa Vaughan having to deal with the suicide of a close friend. In 'Mrs Dalloway' we are presented with suicide through the character of Septimus Smith, a World War 1 veteran who suffers from shell shock, an illness which was not yet recognised as actually being an illness during the period of 'Mrs Dalloway'. The 'Septimus' of 'The Hours' is Richard Brown, Laura Brown's son and Clarissa Vaughan's ex-lover and closest friend. Richard is an author who is suffering from AIDS and like Septimus commits suicide due to his illness, and his inability to cope with their illness' anymore. This could be compared to Virginia Woolf herself, the idea of them all having an illness, either it be depression, AIDS or shell shock, all have come to a point in their lives, where they feel they cannot cope with it anymore and decide to end their suffering themselves.

Septimus' and Richard's experiences of suicide, are perhaps Virginia Woolf's way of communicating her true feelings towards suicide. She gave Septimus the release he wanted from life that she herself, may have wanted. Virginia Woolf's suicide note is quoted throughout 'The Hours'. " I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been. " Richard says this to Clarissa, right before he commits suicide and it is always quoted entirely at the beginning of the film as Virginia Woolf is committing suicide. This is known as intertextuality, in which other texts are used within another text, it

adds realism to a piece of text and easily creates a direct link with other texts. Illness and suicide are very closely linked throughout both the novel and the film due to the fact that the illness seems to be the reason for the need to commit suicide. In 'Mrs Dalloway' after Septimus has committed suicide, Clarissa Dalloway does not frown upon his committing suicide but instead seems to embrace the thought of it. " She felt somehow very like him-the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. " (Woolf, 165) It suggests her empathy with Septimus, how she understands the reasons behind him committing suicide, also her blatant disregard for life, that she describes it as 'throwing it away' like life is a piece of rubbish to just be discarded when it suits an individual. It suggests her dislike for her life, and the sadness she feels towards it, but in the quote she seems almost euphoric at the thought of suicide as if she longs for it, this could explain how Clarissa Dalloway finds that she can empathise with Septimus even though they are two completely different individuals.