

# The Hours (2002)

## Tomatometer:

All critics:

81

Average Rating: 7.4/10

Reviews Counted: 186

Fresh: 150 | Rotten: 36

The movie may be a downer, but it packs an emotional wallop. Some fine acting on display here.

Audience:

82

liked it

Average Rating: 3.7/5

User Ratings: 82,885

### Movie Info

Three women, separated by a span of nearly 80 years, find themselves weathering similar crises, all linked by a single work of literature in this film adaptation of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Michael Cunningham. In 1923, Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman) is attempting to start work on her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which she chronicles one day in the life of a troubled woman. But Virginia has demons of her own, and she struggles to overcome the depression and suicidal impulses that have followed her throughout her life, as her husband Leonard (Stephen Dillane) ineffectually tries to help. In 1951, Laura Brown (Julianne Moore) is a housewife living in suburban Los Angeles, where she looks after her son Richie (Jack Rovello) and husband Dan (John C. Reilly). Laura is also an avid reader who is currently making her way through *Mrs. Dalloway*. The farther she gets into the novel, the more Laura discovers that it reflects a dissatisfaction she feels in her own life, and she finds herself pondering the notion of leaving her life behind. Finally, in 2000, Clarissa Vaughn (Meryl Streep) is a literary editor who is caring for Richard Brown (Ed Harris), a former boyfriend and noted author, who is slowly losing his fight with AIDS. Clarissa is trying to arrange a party to celebrate the fact that Richard has won a prestigious literary award, but is getting little help from Richard's ex-lover, Louis (Jeff Daniels). As she

labors to help Richard through another day, he wonders if his life is worth the unending struggle.

*The Hours* also features Toni Collette, Miranda Richardson, Allison Janney, and Claire Danes. ~ Mark Deming Rovi.



Theatrical release poster (Wikipedia)

PG-13, 1 hr. 55 min.

Drama

Directed By: Stephen Daldry

Written By: David Hare

In Theaters: Dec 27, 2002 Wide

On DVD: Jun 24, 2003

US Box Office: \$41.5M

Miramax Films - Official Site [↗](#)

[<http://www.rottentomatoes.com>]

# *The Hours* (film)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

***The Hours*** is a 2002 drama film directed by Stephen Daldry, and starring Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore and Ed Harris. The screenplay by David Hare is based on the 1999 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same title by Michael Cunningham.

The plot focuses on three women of different generations whose lives are interconnected by the novel *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. These are Clarissa Vaughan (Streep), a New Yorker preparing an award party for her AIDS-stricken long-time friend and poet, Richard (Harris) in 2001; Laura Brown (Moore), a pregnant 1950s California housewife with a young boy and an unhappy marriage; and Virginia Woolf herself (Kidman) in 1920s England, who is struggling with depression and mental illness whilst trying to write her novel.

The film was released in Los Angeles and New York City on Christmas Day 2002, and was given a limited release in the US and Canada two days later on December 27, 2002. It did not receive a wide release in the US until January 2003, and was then released in UK cinemas on Valentine's Day that year. Critical reaction to the film was mostly positive, with nine Academy Award nominations for *The Hours* including Best Picture, and a win for Nicole Kidman as Best Actress.

## Plot

With the exception of the opening and final scenes, which depict the 1941 suicide by drowning of Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman) in the River Ouse, the action takes place within the span of a single day in three different years, and alternates among them throughout the film. In 1923, renowned author Woolf has begun writing the book *Mrs Dalloway* in her home in the town of Richmond outside London. In 1951, troubled Los Angeles housewife Laura Brown (Julianne Moore) escapes from her life as a conventional housewife by reading *Mrs Dalloway*. In 2001, New Yorker Clarissa Vaughan (Meryl Streep) is the embodiment of the title character of *Mrs Dalloway* as she spends the day preparing for a party she is hosting in honor of her former lover and friend

Richard (Ed Harris), a poet and author living with AIDS who is to receive an award for career achievement. Richard tells Clarissa he has stayed alive for her sake, and the award is meaningless because he didn't get it sooner, until he was on the brink of death. She tells him she believes he would have won the award regardless of his illness. Richard often refers to Clarissa as "Mrs. Dalloway", due to her distracting herself from her own life and self the way the Woolf character did.

Virginia, who has experienced several nervous breakdowns and suffers from bipolar disorder, feels trapped in her home, intimidated by servants and constantly under the eye of her husband Leonard (Stephen Dillane) who has begun a publishing business, Hogarth Press, at home to stay close to her. Woolf both welcomes and dreads an afternoon visit from her sister Vanessa (Miranda Richardson) and her children. After their departure, Virginia flees to the railway station where she is awaiting a train to central London when Leonard arrives to bring her home. He tells her how he lives in constant fear that she will take her own life. She says she fears it also, but argues that if she is to live she has the right to decide how, and where, as much as any other.

Pregnant with her second child, Laura spends her days in her tract home with her young son, Richie. She married her husband, Dan (John C. Reilly), soon after World War II and on the surface they are living the American Dream but she is deeply unhappy. She and Richie make a cake for Dan's birthday, but it is a disaster. Her neighbour Kitty (Toni Collette) drops in to ask her if she can feed her dog while she's in the hospital for a procedure. Kitty pretends to be upbeat, but Laura senses her fear and boldly kisses her on the lips. Kitty accepts the kiss without comment, and both women ignore any hidden meaning it might have. Laura and Richie successfully make another cake and clean up, and then she takes Richie to stay with Mrs. Latch (Margo Martindale). He is terrified of being left without her and she insists she will be back, but instead of running errands she checks into a hotel where she intends to commit suicide. Laura removes several bottles of pills and Woolf's novel from her purse, and begins to read *Mrs Dalloway*. She drifts off to sleep, and dreams the hotel room is flooded, awakening with a change of heart, and caresses her belly. She picks up Richie and they return home to celebrate Dan's birthday.

Clarissa appears equally worried about Richard, and his depression, and the party she is planning for him. Although Clarissa herself is a lesbian who has been living with Sally Lester (Allison Janney) for 10 years, she and Richard were lovers during their college days, and he has spent the better part of his life in gay relationships, including one with Louis Waters (Jeff Daniels), who left him years ago but returns for the festivities. Clarissa's daughter, Julia (Claire Danes), comes home to help her prepare. Richard has taken all sorts of pills but tells her Clarissa is the most beautiful thing he ever had in life, before he throws himself out a window to his death. Later that night Laura, who is Richard's mother, arrives at Clarissa's apartment. It is clear that Laura's abandonment of her family was a profound trauma for Richard, but Laura reveals it was a better decision for her to leave the family after the birth of her daughter, rather than commit suicide. She has led an independent, happier life as a librarian in Canada. She does not apologize for the hurt she caused to her family (Dan and their daughter are also both dead), and suggests that it's not possible to feel regret for something over which she had no choice. She acknowledges that no one will forgive her, but offers an explanation: "It [her life] was death. I chose life." When Julia spontaneously hugs her, she looks stunned and surprised, then moved by the demonstration of compassion.

## Cast

1923

- Nicole Kidman as Virginia Woolf
- Stephen Dillane as Leonard Woolf
- Miranda Richardson as Vanessa Bell
- Lyndsey Marshal as Lottie Hope
- Linda Bassett as Nelly Boxall

1951

- Julianne Moore as Laura Brown
- John C. Reilly as Dan Brown
- Jack Rovello as Richie Brown
- Toni Collette as Kitty
- Margo Martindale as Mrs. Latch

2001

- Meryl Streep as Clarissa Vaughan
- Ed Harris as Richard "Richie" Brown
- Allison Janney as Sally Lester

- Claire Danes as Julia Vaughan
- Jeff Daniels as Louis Waters

## Critical reception

*The Hours* currently has 81% positive reviews on the movie review aggregator site Rotten Tomatoes, with 150 of 186 counted reviews giving it a "fresh" rating and an average rating of 7.4 out of 10 — with the consensus that "the movie may be a downer, but it packs an emotional wallop. Some fine acting on display here." On Metacritic, the film holds an average score of 81 out of 100, based on 39 reviews. The four main cast members were praised, especially Nicole Kidman who won numerous of awards for her portrayal of Virginia Woolf including the Academy Award for Best Actress.

Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* called the film "deeply moving" and "an amazingly faithful screen adaptation" and added, "Although suicide eventually tempts three of the film's characters, *The Hours* is not an unduly morbid film. Clear eyed and austere balanced would be a more accurate description, along with magnificently written and acted. Mr. Glass's surging minimalist score, with its air of cosmic abstraction, serves as ideal connective tissue for a film that breaks down temporal barriers."

Mick LaSalle of the *San Francisco Chronicle* observed, "Director Stephen Daldry employs the wonderful things cinema can do in order to realize aspects of *The Hours* that Cunningham could only hint at or approximate on the page. The result is something rare, especially considering how fine the novel is, a film that's fuller and deeper than the book ... It's marvelous to watch the ways in which [David Hare] consistently dramatizes the original material without compromising its integrity or distorting its intent ... Cunningham's [novel] touched on notes of longing, middle-aged angst and the sense of being a small consciousness in the midst of a grand mystery. But Daldry and Hare's [film] sounds those notes and sends audiences out reverberating with them, exalted."

Richard Schickel of *Time* criticized its simplistic characterization, saying, "Watching *The Hours*, one finds oneself focusing excessively on the unfortunate prosthetic nose Kidman affects in order to look more like the novelist. And wondering why the screenwriter, David Hare, and the director,

Stephen Daldry, turn Woolf, a woman of incisive mind, into a hapless ditherer." He also criticized its overt politicization: "But this movie is in love with female victimization. Moore's Laura is trapped in the suburban flatlands of the '50s, while Streep's Clarissa is moored in a hopeless love for Laura's homosexual son (Ed Harris, in a truly ugly performance), an AIDS sufferer whose relentless anger is directly traceable to Mom's long-ago desertion of him. Somehow, despite the complexity of the film's structure, this all seems too simple-minded. Or should we perhaps say agenda driven? The same criticisms might apply to the fact that both these fictional characters (and, it is hinted, Woolf herself) find what consolation they can in a rather dispassionate lesbianism. This ultimately proves insufficient to lend meaning to their lives or profundity to a grim and uninvolved film, for which Philip Glass unwittingly provides the perfect score — tuneless, oppressive, droning, painfully self-important."

Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* awarded the film, which he thought "sometimes stumbles on literary pretensions," three out of four stars. He praised the performances, commenting, "Kidman's acting is superlative, full of passion and feeling ... Moore is wrenching in her scenes with Laura's son (Jack Rovello, an exceptional child actor). And Streep is a miracle worker, building a character in the space between words and worlds. These three unimprovable actresses make *The Hours* a thing of beauty.

Steve Persall of the *St. Petersburg Times* said it "is the most finely crafted film of the past year that I never want to sit through again. The performances are flawless, the screenplay is intelligently crafted, and the overall mood is relentlessly bleak. It is a film to be admired, not embraced, and certainly not to be enjoyed for any reason other than its expertise ... Glacially paced and somberly presented, *The Hours* demands that viewers be as impressed with the production as the filmmakers are with themselves ... Whatever the reason - too gloomy, too slow, too slanted - [it] is too highbrow and admirably dull for most moviegoers. It's the kind of film that makes critics feel smarter by recommending it, even at the risk of damaging credibility with mainstream audiences who automatically think any movie starring Kidman, Streep and Moore is worth viewing. *The Hours* will feel like days for them."

Phillip French of *The Observer* called it "a moving, somewhat depressing film that demands and rewards attention." He thought "the performances are remarkable" but found the Philip Glass score to be "relentless" and "over-amplified."

Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* rated the film three out of five stars and commented, "It is a daring act of extrapolation, and a real departure from most movie-making, which can handle only one universe at a time . . . The performances that Daldry elicits . . . are all strong: tightly managed, smoothly and dashinglly juxtaposed under a plangent score. I have to confess I am agnostic about Nicole Kidman, who as Woolf murmurs her lines through an absurd prosthetic nose. It's almost a Hollywood Disability. You've heard of Daniel Day-Lewis and *My Left Foot*. This is Nicole and her Big Fake Schnoz. It doesn't look anything like the real Virginia's sharp, fastidious features . . . Julianne Moore gives [a] superbly controlled, humane performance . . . Streep's performance is probably the most fully realised of the three: a return to the kind of mature and demanding role on which she had a freehold in yesterday's Hollywood . . . Part of the bracing experimental impact of the film was the absence of narrative connection between the three women. Supplying one in the final reel undermines its formal daring, but certainly packs an emotional punch. It makes for an elegant and poignant chamber music of the soul."

## Box office

*The Hours* opened in New York City and Los Angeles on Christmas Day 2002 and went into limited release in the United States and Canada two days later. It grossed \$1,070,856 on eleven screens in its first two weeks of release. On January 10, 2003, it expanded to 45 screens, and the following week it expanded to 402. On February 14 it went into wide release, playing in 1,003 theaters in the US and Canada. With an estimated budget of \$25 million, the film eventually earned \$41,675,994 in the US and Canada and \$67,170,078 in foreign markets for a total worldwide box office of \$108,846,072. It was the 56th highest grossing film of 2002.

## Soundtrack

*Main article: The Hours (soundtrack)*

The film's score by Philip Glass won the BAFTA Award for Best Film Music and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Score and the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score. The soundtrack album was nominated for the Grammy Award for Best Score Soundtrack Album for a Motion Picture, Television or Other Visual Media.