

Interpretation of Multiple Personality Perception in Women through the Cinematic Universe

Sinematik Evren Aracılığıyla Kadınlarda Çoklu Kişilik Algısının Yorumu

Daldry, S. (Director). (2002). *The Hours* [Film]. Miramax Films, Scott Rudin Productions.

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Introduction

Movies can change perceptions and open doors for understanding different meanings through scenes. There must be a reason for adaptations, and Hutcheon believes that such an environment lays the groundwork for fundamental ideas. Writing down an idea is an act of forming it; thus, “the book moves on to discuss who adapts, why they do so, and how audience receive adaptations” (as cited in Kinney, 2006, p. 2). The screen is a reality experience where audience bring a different visuality to the written text.

The Hours (2002, Stephen Daldry) is a film adapted from Michael Cunningham’s novel of the same name (1998), focusing on three different women in search of something during a period that continues with certain principles. Stephen Daldry’s narrative choice marks the transition from the outer to the inner lives of women who can be identified with society. Social mentality coerced women

into unbearable ideologies that confine them to lowered roles, referencing the single-mindedness of patriarchy. Daldry's three different women characters highlight the oppressive realities individuals face. Each shot communicates something different to the viewer, serving as a communication technique.

I aim to uncover hidden details and symbols in the film, encouraging viewers to create their own meanings. In doing so, the audience becomes involved in the pain, unhappiness, and suffering of the individuals in a fictional world, anticipating what awaits them through images that interact with disjointed movie characters. Clearly, it is the director's attempt to temporarily obscure the meaning by conveying the film through three selves and to stage an authority that directs the reader to reshape the given perspective while questioning their reality.

Unraveling Identity: The Impact of Society on Women's Self-Perception

Society is responsible for women's identity crises, a long-standing theme in many movies. Societal pressure leads to women's gradual alienation from themselves as they try to become rooted but struggle or fail. They are condemned to construct society's imagination, defined by roles such as housewives and 'other.' Female characters experience emotional turmoil by attaching too much to traditional commitments. The relentless traditional femininity estranges women from their true selves, trapping them in a life seeking escape. Luce Irigaray, in "Speculum of the Other Woman," finds binary associations problematic for women's agency. She invites audiences to reconsider how women are depicted through a limited set of images, symbols, and figurations based on male supremacy (Irigaray, 1974-1985, p. 71). Women pursuing relationships without male desire face mistreatment, as depicted in Stephen Daldry's *The Hours*.

Over time, the meaning of happiness, whether becoming a proper woman or a masculine man, has traditionally been passed down to people. Many women are forced into unequal relationships that abuse their realities, and society only approves of heterosexual relationships. Adrienne Rich suggests that "to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination" (Rich, 1972, p. 23). Rich's statement emphasizes the innate conflict between cultural standards of femininity and the freedom of the individual woman to express herself creatively. Women who rigorously conform

to traditional gender roles may find that their creative impulses—which frequently aim to question and disrupt accepted norms—are at odds with one another. Daldry explores the enduring relevance of Rich’s assertion, illustrating how the tension between societal conformity and individual creativity continues to shape women’s lives across different historical contexts. In the end, *The Hours* emphasizes how crucial it is to embrace one’s own distinct individuality and defy social standards in order to reach one’s full creative potential and achieve personal fulfillment.

The depiction of women through artistic mediums always converges on the idea of passivity. Femininity, along with passivity, is an inheritance derived from culture and becomes integral to a woman’s identity. Mary Ann Doane, in “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator” (1982), clearly addresses this issue: “above and beyond a simple adoption of the masculine position in relation to the cinematic sign, the female spectator is given two options: the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one’s own object of desire, in assuming the image in the most radical way” (Doane, 1982, p. 87). The same story about women has emerged from different contexts, destined to share the identical fate. Reminiscent of Stephen Daldry’s film version of *The Hours*, this phenomenon shows how female experiences are universally shared across time and space. The word “woman” is more than what society dictates. Deleuze’s concept of becoming-woman signifies a profound reinvention of identity through gender fluidity, and how it changes already male-invented personalities. Opposite necessities “this becoming-woman should not be seen as a molar becoming a woman or as an end in itself. Every becoming is a process and an attempt to think differently, to see or feel something new in experience by entering into a zone of proximity with somebody or something else” (Pisters, 2003, p. 106). Every ending ignites the start of something new, as if one has to kill what resides inside to reconstruct a new version of it. Frankly, attributed meanings have deeply entrenched the reality of women.

There is a preconceived notion of womanhood in this world which expects female gender to conform. According to Pisters,

The becoming of a woman in a Beauvoirian sense means the construction of a woman according to social, patriarchal standards. In this respect, de Beauvoir represents the constructionist pole in feminism, which states that all differences between men and women are socially imposed, even though they are basically

equal and neutral at birth. The opposite position in feminism is to argue that one is born as a woman, which often, although not necessarily, leads to essentialist views (Pisters, 2003, pp. 112-113).

Through the resurrection process, women who are left to allude to this situation depict a journey of rebirth from Virginia Woolf to a mere housewife, and eventually to Clarissa, a woman who has established her place in society with her own sexual identity in *The Hours*.

Virginia Woolf's metaphorical demise symbolizes not only the death of the woman herself but also the passing of an entire generation burdened by societal norms attributed to her. Another female character appears in an ongoing part, more confident about what she feels but never has the courage to prove it. The last character, Clarissa, emerges before the audience as a character who achieves self-realization through self-validation, challenging and ultimately shattering societal norms. Elizabeth Grosz, in *Volatile Bodies* (1994), explains the choice of three different female characters: "One personality may require glasses to correct faults in the optical apparatus while another personality has perfect vision; one personality is left-handed, the other right; one personality has certain allergies or disorders missing in the other. These are not simply transformations at the level of our ideas or representations of the body" (Grosz, 1994, p. 190). Female characters with different traits demonstrate how manipulation of their personalities comes from male abuse that causes a disaster for their identities. These characters in literature represent a range of reactions to gendered power relations, just as no two people have the same experiences or reactions to the world around them.

The Role of Visual Medium in Interpreting Women's Position

The film initially starts with the suicide of a woman named Virginia in a river at the corner of her house. The message conveyed to the audience through the eye-level shot is that she is the main character and is involved in the upcoming events. In truth, the audience becomes involved from the moment the story begins to be told, but before the story starts, there is a background. Through flashbacks, the course of the events is shaped by what has been experienced from the beginning to the end. Each processing in the movie affects part of the framework that creates the movie's overall narrative form.

Although the film implies the separation of different selves, Daldry's *The Hours* intertwines the storylines within the own stories of three central female characters, gathering everything into one self. Like a transitional part, doors that open and close would signal a shift in time if they were considered to be interdimensional shifts. In that sense, the one finds herself in a different rupture that focuses on the change of time in certain images; in other words, the viewer witnesses the events from each character's time zone and point of view. The camera shifts its focus to female figures, capturing them at eye level. Suddenly, one of them changes into a different female when facing a mirror. A new narrator chosen to be presented continues in the upcoming scenes.

It appears to the audience that two people gazing into mirrors from different locations are truly staring at each other beyond the glass, as though they were real-life counterparts or self-completed images. Simultaneously, the final character, a woman, blends into the background like a common thread among other vanishing female characters. Once again, the eye-level camera turns its direction to a book lying on the floor. The last character picks up one specific book whose name is more legible than the rest. This is *Mrs. Dalloway*, the novel by Woolf. To make it clear, all characters can therefore be complete versions of Virginia Woolf's shadow selves very near the beginning. "They derive their life from the soul of Virginia Woolf, whose own act of writing is represented as a descent into her 'second self'" (Hughes, 2004, p. 5). Thus, although the viewer does not know the characters exactly, they have taken a journey into the inner world of the characters through those flashbacks and thoughts wisely placed in the film.



Figure 1: Still from *The Hours* (2002) (Timestamp: 1:47:17)

As far as the audience knows from the protagonist of Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* (1998), Clarissa appears as an intradiegetic narrator and has a small conversation with a florist at the flower shop. The actress looks at the camera with a shoulder-level shot, indicating that she is looking at the audience, trying to convey something about her inner thoughts, illusions, worries, and facts.



Figure 2: Still from *The Hours* (2002) (Timestamp: 1:39:17)

This scene may specifically build a connection between the viewer and the character. The use of the camera angle here emphasizes that the character is far from reality. She has secrets and walls hiding from the audience, and even from herself.

After the audience learns about her past relationship—once lovers with her husband, now friends who still love each other—this gives her pain, knowing he is currently with someone else and is going to die because of him. This explains why she is in the flower shop; she wants to cover up the ugliness and reality by isolating herself among the flowers (*The Hours* 07:20 – 1:47:17). The statement could suggest that the outward appearance or behavior of individuals, represented metaphorically as ‘flowers,’ often serves as a facade or cover-up for deeper, more complex realities that remain hidden beneath the surface.



Figure 3: Still from *The Hours* (2002)

Unlike the book, one can understand that Clarissa is together with a woman named Sally instead of a man, but she still has a heart set on Richard. The camera suddenly changes and gets closer to the person who is about to write the main character. The extreme shot focuses on a scribbled place on paper with the name Clarissa, making one feel her presence in the room as if she is alive. According to the book, Clarissa is frequently referred to as Mrs. Dalloway and even Mrs. Richard Dalloway. She is defined as someone's wife, not as an individual like Clarissa. Society does not see Clarissa as she is but as a wife. She is reduced to being someone's wife and does not have a place as Clarissa in society. For this reason, she is struggling, and this is the natural story. The approach here, referring to the previous scene, points out that Clarissa's life is no longer confined to boundaries in her new version, as is the case with Virginia. Clarissa sort of achieved Woolf's goals, but she paid the price for it. The audience can consider the camera zooms that show every necessary detail, including the flowers, mirrors, relationships, and writing, which are connected with the inner world of Virginia Woolf herself, allowing the viewer to complete the whole picture step by step. This allows the viewer to establish connections across all scenes, creating a cohesive experience.

The viewer takes the responsibility of interpreting the images, meaning that the reader and the artwork are connected and cannot be thought of separately from one

another. The artwork would have no meaning if there was no interpretation. The goal here is to isolate the real self and show what a person thinks about it through cinema. As Cavarero states, "the story can only be narrated from the posthumous perspective of someone who does not participate in the events..." (Cavarero, 2000, p. 34). The obvious design, in relation to form-dependent integrity, connects to the unifying meaning by one who lives it within the doubts. This could also be called a request. Virginia does not exist; there are delusions over her personalities, yet they are presented as if they were a shame for a proper human being. As people focus more on mistakes than who the person really is, pain is not considered for individuals. She tries to reconstruct her history because it does not make sense for her to feel at home anymore. She resents her life and wishes to be someone unfamiliar to herself. This means that the world in her lifetime is not good, and she has to do something to escape from it. Entering each scene from her point of view reveals specific details about what life has prepared for her. That is why the reality of time collapses over clocks, and the audience finds themselves watching who Virginia wants to be.

In Laura's scene, when a woman named Kitty shows up in her neighborhood, they share a kiss during a conversation. This is supposed to give someone relief and is a way of saying "I understand your deep desires and this is normal." This scene also points out the normalization of same-sex relationships that women can also have relationships other than men.



Figure 4: Still from *The Hours* (2002) (Timestamp: 1:13:22)

The detail that makes the reader think this is the case is the woman's red nail polish, clearly visible on the screen. Red is always associated with the color of passion and lust (*The Hours* 41:17 – 1:13:22). Kissing can be considered an expression or outburst of hidden desires, and the act of kissing is a kind of redemption from social boundaries for the characters. Once you do it, the feeling of ease and acceptance of your true self brings happiness in return. The characters, use this instinct as a guide to understand what is the actual meaning of life. Choosing to live behind a facade of being a proper housewife, however reluctantly, distances Laura from protective social consequences. What makes life meaningless is man himself and one compels others to adapt this life as the absolute agony.

The previous scene before the kiss is a precursor to this, gathering the two women in one scene. In the middle of them, there is an engaging detail: Laura has been reading *Mrs. Dalloway*. The fact that the camera focuses on the book in the middle of the characters implies that all the characters have been secretly desiring something in common. Reading is a reason for Laura to hold on to her life built with lies. "Her reading of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is her exit towards a more secure path by penetrating Clarissa Dalloway's underworld" (Cianconi, 2009, p. 34). She puts herself in Clarissa's shoes, thinking she shares the same fate. This is the one's unique self trapped in a world where someone else has already walked the same path.

An invisible mask symbolizes the taught solitude in the characters' selves, drawing the audience's attention to other details, just like they are busy with party life. The audience and the characters are jolted by the reflection of this sentence in mind: "It never has been about parties, parties are just like escape tickets or a break, this is life itself." The use of this aims to keep the film and the audience together but is not intended to give the same message to everyone. If that were the case, then everything would be a copy of someone else's idea, and movies would not always serve the build up a new consciousness. Mekas explains it as follows: "Fake external dramatic clashes would have led us away from the true drama; big pronounced ideas would have hidden our true uncertainty; even the metaphors would have become lies" (Mekas, 2016, pp. 69-70). Creating a temporary gap in both respects towards the film and the book destroys the observer's notion of meaning about time. Through self-reflexive elements, the film displays a shot of its own clapperboard, emphasizing the date and what it takes from the characters. Perhaps one is supposed to think that dealing with something instead of facing the real matters means desperately trying to break the rituals of life. One cannot do anything but be aware of one's unchanging destiny and try to destroy it with some changes in life. One of the best scenes related to this part includes Laura's lines: "We're baking the cake to show him that we love him" (*The Hours* 32:45 – 1:21:52). Her son's reaction to the situation is ironic and translates what Laura truly feels from the bottom of her heart. Love cannot be a forged or materialistic image; that is why whether the child and her mother make a cake or not, if there is love, one will feel it no matter what. This is the burden of being unable to express one's authentic self. Laura's life represents a mirror for Virginia's past, and they complete each other. During the stream, the shift changes into how women are compelled to live in a struggle with their identity issues across different time periods while trying to in search of being well.

Characters' lives branch out through Woolf's soul, making it possible to say that "this faculty, the soul of Virginia Woolf, made of the same substance as the animating mysteries of the world, sustains Laura Brown, however precariously, in one of the darkest periods of her life" (Hughes, 2004, p. 354). The fact that the narrator Virginia Woolf situates herself in the present, moving to the present from the past like time travel, introduces skepticism into the narration. Even though there seem to be three different endings, they all succumb to the expectations of the Victorian Era; Laura and Clarissa fulfill themselves accordance with Victorian values, while Virginia ends her life by throwing herself into the river. However, this is the beginning, not the end, for Virginia, because nature has the ability to regenerate itself. More, she believes that there will be people who defend her ideas in any other form, which brings her a sense of peace as she

drowns.

The use of blue and brown in the kitchen scene can imply sadness, but if it stands for sadness, she should have been happy after she threw it away, as she got rid of what made her upset. She keeps trying to find what has been missing in her life. The audience learns that the blue part of the cake can symbolize hope at the same time. As soon as she realizes she can no longer endure the captive lifestyle and feels that her hopes for the future are gone, the audience gets the impression that she tries to embrace femininity with flowery clothes. The cake acts as a bandage covering a bleeding wound (*The Hours* 43:01 – 1:11:30). The whole film questions the possibility of freedom. The identity created by the system cause trouble for individuals thus to create a new one can be seen as an attempt to resist against society.

Conclusion

The film ends with a message that underscores how people always expect more time even if they know nothing changes. The idea of time takes the lead within the narrative. Everyone expects something more from life, maybe time or daylight, as Richard mentioned when his time had come. Each character is immensely fond of trying to fill the gap left by lifelong misery. *The Hours* grapples with Virginia Woolf's own creation of ghosts that become subjects throughout the movie. According to Hughes, "the idea that the reader's response is fundamental to the infinite process in which art participates" (Hughes, 2004, p. 360). Therefore, serving existing traditions as a new custom revealed by the artist is to experience new impressions, expanding perception in both ways to reach the meaning beyond the artist and the work. The details, including the act of reading, form, audience, and the like, are all parts of the art as a whole. A work is not self-sufficient unless it has an interpreter; that's what the details are used for in the movie, serving a single meaning.

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