

***Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) vs. *The Hours* (2002): How does the patriarchy infringe on the autonomy of marginalized characters?**

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Mrs. Dalloway (1925) vs. The Hours (2002): How does the patriarchy infringe on the autonomy of marginalized characters?

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Why this topic?

- This presentation is based on a paper I wrote for *Women, Literature, and Social Change* class (ENGL 389 Winter 2022) taught by Dr. LaVona Reeves.
- Dr. LaVona Reeves is a professor of English and Gender Studies and has contributed extensively to this field.
- As a result, Dr. Reeves's work has made me want to present this paper and focus on this field for my future McNair Scholar research.

Introduction

The feminist themes that are present in *Mrs. Dalloway* (Woolf, 1925) and *The Hours* (Daldry, 2002), influence one another.

As a result, I will examine the relationships between men and women and illustrate how the patriarchy works socially.

In Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), the patriarchy operates in 1940s London.

In the film adaptation of *The Hours* (2002), the patriarchy operates in early 2000's America.

Virginia = Character, Woolf = The author

Presentation Itinerary

Who is
Virginia
Woolf?

Summaries of
The Hours &
Mrs. Dalloway

Argument &
Evidence

Who is Virginia Woolf?

Virginia Woolf was born on January 25th, 1882, and died on March 28th, 1941.

Woolf is a Modernist, 20th-century English writer.

Woolf is considered one of the most talented authors because of her “stream-of-consciousness” writing style.

Virginia Woolf’s literature includes themes of feminism, gender, sexuality, the role of patriarchy, and many other topics.

Summaries

The Hours (2002) & *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)

The Hours (2002)

The Hours is based on Michael Cunningham's novel which was published in 1998.

The 2002 movie adaptation, directed by Stephen Daldry, focuses on three women: Virginia Woolf, Clarissa Vaughan, and Laura Brown.

Throughout the movie, the lives of these three women are connected by Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The film also highlights how each woman has encountered suicide in their life. The characters are also connected in this way too.

For example, Virginia Woolf committed suicide in the 1940s due to her mental illness. Laura Brown attempted suicide because she was unsatisfied with her life. Clarissa was faced with a choice about letting her friend Richard, who was diagnosed with AIDS, commit suicide.

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place after WWI in London, England, and follows Clarissa Dalloway, an upper-class woman.

Throughout this story, Clarissa reflects on her life and whether she made the right decisions.

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf (cont.)

For example, Clarissa reflects on her old relationship with Peter Walsh, who initially proposed, but Clarissa declined and ended up marrying Richard Dalloway.

Clarissa also reflects on her relationship with Sally Seton—whom she had strong (potentially romantic) feelings for.

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf (cont.)

Mrs. Dalloway also follows other characters such as Septimus Warren Smith, Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and others.

Throughout the story, these characters reflect on their lives similarly to Clarissa, and Woolf uses her stream-of-consciousness as a narrative device to achieve this.

Evidence & Argument

Argument: The patriarchy infringes on the autonomy of several different kinds of marginalized characters in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and the movie *The Hours* (2002).

How does the patriarchy infringe on Virginia's autonomy in *The Hours*?

The Hours – Directed by Stephen Daldry (2002)



How does the patriarchy infringe on Virginia's autonomy in *The Hours*?

In the train station scene, Virginia is advocating for herself; she is advocating for her self-determination and autonomy.

The advocacy occurs when Virginia says, "the meanest patient, yes, even the very lowest is allowed some say in the matter of her own prescription" (*The Hours*).

This quote represents advocacy because she explains to Leonard that anyone should have at least the option to make decisions for themselves regardless of someone's mental state.

Especially if that decision could benefit them; in other words, Virginia is telling Leonard that he is wrong for thinking that she should not be allowed to make decisions independently.

Overall, If Virginia had her autonomy to begin with, she would have not made the decision to flee to London without telling Leonard.

How does the patriarchy infringe on Virginia's autonomy in *The Hours*?

The infringement of Virginia's autonomy from the patriarchy occurs by the doctors that treated Virginia for her mental illness and Leonard's enabling of the doctors' treatments.

Virginia says to Leonard, "I am attended by doctors who inform me of my own interests... They do not speak for my interests". In response, Leonard supports the doctors and declares, "They know your interests!"

Virginia feels that Leonard is enabling her doctors' control over her, and he is further contributing to her lack of autonomy. As a result, she wanted to flee to London to take back control of her autonomy.

How does the patriarchy infringe on Virginia's autonomy in *The Hours*?

It is important to note that Woolf's doctors were men. According to Trombley Stephen, author of *All that Summer She was Mad: Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors*, George Henry Savage, Sir Maurice Craig, Sir Henry Head, and Dr. T.B. Hyslop are some doctors that Woolf saw to help with her mental illness.

With Woolf's doctors being all men, the social operations within the patriarchal society of *The Hours* are reinforced.

By having men control Virginia's every say and action, Virginia had no autonomy over herself.

Virginia admits, "I've endured this custody. I've endured this imprisonment... My life has been stolen from me" (*The Hours*).

How does the patriarchy infringe on Septimus's autonomy in *Mrs. Dalloway*?

Mrs. Dalloway – by Virginia Woolf (1925)

Who is Septimus?

Septimus is a World War 1 veteran.

As a result, from his experiences as a WW1 soldier, Septimus has characteristics of mental illness.

In the story *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is not stated directly what exactly is wrong with Septimus—the reader must infer. It is likely he may have PTSD (Conner, 8).

Septimus is a marginalized character in *Mrs. Dalloway* because of his mental health.

As a result of his mental health, Septimus is not seen as equal to those in power, specifically his doctors.

How does the patriarchy infringe on Septimus's autonomy in *Mrs. Dalloway*?

“Must,” “must,” why “must”? What power had Bradshaw over him? “What right has Bradshaw to say ‘must’ to me?” he demanded. “It is because you talked of killing yourself,” said Rezia. (Mercifully, she could now say anything to Septimus.) So he was in their power! Holmes and Bradshaw were on him!” (Woolf, 104).

This quote references Sir William Bradshaw and his recommendations for treatment for Septimus. Bradshaw recommended separating Septimus from his wife by having him stay in the country for an unspecified amount of time.

Unfortunately, Septimus does not have a say in the treatment he received to remedy his mental health, and he expresses his anger about this to his wife Lucrezia (Rezia). Septimus states that Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw have power over him.

Here, the patriarchy infringes on Septimus's autonomy because he does not have the right to make choices regarding his mental health needs but also decisions that affect how he wants to live his life. Eventually, Septimus ends his own life due to his lack of autonomy.

"Septimus commits suicide because his society will not accept him, except on its own oppressive terms. He is destroyed by the social distinction which labels him "insane" because he does not fit into the chalk marks society has set down" (Blanchard, 305).

Conclusion

Why does the patriarchy's infringement on Septimus and Virginia matter?

Well, the social operations of the patriarchy still function in the same way—even today.

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