

## About the Author

Michael Cunningham was born in Cincinnati in 1952, and grew up outside of Los Angeles. He attended Stanford, and earned a MFA at the prestigious Iowa Writers' Program. He now lives in New York City, and teaches creative writing at Columbia University. He has regularly had short fiction published in the magazines. His first novel, *A Home at the End of the World*, appeared in 1990, to good reviews. *Flesh and Blood* followed in 1995. Cunningham has been more careful than facile; he does not hurry his new books. *The Hours* appeared in 1998. In 1999 it received both the Pen/Faulkner and the Pulitzer Awards for fiction. Cunningham himself called it "my strongest book, as you write you get better at it." In its 81-year history, Cunningham is the first avowed gay writer to win the Pulitzer Prize. Although he argues against limiting writing to an unnecessarily narrow slice of experience, his writing has, in fact, generally focused on gay characters and themes. *The Hours* is no exception, although it has been received enthusiastically by a mainstream audience.

(*NoveList.com*)

## Reviews

"A smashing literary tour de force and an utterly invigorating reading experience. If this book does not make you jump up from the sofa, looking at life and literature in new ways, check to see if you have a pulse." —*USA Today*

"An exquisitely written, kaleidoscopic work that anchors a floating postmodern world on pre-modern caissons of love, grief, and transcendent longing." —*Los Angeles Times*

"Cunningham has created something original, a trio of richly interwoven tales...his most mature and masterful work." —*The Washington Post Book World*

(*us.macmillan.com*)

## Movie Adaptation

Based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the film interweaves the stories of three women in different eras. In 1923, the author Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman), depressed and suicidal, is writing the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. In 1949, pregnant Los Angeles housewife Laura Brown (Julianne Moore) is planning a birthday bash for her husband, but can't stop reading that novel. And in present day, New York City book editor Clarissa Vaughn (Meryl Streep) is throwing a party for friend and former lover Richard (Ed Harris), who is dying of AIDS and gave her the nickname, Mrs. Dalloway. Directed by Stephen Daldry and also starring Toni Collette, Claire Danes and Allison Janney.

([moviefone.com](http://moviefone.com))

## Movie Reviews

A compelling, moving film that respects its audience and its source material. —Eric Harrison-*Houston Chronicle*

You don't just love the movie for its structure but for the haunted people in it, making each other miserable, but forcing each other to face who they are. —Desson Thomson-*Washington Post*

Far from a bad film, and at least two of its central trio of performances provide moments of disarming grace, but don't be surprised if a whiff of self-congratulation emanates from the screen. —Ty Burr-*Boston Globe*

([rottentomatoes.com](http://rottentomatoes.com))

## Further Reading

*Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf

*Spending* by Mary Gordon

*The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath

*Mitz* by Sigrid Nunez

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## **The Hours**

### **By Michael Cunningham**

#### **Possible Discussion Questions**

1. Clarissa Vaughan is described as an ordinary woman. Do you accept this valuation? If so, what does it imply about being ordinary? What makes someone, by contrast, extraordinary?
2. What does the novel imply about the fine line between sanity and insanity? Would you classify Richard as insane? How does his mental state compare with that of Virginia? Of Laura as a young wife?
3. Each of the novel's three principal women occasionally feels a sense of detachment, of playing a role. Is role-playing an essential part of living in the world, and of behaving sanely?
4. What does this book tell us about the creative process? How does each character revise and improve his or her creation during the course of the story?
5. Which characters keep their inner selves ruthlessly separate from their outer ones? Why?
6. Each of the novel's characters sees himself or herself, most of the time, as a failure. Are such feelings an essential and inevitable part of the human condition?
7. What does the novel and its characters have to say about the transition from youth to middle-age? Should such passages be resisted or embraced?
8. Which of the characters loves the idea of death, as others love life? What makes some decide to die, others to live?
9. If you have read Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, would you describe *The Hours* as a modern version of it? A commentary upon it? A dialogue with it? Which characters in *The Hours* correspond with those of Woolf's novel?
10. What does the pattern of the writing contribute to the feeling of the novel?

([readinggroupchoices.com](http://readinggroupchoices.com) and [NoveList.com](http://NoveList.com))