

Michael Cunningham

Master of the sublime.

THE HOURS by Michael Cunningham. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998. Hardcover, \$23. Picador USA, paperback, \$13. 1999 Pulitzer Prize and PEN/Faulkner Award.

Whether or not you have seen *The Hours* on the screen, I urge you to join the millions of readers who are only now reading Michael Cunningham's exquisite novel centered around writer Virginia Woolf. At periods in her life, Woolf battled the demons of migraine, depression and voices. At age 59, she could no longer fight them and took her own life. Cunningham begins the novel with her suicide, then flashes back to a creative period when she was writing her great, post-WWI novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Using that work as a starting point, Cunningham shows its influence on the lives of a contemporary New Yorker and a post-WWII Los Angeles housewife.

In the film, Nicole Kidman speaks Woolf's words and inhabits her sensibilities in an accomplished performance that's a thing of beauty. Like Kidman, Meryl Streep so embodies book editor Clarissa Vaughn that they are now inseparable in my mind. And the 1949 housewife and mother, Laura Brown, is brought to the screen with gentle perfection by Julianne Moore. Rarely are three strong women characters this fully realized, first by a great writer and then by three of the best actors working today. I'm compelled to encourage others to both read the novel and see the film, because these are complementary works of art.

Cunningham devotes alternating chapters to his characters, streaming from one into the other, telling the story of a day in the life of each woman. The opening line of Woolf's novel — "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself." — serves to move into Clarissa's morning, buying flowers for a party that evening to celebrate her friend and former lover Richard's literary prize. Only Richard calls her "Mrs. Dalloway," a nickname from their shared past. The sentence also moves book lover Laura, pregnant now

with her second child, to linger in bed the morning of her husband's birthday, to postpone facing the day just one minute longer.

Cunningham's lucidity, the way he layers sentences to create a palpable reality of, for example, Woolf's headaches, is incomparable. His characters express intimate, inner thoughts, curious notions that they are blame-worthy, not as fully creative as others, not good enough. Such glimpses of an interior life offer a more concrete portrait of the characters than film ordinarily allows, although Stephen Daldry's film uses voice-over narration to express their thoughts. Because the medium determines how we receive information, a film actor may express such emotions wordlessly with a glance or movement, but here's Cunningham speaking Laura's thoughts:

"She wonders, while she pushes a cart through the supermarket or has her hair done, if the other women aren't all thinking, to some degree or other, the same thing: Here's the brilliant spirit, the woman of sorrows, the woman of transcendent joys, who would rather be elsewhere, who has consented to perform simple and essentially foolish tasks, to examine tomatoes, to sit under a hair dryer, because it is her art and her duty."

Cunningham graduated from Stanford in 1975, then took his MFA at Iowa in 1980. He was selected as a Guggenheim Fellow in 1993 and awarded an NEA fellowship in 1988. The paperback version of *The Hours* has now reached #10 on the New York Times best-sellers' list. Cunningham reads and talks about his work at 7:30 pm April 7 in LaSells Stewart Center, OSU campus. Free. **EW**



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BOOK NOTES March 27-April 24: Congratulations to **Leigh Anne Jasheway**, who won the 2003 Erma Bombeck writing contest, and **Eve Powers**, who won first prize for her short story, "The Last Book," from the National League of American Pen Women's annual literary competition. ...National Book Critics Circle Awards to: **Ian McEwan**, fiction, *Atonement* (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday); **Samantha Power**, nonfiction, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New Republic/Basic Books); **Janet Browne**, biography, *Charles Darwin: the Power of Place* (Alfred A. Knopf); **B.H. Fairchild**, poetry, *Early Occult Memory Systems of the Lower Midwest* (Norton); and **William H. Gass**, criticism, *Tests of Time* (Knopf). ...Manhattan storyteller **Laura Simms** (*The Robe of Love*) says; "Storytelling is a peace movement, a key to living with the natural world and an outrageous commitment to being present." For reservations to her performance at 7 pm March 28 at Intaba's Kitchen, 1115 S. 3rd, Corvallis or her day-long workshop March 29 at Ahimsa Sanctuary Philomath, call (541) 760-9603. ...A community reading of poems for peace and poems against war begins at 5:30 pm on April 1 at Frist Christian Church, 1166 Oak. To sign up in advance, call Tsunami Books, 345-8986. Donations at the door. ...Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, screenwriter and director (*State and Main*) **David Mamet** speaks at 7:30 pm April 2 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland. (503) 227-2583. ...**Dr. Joseph Arpaia**, *Tibetan Wisdom for Western Life*, speaks at 7 pm April 3 at Barnes & Noble. ...**Margie Boule**, general interest columnist for *The Oregonian*, speaks at 6:30 pm April 3 at the Baker Downtown Center. Willamette Writers members free/\$5 donation non-members...**Howard Zinn** (*A People's History of the United States*) speaks at 7 pm April 4 in 150 Columbia Hall, UO. \$5 students/\$7 general. ...Artist **Mike Walsh** leads a tour and discusses *Works: Fragments of the Material Age*, at

7:30 pm April 4 at Eugene Public Library. ...BBC investigative journalist **Greg Palast**, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, speaks at 6 pm April 6 in 150 Columbia Hall, UO. No tickets; donations accepted at door. Please note change of venue. ...**Michael Cunningham**, *The Hours*, will read from and discuss his work at 7:30 pm April 7 in LaSells Stewart Center, OSU campus. Free. ...Writer **Barry Lopez** speaks on "Why Libraries? why Now?" at 6:30 pm April 8 in Eugene Public Library's magazines and newspapers room, second floor; limited seating. ... Award-winning writer and environmental activist **Terry Tempest Williams** delivers the 2003 Johnston Lecture, "Memoirs of an Environmentalist with a Pen: How writing intersects with the politics of place," at 4:30 pm April 10 in Beall Concert Hall, UO. ... **Usha Honeyman**, *Free to Be Well*, speaks on environmental toxins at 7 pm April 10 at Barnes & Noble. ...Poet **Toni Van Deussen** and others celebrate National Poetry Month at 1 pm April 12 at Barnes and Noble. ...**Mitch Lockett**, author of *How To Kill a Common Loon*, presents bluegrass and storytelling at 7 pm April 15 at Flying Dogs Cafe, 1249 Alder. Free. ...Local poets **Rebecca Childers**, **Anthony Robinson**, **Quinton Hallett**, **Kenn Mitchell** and **Kelly Terwilliger** read at 7 pm April 15 in Bascom/Tykeson Conference Room at the Eugene Public Library. ...**Marc Cromwell**, *If I Gave You God's Phone Number*, speaks at 1 pm April 16 at Barnes & Noble. ...**Patti May Cangiano** speaks about Mary Baker Eddy at 7 pm April 17 at UO Bookstore, in conjunction with the Eddy exhibit now in the second floor South Reading Room, Knight Library, UO campus. ...Eugene Poetry Slam play-off, Round II at 8 pm April 19, Foolsap Books. ...Nature readings in celebration of Earth Day at 3 pm April 19 in Tsunami Books. ...**Gary Michael Linz**, *The Rainbow Lanes Exchange*, speaks at 7 pm April 24 at Barnes & Noble. ...**William Sullivan**, *Oregon's Trips and Trails*, shows slides and talks about his new book at 7 pm April 24 at REI. Free

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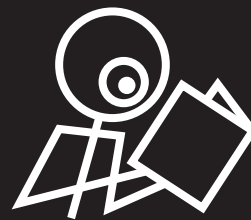
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