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## REEL

## CRITIQUE

**"The Hours"**  
Meryl Streep, Nicole Kidman,  
Julianne Moore  
Paramount/Miramax  
Director: Stephen Daldry

"The Hours" centers around three women who are strongly affected by the classic Virginia Woolf novel "Mrs. Dalloway." One is writing it, one is reading it and the other is living it. It is the Golden Globe winner for Best Drama, and Nicole Kidman won the Golden Globe for Best Actress.

In the film, Kidman portrays famed but troubled author Virginia Woolf as she pens the acclaimed novel. Kidman's character is becoming increasingly depressed as her creativity is stifled under suburban life.

Meryl Streep portrays Clarissa Vaughan, a modern-day Mrs. Dalloway, who begins to question the purpose of her life when her friend asks, "When was the last time you were happy?"

Julianne Moore gives the most convincing performance in the film as Laura Brown, a 1950s homemaker whose loneliness increases as her family grows larger.

Ultimately, these three women must make life-altering choices to either overcome the inequities and mundane nature of life or live with the knowledge that they will remain unhappy and unfulfilled until death.

"The Hours" attempts to preach empowerment in a story in which suicide and running away appear to be the only options. However, in addition to the characters' lack of choices, some of their shocking actions render the film somewhat unbelievable.

The film attempts to salvage the message, "Life is the answer," at the very end, but it is too late. The audience is left questioning the fullness and meaning of their own lives. While this may have been the intent of the filmmakers, and a reality for many, it is not the feeling one wants to carry home from the movie theater.

While all three actresses deliver incredible performances, this film lacks the substance to fully explore their talents.

It limps along at an incredibly slow pace because no explanation is given how these women arrive in their respective situations. The screenplay is a watered-down version of the Pulitzer Prize winning novel, and the film's producers should have remembered that not everyone has read the book.

Exercise caution within regard to whom you see this film. The intense, mature subject matter makes this film's PG-13 rating a joke. "The Hours" is a complex novel that should not have been adapted to the screen. It is neither the "feel-good movie of the year," nor the best.

—Jeremy Osborne

**"About Schmidt"**  
Jack Nicholson, Kathy Bates,  
Hope Davis, Dermot Mulroney  
New Line Cinema  
Director: Alexander Payne

Warren Schmidt, played by Jack Nicholson, has just retired from an Omaha insurance company where he worked for almost 40 years.

During a rather depressing retirement party at a drab, third-rate steakhouse, where co-workers stand and congratulate him on a successful career, Schmidt heads to the restaurant bar feeling completely unsatisfied with his life, which for him was only his career.

Schmidt's life as a retiree leaves him with the option of joining in the daily life of his wife of 40 years, Helen, whom Schmidt feels he does not know anymore, asking, "who is this old woman who is my house?"

It is not the restlessness of retirement but rather desperation that inspires Schmidt to explore the open highway in his 30-foot Winnebago Adventure. Schmidt heads to Colorado with the mission of saving his somewhat estranged daughter, Janie (Hope Davis) from marrying mullet-sporting, waterbed salesman Randall Hertzell (Dermot Mulroney, "My Best Friend's Wedding").

This is where the real fun begins as Schmidt is introduced into a counterculture of fellow Winnebago travellers on the road and begins correspondence with a 6-year-old Tanzanian boy whom he sponsors for cents a day as part of his efforts to make an impact on the world. Schmidt's loneliness on the road evokes some sympathy as he struggles with how to define his life.

Director Alexander Payne makes a graceful transition from the comedic lives of Schmidt's trip and the Hertzell family whom Janie joins into dramatic moments of Schmidt's solitude and complete loneliness.

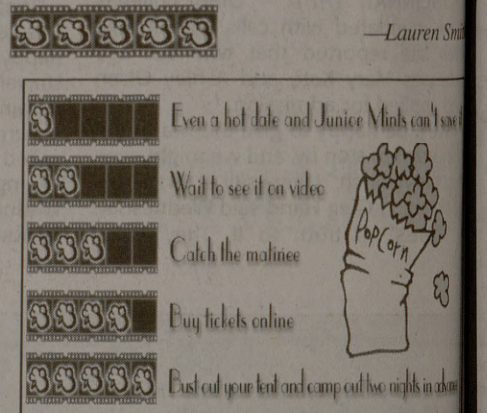
Look out for Kathy Bates as Randall Hertzell's New Age, rather crass mother, especially in a hot scene with Nicholson.

The role of Warren Schmidt is a big one that only someone like Jack Nicholson could effortlessly execute without running the possibility of getting lost in it.

Nicholson has already received a Golden Globe for his brilliant portrayal of Warren Schmidt, and another Oscar would be well-deserved for this role.

New Line Cinema's "About Schmidt" gives you people an accurate view of the world of a man near the end of his life, lost, and desperately on a search for what he will leave on this earth when he is gone. This is his journey with Warren Schmidt.

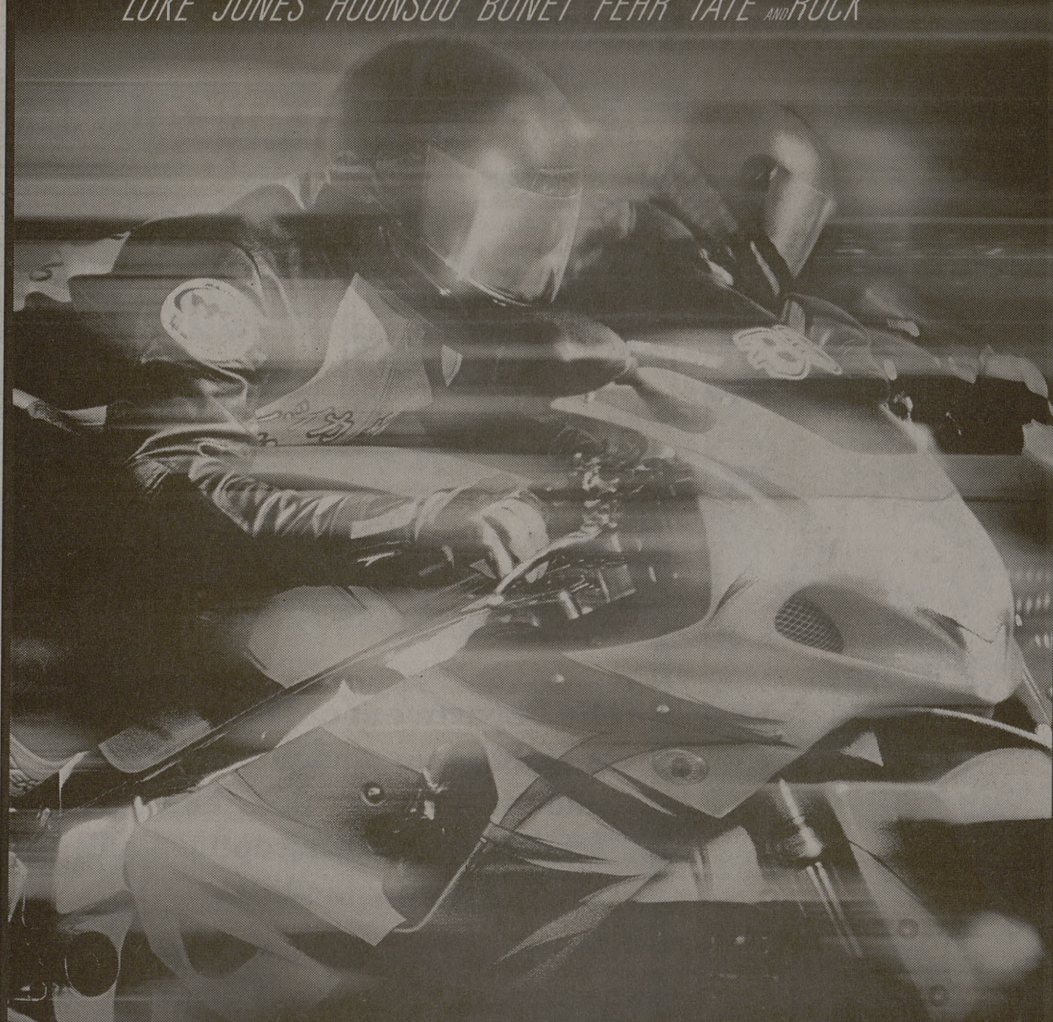
—Lauren Smith



LAURENCE FISHBURNE

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