THE WOMEN WHO WELCOME, SERVING THEMSELVES AND OTHERS: THE MOTIVATION FOR BEING HOSPITABLE IN MODERNIST LITERATURE

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Marti B. Winer

Drew University

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As both sides of the Atlantic Ocean attempted to adjust to the new normal created in the aftermath of World War I, gender roles and relationship boundaries were tested as women struggled to find their own identity and relevance both in and out of their homes. Women's roles had changed considerably during the war and when soldiers returned home, they found more independent and empowered women eager to continue in active roles they played throughout the Great War. Sometimes that influence was outside of the home and engaging with the broader community, but often it was as a broader decision maker in the home driving economic and social decisions that may have previously been left to men.

Modernist literature, representing the wide body of work published largely between World War 1 and World War 2, frequently demonstrated that women played key roles in influencing social, political and economic agendas during that time. Both in America and in Europe, however, it seemed that this influence was not often exercised publicly through official position such as business leader or political position. It was demonstrated more subtly through events hosted at home. Hospitality became a key tool with which women could subtly influence the evolving world around them, all while maintaining the traditional and docile role that society predominantly still preferred.

In addition to using hospitality in their homes as an opportunity to assert influence over the world around them, female characters in modernist literature also used hospitality to achieve personal satisfaction and to validate their sense of self-worth. Isolation and hopelessness were seen as prevalent themes throughout modernist literature, so while women were struggling to find their place in a changing public landscape, it was also quite clear that there was personal internal struggle as well. At one end of the spectrum, there are many examples of how women used their dinners, parties and other gatherings to feel seen in a world where they were otherwise invisible, however there are equally as many women who, even when routinely lavished with attention, used these events to showcase their own charm and personality in a socially acceptable manner.

Whatever emotion might have been behind the pursuit of personal validation, the female characters often demonstrated what the reader might perceive as attention-seeking behavior. These characteristics are seen in works with clear feminist leanings, as well as works with a more traditional male narration and bias. The perspective of the author, the reader, and the narrator determined whether this behavior was justified, logical or even warranted under the circumstances. In some instances, the reader is asked to feel sympathetic to these women. In other cases, the behavior may seem selfish and self-involved.

Much of this distinction was drawn based on the female character's interactions with her husband. Some of this behavior was motivated by a desire to maintain individuality, but often there were signs of desperation to remain visible as an aging women in a male-dominated world. This desperation could take the form of jealousy,

anxiety, flirting or anger, but regardless, were important to how that particular woman delivered hospitality in her home and how it impacted the stories and character development in these modernist works.

Objective

This Arts and Letters master's thesis endeavors to demonstrate how female characters in modernist literature use hospitality to both advance their political, social or economic priorities in a variety of circumstances, as well as to seek affirmation and attention for their own psychological needs. The authors created complex characters with crucial internal and external dialogue, allowing readers to gauge the characters' motivations and emotions in comparison to their actions as these characters hosted events. These comparisons evolved over time as the characters aged. A discussion of several novels written during this period will provide a perspective on:

1. how the lead female characters serving as hosts in their own homes are able to influence social, political and economic goals through their hospitality,
2. how these same characters use these events to find personal satisfaction and validate their self-worth,
3. how these women see themselves differently as they have aged and how others have noted those changes as well,
4. how the female characters' interactions with their husbands impact their hospitality as well as their psyche,
5. how these stories are differently presented by an American author and a British author, as well as how the authors' own biographies impact the stories,

6. and how characteristics of modernist literature are displayed in these works.

Literature Discussed

This thesis focuses on comparing the works of two female modernist authors- Willa Cather and Virginia Woolf. Each work presented has a strong female character who serves as a host in at least one, and often several, significant social scenes that impact the character and plot development of the book. These books demonstrate the social, political and economic perspectives in both Britain and the United States and, within the United States, they demonstrate the differences between the more established and urban east coast from the still-developing west coast. The books selected for discussion are:

A Lost Lady- Willa Cather (1923)

The Professor's House- Willa Cather (1925)

My Mortal Enemy- Willa Cather (1926)

Mrs. Dalloway- Virginia Woolf (1925)

To the Lighthouse- Virginia Woolf (1927)

Historical Background

Before exploring the texts that Cather and Woolf presented, it is important to understand how women's roles evolved during World War 1 and how they changed at the end of the war in both the United States and in Europe. These details are significant as they established a new mindset both for the women who wrote these books, but also for to the accurate portrayal of the women in the books. Some of these novels present a multi-generational approach to comparing and contrasting these pre- and post-World War

1 mentalities, while others show inner-conflict about this evolving role through individual characteristics.

While historical accounts talk about how women had always played an important role in supporting male troops by providing moral support and continuity on the home front, World War I began to document how women could take a more proactive approach to supporting the military effort as nurses, female military auxiliaries, ambulance drivers, farm workers, and factory laborers as well as in many other occupations. Despite their contributions outside of the home through extensive and varied war work, however, the most public celebrations honored women's contributions at home.[1]

There are a number of theories as to why this was the most celebrated contribution but it could be summarized that for the men returning from war, this was the most comfortable distinction as the men, themselves, needed to step back into the roles that women had covered throughout those years. Questioning if those jobs truly needed to be held by men going forward rocked the fundamental gender norms that created the foundation of polite society. "Adventurous, independent-minded women found themselves at odds with the mood. They found themselves thrown out of work and back into the kitchen almost overnight."[2] These ideas have been explored by a number of researchers.

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[1] Susan Grayzel, "Changing Lives: Gender Expectations and Roles during and after World War One," *British Library,* accessed April 8, 2017, https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/changing-lives-gender-expectations.

[2] Kate Adie, "What Did World War I Really Do for Women?" *World War One BBC*, accessed April 8, 2017, http://bam.files.bbci.co.uk/bam/live/content/z77whyc/transcript.

According to research featured by the British Library, "some women publicly embraced new access to traditionally male occupations and had no wish to relinquish them when the war was over. Others faced economic, physical and psychological challenges that made them eager for a return to pre-war conditions. Some men found meaning in their military service and sacrifices; others found themselves traumatized by the carnage unleashed by modern weaponry. Millions of men faced devastating injuries from poison gas, machine gun fire, and powerful artillery shells. Dissent from gender norms was perhaps more easily tolerated for women as they took on roles that had previously been the work of men (in munitions factories for example). Male dissent from gender norms was not so readily accepted. While pacifist or anti militarist actions by women could be understood, if not excused, as stemming from expectations that women desired peace above all, similar expressions by men, such as their taking on the new role of the conscientious objector in Britain, could call into question their very masculinity."[3]

As a result of these conflicted roles and differing feelings during this unprecedented time period, there were visible changes in European politics, society, and culture but it was relatively slow and tempered. Women were gaining voting rights in many nations for the first time, yet women's full participation in political life remained limited, and some states did not enfranchise women until much later (1944 in France). Socially, certain demographic trends that were prevalent before the war persisted after it. Family sizes continued to shrink despite renewed anxiety about falling birth rates and ongoing insistence on the significance of motherhood for women and their nations.

[3] Grayzel, "Changing Lives."

Women did not gain or retain access to all professions, and they did not come close to gaining equal pay for comparable work.[4]

While these trends addressed the economic and political circumstances, there were also many societal norms that evolved during this time influencing women. Women's visible appearance changed with many women having shorter hair and choosing shorter skirts or pants. New forms of social interaction between the sexes and across class lines became possible, but expectations about family and domestic life as the main concern of women remained unaltered. [5] Serving the role of host for a variety of functions fell into this category.

Also, it is important to know that from a mood perspective, post-war societies were largely in mourning. The process of rebuilding required the combined efforts of men and women in public, and perhaps even more so in private, to overcome the emotional and physical toll of the war.[6] The conflict between traditionalists and radicals was real and present, though not enough pressure was exerted to allow women continue in their wartime roles. Their achievements and interest in continuing in those roles were overshadowed by the grim cost of the war and the effort to begin healing.[7]

Still, a number of historians have noted that, in reality, there was no going back. "Women had proved what they could do; the war could not have been won without them. They told their daughters and their granddaughters; they were on their way from dependents to citizens. And this is their legacy: future generations could learn of their achievements, their pioneering efforts. This legacy is the backbone of women's

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Adie, "What Did World War I Really Do."

independence and citizenship today."[8] It was in this environment that Willa Cather and Virginia Woolf published their bodies of work, and in this context that their female characters were judged for both their ability to be strong and assertive, as well as feminine and traditional. While they had come of age prior to that, many of their characters were impacted by the war's timing. As Jane Lilienfeld put it:

> "By the time Cather, Colette and Woolf wrote of their mothers, it appeared that with the vote, and wider educational and job options, women were men's equals. Alas, we now know that institutional change must coalesce with a change of heart, for those in power will not relinquish it. But Cather, Colette and Woolf grew into their forties and fifties during a time when it still seemed possible that by their sisterhood, intelligence and united efforts, women could forge new, free lives." [9]

With this mindset evolving in the background, it is no surprise that hospitality played such a prevalent role in each of the works. It was both a signal and a tool that expressed the authors' and characters' progressivism and traditionalism- the fundamental "double" that existed both in society and in modernist literature.

Societal Background

As the history covered above demonstrated, the conclusion of World War 1 brought conflict between the traditional and progressive social perspective. Those who were eager to return to pre-war thinking wanted to preserve society and its sense of propriety. In one of those efforts to codify the societal code and bring the rules of proper society to the masses, Emily Post, otherwise known as Miss Manners published her first

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Jane Lilienfeld, "Re-entering Paradise: Cather, Collette, Woolf and Their Mothers," in *The Lost Tradition Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner (New York: Ungar, 1980), 161.

etiquette book *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics, and at Home* in 1922 (frequently referenced as *Etiquette*) at the age of 50.[10]

Throughout the pages of this book, Emily Post shared the tradition that had graced the homes of the upper echelon in one convenient collection. This book captured information that had been shared in journals serving everyone from professional house staff to women who managed the operations of elaborate estates. As this paper is focused on how the characters in these modernist novels welcomed people into their homes, it is helpful to have context on how those events were treated in this work of the time and competed with every progressive step feminist women had made during and after the war.

This is relevant to this paper as Cather and Woolf portray the women spending considerable time and energy related to making sure that the hospitality that they delivered was done with correct protocol. Their actions related to the order and timing of the evening, the food service, the seating arrangements, and even the conversation for the event. Based on the strong personalities of these female characters, a current reader might hope to see some more blatant feminist behavior. However, it is important to consider that Cather and Woolf's ages, as well as those of their characters, the formality of the society in which they functioned and the perceived implications of their actions, would drive them back to more traditional execution of hosting in their homes. The interesting conversation arise when these actions are put into conversation with their inner dialogue, which often indicated different feelings on both their traditional roles and their motivations.

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[10] Emily Post, *Etiquette* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1922).

To provide some context around this discussion and to demonstrate the detailed and serious nature with which hospitality was treated, the following is an excerpt from Post's 1922 book. The purpose of this excerpt is to establish a feel for the level of anxiety surrounding home-based events and the psychological and sociological pressure pushing against even the strongest female characters, regardless of any feminist perspective they may have:

> THE OLD GRAY WRAPPER HABIT
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> How many times has one heard someone say: "I won't dress for dinner—no one is coming in." Or, "That old dress will do!" Old clothes! No manners! And what is the result? One wife more wonders why her husband neglects her! Curious how the habit of careless manners and the habit of old clothes go together. If you doubt it, put the question to yourself: "Who could possibly have the manners of a queen in a gray flannel wrapper? And how many women really lovely and good—especially good—commit esthetic suicide by letting themselves slide down to where they "feel natural" in an old gray flannel wrapper, not only actually but mentally.
>
> The woman of charm in "company" is the woman of fastidiousness at home; she who dresses for her children and "prinks" for her husband's home-coming, is sure to greet them with greater charm than she who thinks whatever she happens to have on is "good enough." Any old thing good enough for those she loves most! Think of it!
>
> A certain very lovely lady whose husband is quite as much her lover as in the days of his courtship, has never in twenty years allowed him to watch the progress of her toilet, because of her determination never to let him see her except at her prettiest. Needless to say, he never meets anything but "prettiest" manners either. No matter how "out of sorts" she may be feeling, his key in the door is a signal for her to "put aside everything that is annoying or depressing," with the result that wild horses couldn't drag his attention from her—all because neither she nor he has ever slumped into the gray flannel wrapper habit. [11]

[11] Ibid., chap. 36 (Every-Day Manners at Home).

CHAPTER 2

THE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE: WILLA CATHER AND HER FEMALE CHARACTERS

"Willa Cather was born into a family of strong women" establishing personality traits that would guide her own life, as well as create inspiration and patterns in the female characters of whom she wrote.[12] Cather was born in Back Creek Valley, Virginia, on December 7, 1873, the oldest of Charles and Virginia Cather's seven children. When Willa was nine years old, the family relocated to Nebraska along with her maternal grandmother, Rachel Seibert Boak. "Cather's removal from the settled and deeply felt culture of postwar rural northern Virginia to the pioneering prairie of the Nebraska Divide—a sensitive child at a critical age—was in many ways her making as an artist."[13] When the family settled in Red Cloud a year after their big move west, Cather truly embraced both the prairie and the culturally diverse neighbors who exposed her to arts, science and history, feeding the creative and curious young mind. Many of these individuals inspired her characters later in life.

At the age of fifteen, Cather cut off her hair, referred to herself as either "Willie," William, or "Wm" Cather, M.D.,[14] and assumed dressing in a way that identified her more as a male beginning a long and hotly debated discussion of her self-identification,

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[12] Lilienfeld, "Re-entering Paradise," 160.
[13] Robert Thacker, "Willa Cather's Biography," *The Willa Cather Foundation,* accessed 24 Apr. 2017, https://www.willacather.org/willa-cathers-biography.
[14] Ibid.

feminist perspective, and political views. Shortly after that, she graduated from high school, began attending the University of Nebraska where her interests changed from medicine to writing and she began her career as a writer. Her career was punctuated by successes and failures, popularity and disdain, with important relationships in her personal life influencing the twists and turns along the way, as she evolved an individual, a writer, and a presence in the literary world leaving a legacy for others.

The important relationships in Cather's youth influenced both her sense of the women's role in the family and society, as well on hospitality. Cather's relationships with her mother and grandmother were complex. While she did not get along with her mother who "dominated" their house, her mother was an advocate of her college education and even "kept Willa's attic room locked in her absence, thought that space must have been sorely needed in a house full of other children."[15] Her grandmother, however, was always viewed as the more selfless individual who continued to "shoulder all the household and child-care tasks" demonstrated in Cather's story "Old Mrs. Harris", providing Mrs. Cather time to herself, but also making Mrs. Boak the bigger influence on Willa's love of learning and understanding of nurturing.[16]

This idea of nurturing also plays into Cather's impression of hospitality. In her prairie books, she plays particular attention to the welcoming of immigrants (as seen in Damai's dissertation entitled *"*Welcoming Strangers: Hospitality in American Literature and Culture") which mirrored how she felt moving from the southern comforts of Virginia to the unchartered Nebraska prairie. Even in the works used in this paper, you can see the influence of her varied Nebraska neighbors and how the concept of hospitality

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[15] Lilienfeld, "Re-entering Paradise," 162.
[16] See ibid., 161.

was ingrained on Cather based on the comfort she had coming and going from her neighbors' homes. Mrs. Forrester and Mrs. Henshawe's charm, based on their genuine interest in conversation, can be tracked back the hospitality Cather felt as the neighbors' demonstrated interest in and educated her. Mrs Forrester's and Mrs. Henshawe's thirst for good dialogue and desire to be surrounded by those they found interesting, reads much like the adults in young Cather's life who welcomed and nurtured her by engaging her in new ideas along the way.

There is significant literary criticism written on whether or not Cather or her work can and should be considered feminist. Her own teenage period of identifying herself as "William Cather, M.D."[17] where she eschewed position of traditional female behavioral and physical characteristics, fundamentally does not align with feminist perspective. Also, Cather's critique of other women, as though they were outside of herself, was on the severe side. "All in all, women seemed to Cather to use art rather than make it. This is basically the same complaint that Virginia Woolf later made in *A Room of One's Own*, that women used writing as "self-expression" rather than as art. But Cather made it with uncommon ferocity."[18]

Still, before concluding that Cather could not be a feminist, the reader should consider that uncovering Cather's political motives is similar to this paper's effort to explore the blurred line between selfish vs. selfless motives of the female characters. Acocella articulates this idea in *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*, in speaking about the publishing of *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* by Sharon O'Brien:

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[17] Joan Acocella, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 9.
[18] Ibid., 40.

> "Before this, remember, there were two basic approaches to Cather's insufficient feminism: one, write her off; two, claim that behind her unreliable narrators, she was really a feminist. O'Brien came up with a third approach, the reconciliation model. In this scenario, Cather did let women down, but only early on, and only because she was in conflict over a woman, her mother."[19]

The development of a third model is important to this discussion because it helps to create grey space in what had previously been a black and white answer about whether or not Cather was a feminist. This is particularly relevant in applying Cather's perspective and opinion to this analysis, as the female characters providing hospitality, both with and without children, needed to be nurturing in order to be successful- a very traditionally female role. This premise, however, would create room to suppose that Cather's characters seems selfish and unprogressive because she herself had significant baggage stemming from her maternal relationship. In addition, those feelings were compounded by her intense adult relationships, sexual or platonic, with other women who served in caretaking roles. If all of this were true, believing in feminism is not the real question about Cather, but her ability to trust and express it, based on her mixed experiences in having nurturing given and withheld.

Even with that argument, some feminists argued that "conflict was endemic to women writers anyway, for they were torn between the need to tell their own, female story and wish to write something acceptable to the male literary establishment."[20] However, Cather's timing and style as an author, use of male characters, as well as consistency in her own commentary made this larger argument much harder for sympathetic critics to prove, although "exploring opposites in her fiction was perhaps

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[19] Ibid., 51-52.
[20] Ibid., 43.

Cather's method of evaluating, as well as giving equal credence to, both sides of an issue in an effort to unify the opposites into a personal wholeness"[21] It seemed that Cather, herself, searched for "wholeness" throughout her life so it is not hard to imagine why her work and commentary is hard to easily label as well.

While the elusive categorization of Cather and her work persists, it seems fair to say that regardless of whether or not Cather had political agendas she was looking to advance, she was more selfishly interested in writing was what interesting and celebrating life with a level of intricate detail that made her unique. While her books were published in the modernist era and had many of the themes indicative modernist writing, her body of work did not fit the trends of the time, and baffled critics by winning over public appeal.

One aspect of her writing that established this reputation was the character development of Cather's women and the detailed context in which they live, which is very frequently discussed as one of her finest asset. One article, which positions Cather's female characters as "pioneers" includes the following quote from an article about gender and place in *O Pioneers*! and *My Antonia*:

> "And she proceeded to tell those stories with startling precision and accuracy and with special attention to the crucial role of culture and region in the construction of social identities and relationships. Breaking fresh ground is one of the things pioneers do and, with her second novel, Cather laid claim to a narrative space at some remove from the familiar situations and accents of popular fiction. She set her course in the direction of an area of American experience where she felt there had been no adequate or authentic register and where she could employ her talents as "a reporter in fiction."[22]

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[21] Joyce Schanbacher McDonald, "The Incommunicable Past: Willa Cather's Pastoral Modes and the Southern Literary Imagination," (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1994), 7.
[22] David Laird, "Willa Cather 's Women: Gender, Place, and Narrativity in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia,".Digital Commons@University of Nebraska- Lincoln*. Jan 1, 1992. Accessed April 8, 2017.

While these books are not included in this discussion about Cather's work, there are relevant elements to this comment. The female characters being discussed in this paper use hospitality as a part of their exploration of "culture and region" and especially in their application to "social identities and relationships." While it may be overstating to say that being a good host is a groundbreaking endeavor, every "pioneer" is taken out of their comfort zone in search of a new one, much like Cather was. The ability to play the right role in making others feel welcome, and Cather's account of the actions used to achieve that goal, explains a lot about these modernist female characters and their motivations.

The three Willa Cather works that are included in this thesis, from "her great middle period, her tragic period" [23] explore an American perspective on the post-World War 1 woman and how she delivered hospitality in her social circle. Each one of these books reveals a woman in a different economic and societal circumstances and in a different geographic area, demonstrating a range of stories from across the country. Yet, in each of these novels, the lead female character played the role of host and caretaker in their homes while they sought attention and validation from the men they were hosting. The extent to which they were concerned about promoting an outside agenda varied between these books, with *My Mortal Enemy* portraying the most manipulative female character and *The Professor's House* portraying the least, but they all used hospitality to establish standing in both their families and outside communities.

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http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1646&context=greatplainsquarterly.

[23] Acocella, 21.

A Lost Lady

Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*, the earliest of the books being discussed, illustrated how hospitality was a part of the socio-economic growth in the western United States positions of authority in their homes in order to guarantee its superior execution. Mrs. Marion Forrester, the wife of Captain Forrester, was the central character in *A Lost Lady* and was described predominantly through the eyes of Niel Herbert, a young man who grew up in the town of Sweet Water. The Forresters' house was established as "a house well known from Omaha to Denver for its hospitality and for a certain charm of atmosphere" serving as a key landmark as the railroad was developed. While Mr. Forrester played an executive role in the business of the railroad, Mrs. Forrester was a significant character in the culture of the organization as well. Cather further detailed this point as she revealed that while the railroad industry was led by men who had "younger brothers or nephews" rising in the ranks behind them, that it was, Mrs. Forrester, who created that atmosphere as "She was always there, just outside the front door, to welcome their visitors."

Throughout the book, Cather spends considerable detail describing Mrs. Forrester and her actions, as well as the motivations for why making her home a hospitable place was of the highest priority for her. She also was very specific about the blurred lines between conscious actions that created a hospitable environment and the inherent characteristics in Mrs. Forrester that drew people to her home and made them feel comfortable and engaged once they arrived. Part of her success as a host was due to Mrs. Forrester's own charm. "The secret of it, [Niel] supposed, was that she couldn't help

being interested in people, even very commonplace people." From the beginning, Niel asserted that "Mrs. Forrester was a very special kind of person." He also noted "he was proud now that at the first moment he had recognized her as belonging to a different world from any he had ever known." Niel himself confused the personality and the actions that made a home hospitable. He "who had made up his mind that he would never live in a place that was under the control of women, found himself becoming attached to the comforts of a well-conducted house: to the pleasures of the table, to the soft chairs and soft lights and agreeable human voices at the Forresters'."

One reason Niel found the climate at the Forresters' "agreeable" was that there was clear and reliable role clarity in hosting that was determined based on traditional gender roles. Part of Mrs. Forrester's success as a host came from the balance with her husband. Throughout the book, and especially in the scenes that depict the more formal dinner parties, the Captain's role of carving and serving, as well as providing the toast, was firmly established and was not challenged in any way by his wife. He also was chivalrous in his interest in ensuring that his female guests were comfortable around smoke and well-cared for, making their evening as enjoyable as possible. The Captain's hospitality was gracious and without effort, but was also presented as a very straightforward translation of his personality and moral fiber. Being the male, he did not need to use it as a tool for any additional purposes, but was able to assume the role of host, especially with his wife in a complementary role, as an extension of his natural self and charm. Part 1 of the book closes with this sentiment as Niel noted "Both the Captain and his wife came to the door with him, and stood there on the porch together, where he had so often seen them stand to speed the parting guest."

Mrs. Forrester, however, had a more deliberate approach which was very clear to the reader. Although it was true that Mrs. Forrester possessed charm and hospitable grace, she wielded significant authority and strength. There was irony in that, however, since it was the withholding of her charm and hospitality that gave her one of her most powerful tools to control the people around her. This doubleness was a concept seen throughout the book and frequently in modernist literature. She demonstrated this very early in the novel when she asked Ivy Peters "Will you wait on the porch, please?" in the same encounter in which she was taking care of a young, injured Niel Herbert in her home. Even later in the novel when Captain Forrester became ill, "when any of the housewives from the town came to call, she met them in the parlour, chatted with them in the smiling, careless manner they could never break through, and they got no further." These events and assorted others throughout the novel reminded the reader that while Mrs. Forrester's charm was significant, it was not without boundaries and certainly not guaranteed when she did not believe it to be earned. Her acts of hospitality, much like her charm, had a sense of duality serving as a shield from the aspects of her life and home she was disinterested in sharing.

These encounters were sharp reminders to the reader that there were several priorities as to why Mrs. Forrester was so hospitable. The first reason, a practical one, was that given the time period in which the booked was published, it was her most effective tool to capitalize on her charming personality, as well involve herself in her husband's professional endeavors. It is what allowed her to justifiably interact with the assortment of successful men that traveled through the town, showering gifts and attention on her. The second reason was that Mrs. Forrester's hospitality allowed her to

indulge two different sides of her personality. The first was the aspect explored above; it demonstrated her more assertive side and allowed her authority to run her house in a way that showcased her charm and positioned she and her husband as important socio-political individuals. The second side of her personality, which became clearer as the story evolved, was that having company, especially male guests, gave Mrs. Forrester the attention she craved, both to validate her insecurities as an eternally young and beautiful woman, but also as an individual who flourished and was energized by social settings. These differing sides of her personality created the great internal conflict in the book and influenced Mrs. Forrester's decisions, actions, and the perceptions of her as reported by Niel throughout the story.

As a reader would imagine, there is inconsistency in Niel's accounts of Mrs. Forrester as he matured, but the significant detail that he revealed was that as he became of age, so did Mrs. Forrester- "And even she, alas! grew older." Both the changes in her own appearance and the changes in the economic climate in Sweet Water, took their toll on Mrs. Forrester. Cather was able to drive this evolution home in a number of ways and drew sharp comparisons to her younger, social self. For example, when she was visited by Cyrus Dalzell, president of the Colorado & Utah, he brought news from Denver and the acknowledgement that her social circles continued without her. This was a reminder of what she had been like before her husband was sick and they lost their money. Her charm and zest for life, the core of her self-worth and her pride in being hospitable, eroded as she aged and she became bored as a full-time resident of Sweet Water who had an affair that came to an abrupt end and spent her days caring for a sick husband.

As a result of these changes in Mrs. Forrester's life and the wall that she had built around herself, Niel "had that feeling, which he never use to have, that her lightness cost her something." On this count, Niel's observation was very correct. Even his young male perspective assessed that "When women began to talk about still feeling young, didn't it meant that something had broken?" There are several examples of how Mrs.Forrester's dealings with both men and women changed, but the plot adds importance to the specific transition in how she began to make allowances for Ivy Peters. Without comfort of money and the security of her position in society, Mrs. Forrester's hospitality took on a new tone. Gone was the charm associated with her delivery and instead, was replaced by a level of anxiety and almost frivolous behavior. Still, she clung to the right "order" of things and when Ivy Peter suggested "maybe you could give me some lunch, to save time," she responded "Very well, then; I invite you to lunch. We dine at one." When prompted as to why she would tolerate this behavior, Mrs. Forrester's anxiety became clearer and she implored that "we have to get along with Ivy Peters, we simply have to!"

After the Captain died, Mrs. Forrester handed over her legal and business affairs to Ivy Peters, a move that perplexed the Captain's old friends and elicited the sentiment of "Poor lady! So misguided." Still, even Niel did not intervene as his feelings had changed, as she herself had "seemed to have lost her faculty for discrimination; her power of easily and graciously keeping everyone in his proper place." Mrs. Forrester was dismissive of gossip about Ivy Peter's constant presence at her home and what she believed to be gracious hospitality was perceived in town as the scandalous demise of a former community pillar. She justified her behavior as contributing by doing "something for the boys of this town." She explained to Niel that she would "hate to see them

growing up like savages, when all they need is a civilized house to come to, and a woman to give them a few hints." The ability to charm businessmen and add to the culture of a growing economy had long escaped her, so she clung to the hope of having self-worth by being charming, even to an undeserving crowd of young men.

The final dinner party that Niel attended at Mrs. Forrester's house cemented several important points about her motivation and how being hospitable grounded her in her need for attention. While the Captain was alive and Mrs. Forrester was young and vibrant, their life and her role energized her making her hospitality enjoyable for her and her guests. She received positive reinforcement while partnering gracefully with her husband and the outcome made guests feel welcome and wanted. Niel noted at this dinner that "she was not eating anything, she was using up all of her vitality to electrify these heavy lads into speech." With the wrong circumstances and without a sense of purpose, it was a drain. Still, it was clear in her retelling of the story of how she had met the Captain that she could rise to occasion again and be a strong contributing half of a couple where she could deliver a brilliant experience, but for now "all those who had shared in the fine undertakings and bright occasions were gone."

In the end, Niel was indignant with her for still "preferring life on any terms" and not aging gracefully by fading into the past with the rest of that dying generation. Instead she drifted into a sordid relationship with Ivy Peters, lost any mystique of being special, and confirmed for those who had known her that they were wrong to have believed "it was Mrs. Forrester who made that house different from any other." Yet, at the very end of the book, Cather changed the lesson learned for the reader and added one last important insight about Mrs. Forrester (and at that point remarried, and now Mrs.

Collins). While the entire story had been built on the idea that selfishly or selflessly, Mrs. Forrester had been providing hospitality for the care of others, it was at the end that it was revealed that the true ability to be hospitable had stemmed from being well cared for herself and everything she did was merely a mirror of what she herself needed in order not to be lost.

My Mortal Enemy

Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy* depicts another strong woman who used hospitality to move her social and political aspirations forward. It is revealed at the very beginning of this story that Mrs. Myra Henshawe scandalously eloped with her husband from Parthia, Illinois at a young age, shunned the inheritance she would have received has she stayed in Illinois with her uncle, and moved to New York, where the Henshawes built their life. This story was narrated from the perspective of a coming-of-age female cousin, Nellie Birdseye, and included both the details of Mrs. Henshawe's adult life, as well as the on-going commentary and speculation of the family about whether she ever regretted the loss of her inheritance. Both Mrs. Henshawe's perspective on that decision and the actions she had to take subsequently colored the characters in the story, the plot established and the tone in which it was told. Being hospitable was a key action that was used to adjudicate her success throughout the novel.

As has been established for that time period, there were certain expectations of what women were to accomplish as hosts and guests and Mrs. Henshawe was no exception. However, it was clear from the beginning of this story that the reader was to believe that, based on what she gave up, Mrs. Henshawe would always be at a

disadvantage and would be using hospitality to both prove publically how much she and her husband were meant to be together, as well as to advance their social and economic standing which needed to be built in New York. Balancing her need to create this image of success, with the desire to host people with whom she felt more connected, created great internal conflict for Mrs. Henshawe. Their apartment was seen as "a place where light-heartedness and charming manners lived" but was a complex environment struggling to be many things to one woman.

As Nellie accounted for her social engagements, Mrs. Henshawe's friends fell into one of two categories. The first were the "artistic people" who she preferred. The others were "another group whom she called her 'moneyed' friends (she seemed to like the word), and these she cultivated, she told (Nellie) on Oswald's account." Mrs. Henshawe's engagement with these individuals was motivated by the fact that her husband would only work hard if he had "friends" and these were the people with whom he worked. It was clear that Mrs. Henshawe understood the proper protocol for being called upon and calling on others, yet it was clear to the young narrator that this was neither enjoyable nor social for her. Her contribution to her family's economic success, and therefore her motivation, was being hospitable to these "moneyed" friends.

However, when looking at these exchanges from the perspective of those 'moneyed' friends, it seemed as if Mrs. Henshawe was not all that hospitable and maintained the upper hand in these somewhat stressful encounters. Like Marian Forrester, Myra Henshawe's inherent ability to be hospitable stemming directly from her own "spark of zest and wild humour". It was also clear, however that she could be equally as disquieting and withholding of charm. It was noted that "some of the women

were quite afraid of her" and they "looked troubled when she refused anything." She was also observed as finding humor in inappropriate and unfortunate circumstances. Even a narrator predisposed to be biased in liking Mrs. Henshawe was clear that while Mrs. Henshawe brought palpable energy to the rooms she was in, it as a conscious choice whether her lighter side and charm would be evident or if she would only display her more guarded self in a hospitable social world.

Throughout *My Mortal Enemy*, it was clear that most of Mrs. Henshawe's hospitality was selfish in nature, and referred to as "insane ambition", although she claimed it was for benefit of her husband. Her pronouncement that "it's very nasty, being poor!" informed the reader that love did not conquer all, and that her material needs were the reason she was hospitable. It was either to keep her entertained, if her artistic friends, or to keep their place in society. Yet, Cather allows Nellie's comments to divulge the other aspect and softer side of this selfishness saying Myra's "chief extravagance was in caring for so many people, and in caring for them so much." She also made it clear that Mrs. Henshawe had loyalty to Oswald, even forsaking a friend who was not there in a time of need. In the most compelling of scenes at the Henshawe's new year's eve party, Nellie found the balance of these traits when she observed:

> "For many years I associated Mrs. Henshawe with that music, thought of that aria as being mysteriously related to something in her nature that one rarely saw, but nearly always felt; a compelling, passionate, overmastering something for which I had no name, but which was audible, visible in the air that night, as she sat crouching in that shadow."

While the motivation for Mrs. Henshawe's hospitality, and the internal conflict that evolved was clear, there is also good opportunity to note how much of her personal style and delivery of hospitality resulted from the public perspective of her marriage. When

Nellie first observed the dynamic between Myra and Oswald Henshawe, it was clear that "his presence gave her a lively personal pleasure. I was not accustomed to that kind of feeling in people long married." And yet, when she inquired to her aunt, they were described as "As happy as most people" which was disappointing given the sacrifices Myra had made to marry Oswald. Nellie still felt that "He had a pleasant way of giving his whole attention to a young person. He 'drew one out' better than his wife had done, because he did not frighten one so much." which directly reflected the relationship Cather had with her father and the special bond they shared in contrast to her overbearing mother. It was concluded, however, that ultimately Mr. Henshawe's life did not suit him and there was both subtle and direct attention to the outside interests and company of women that he needed to feel complete. While they struggled as a couple, together they proved to make good hosts and present Mrs. Henshawe as considerably more hospitable.

Years later when Nellie next encountered Myra and Oswald on the West-coast in "an apartment-hotel, wretchedly built and already falling to pieces, although it was new" their hospitality was already less of a gentile topic, as indicated by the mere description of taking meals at "an indifferent restaurant on the ground floor". It was clear that proper hosting and hospitality would no longer play a role in the Henshawes' charm or mystique and it seemed tragic that all of the engineered socializing did not save them from falling into "temporary eclipse." However, even as an ill, older woman with none of her creature comforts, Myra's hospitality still spoke to her conflicted personality and the extremes of her selfish and selfless personas. Nellie noted she had become "a witty and rather wicked old woman, who hated life for its defeats and loved it for its absurdities." Myra still

hosted Nellie and “she took great pains to get her tea nicely; it made her feel less shabby to use her own silver tea things”.

Sadly, Myra Henshawe’s motivation to be hospitable, both her selfish and selfless reasons, did not serve her well in the end. Her primary goal was to prove that she and Oswald were successful and happy, and in the end she proclaimed they were neither. In her final significant comments prior to dying she said:

> “We were never really happy. I am a greedy, selfish, worldly woman; I wanted success and a place in the world. Now I’m old and ill and a fright, but among my own kind I’d still have my circle; I’d have courtesy from people of gentle manners, and not have my brains beaten out by hoodlums. Go away, please, both of you, and leave me!”

The greatest pleasure that she gained from socializing and hosting events like her new year’s party was to enjoy the company of the artistic community and those who shared her passion for culture. At the end of her life, while she still enjoyed the simple joys of a poem, classical music and the sea air she still proclaimed that “I find I don’t miss clever talk, the kind I always used to have about me, when I can have silence. It’s like cold water poured over fever.” Myra’s perspective was filled with regret and disdain, feeling cursed to know “Why must I die like this, along with my mortal enemy?”

Interestingly enough to Nellie and the readers, Myra’s opinion was not shared by her husband. Describing her at the very end as a person capable of “generous friendships”, Mr. Henshawe understood that her hospitality demonstrated the care of those she genuinely loved and to whom she was loyal. While often her hospitable nature was a practiced act for political reasons, he acknowledged that the true root of it- empathy and caring for others- could hardly have been achieved by someone selfish and unhappy. He recalled their marriage as a positive shared relationship, confirming that

maybe her description that "people can be lovers and enemies at the same time" might have been true, but only from the eye of the beholder. Mr. Henshawe's version of hospitality was kinder and gentler than Mrs. Henshawe' and in the end it may have seemed their traditional gender roles were reversed. He would have never envisioned her as his mortal enemy, but a partner with whom he shared hosting and happiness over a lifetime.

In both of these Cather books discussed, there is a similar thread of what occurs when an aging woman clings to the lifestyle and charm that brought people to her home in search of her company and hospitality. Mrs. Forrester and Mrs. Henshawe share very similar paths in terms of using their own charm on their own terms to be hospitable, as well as leveraging their husbands to create a welcoming image in their homes. As they aged, the charm and grace eroded to reveal anxious and bitter women who were not personally satisfied, despite the previous acknowledgement that, at their core, both women were genuinely interesting in people are caregiving, the core of good hospitality.

The Professor's House

Although the plot is quite different, the reader can see many of these themes in another of Willa Cather's works, *The Professor's House*. Written just two years after *A Lost Lady* (1923) and just before *My Mortal Enemy* (1925) this novel's leading female character, Mrs. Lillian St. Peter shares a level of anxiety seen by both Mrs. Forrester and Mrs. Henshawe. There is however, a marked difference in why this anxiety is present and how the interactions of the entire St Peter family impact the manifestation of that anxiety. The first section of *The Professor's House*, entitled "The Family", demonstrates a

significant perspective on how hospitality is delivered in the home and the motivation for it. However, it is different from Cather's previously discussed works because Mrs. St Peter's has the dichotomy of a growing extended family structure from which to derive satisfaction, yet an equally growing lack of self-confidence as her husband's own mindset caused him to emotionally withdraw from their marriage.

From the perspective of providing a welcoming environment, Cather establishes at the beginning of this novel that being hospitable was not a priority for Professor Godfrey St. Peter. Describing his old house as " it was almost as ugly as it is possible for a house to be" sets the stage for the solitary activity that he is planning in that home. His new house, however, was designed to receive guests and, from the first scene established there, provided contrast to Cather's other works, because it was clear that this couple did not share the sense of responsibility for being good hosts. Mrs. St. Peter's opening lines establish that her husband had grown both "intolerant" and a "poor judge" of his own inhospitable behavior as she urged him to behave appropriately. The following morning began with the scornful question of "How can you let yourself be ungracious in your own house?"

This initial conflict establishes a pattern in the story for Professor St. Peter to take a retrospective look at his wife and to explore what happened to their relationships over time. It also gives the reader insight into how their relationship impacted her motivation to be hospitable in the present. While the other Cather books presented the conversation about aging more chronologically, this novel allowed Cather to take a more nostalgic look at how time impacted the St. Peters' marital relations, and these characters as individuals, both emotionally and physically. In this story, the emotional distance in their

relationship largely created Mrs. St. Peter's motivation to provide solitary hospitality to their children and friends. It was clear that this was almost exclusively to provide her with a sense of personal satisfaction and a sense of purpose as she aged.

Professor St. Peter struggled with their emotional distance as well, but had no motivation to rectify it. He felt that "people who are intensely in love when they marry, and who go on being in love, always meet with something which suddenly or gradually makes a difference." He was aware that his relationship with his student, Tom Outland, had been the cause of the initial chasm in his marriage, and had caused his wife to be jealous. However, he felt that this was just the natural order of things and that, while Tom's presence was a valid reason to begin this separation, the results were as inevitable as his wife's aging, which also tarnished his image of her. He felt justified in being less enamored of the woman he had fallen in love with years earlier. "Before his marriage, and for years afterward, Lillian's prejudices, her divinations about people and art (always instinctive and unexplained, but nearly always right), were the most interesting things in St. Peter's life." Now, life had moved on and he perceived her to be changed, as was he.

For Mrs. St. Peter, however, this outcome was not as inevitable and was hopeful that she could still steer her husband towards more active engagement in their marriage and in their family life, even as their daughters' married and began families of their own. To her, this was all a part of the process and her version of the natural order. She still sought the companionship of her husband and felt comfortable with their relationship having life stages, yet her husband's lack of engagement left her lonely and isolated. This issue, compiled with her daughters being married and moving on to have lives of their own, created a level of anxiety in Mrs. St. Peter that led to her primary reason for her on-

going hospitality and continued caretaking of not just her daughters, but now their husbands as well. Her own sense of value and self-worth were tied to her ability to create a welcoming environment in a new home in which she was essentially alone.

In the "doubleness" that often exists in modernist literature, it was often when Mrs. St. Peter was not physically alone and was creating this welcoming environment for her sons-in-law did Professor St. Peter even notice her enduring charm. In one scene he observed her appearance and thought "She wouldn't have made herself look quite so well if Louis hadn't been coming, he reflected. Or was it that he wouldn't have noticed it if Louie hadn't been there? A man long accustomed to admire his wife in general, seldom pauses to admire her in a particular gown or attitude, unless his attention is directed to her by the appreciative gaze of another man."

Professor St. Peter identifies his wife's relationship with their sons-in-law as "coquetry" and he was "amused" by it. From a feminist perspective, his assessment of her actions was patronizing and dismissive, consistent with the earlier discussion of Cather being separate from the women she was critiquing. As he reconciled his own feelings about her actions, he took no responsibility for his role in assuaging them or engaging her differently. The most relevant passage to this point reads:

> "Yes, with her sons-in-law she had begun the game of being a woman all over again. She dressed for them, planned for them, schemed in their interests. She has begun to entertain more than for years past- the new house made a plausible pretext- and to use her influence and charm in the little anxious social world of Hamilton. She was intensely interested in the success and happiness of these two young men, living in their careers as she had once done in his. It was splendid, St. Peter told himself. She wasn't going to have to face a stretch of boredom between being a young woman and being a young grandmother. She was less intelligent and more sensible than he had thought her."

This text summarizes largely the role that hospitality and being hospitable played in the life of Mrs. St. Peter as she aged. She and her husband were no longer intellectually-stimulating counterparts and co-hosts and she needed to move on in order to find value and self-worth herself. His interpretation of this being "sensible" spoke to his sexist perspective of what traditional female roles should be and how they are at odds with "intelligent" women, but yet he only selfishly factored his own emotional status into his analysis, completely ignoring her needs. As he noted, she had found motivation from renewed attention from her sons-in-law and this quelled the anxiety she was experiencing both as an aging woman and someone who had been shut out of the conversation with their life partner.

Together they lament this entire process of aging and the evolution of their relationship when Professor and Mrs. St. Peter are by themselves at the opera in Chicago. St Peter observed about her "how young mood could return and soften a face." He told his wife "it's been a mistake, our having a family and writing histories and getting middle-aged." He wanted to tell her "how much more lovely she was when she wasn't doing her duty!" While she agreed with him, she resigned herself that "one must go on living" and they both acknowledged the separation that began with Tom Outland and continued the grow over time as they aged. Despite it all, Mrs. St. Peter still seemed hopeful that the attention that needed and partnership she craved would come from her husband. She, too, was nostalgic for the time when they were young and in love and certainly seemed to be motivated by the desire to recapture that more so that capturing the attention of the younger generation. It was clear that her attention towards her sons-in-law was a replacement, but most likely not her first choice.

In exploring the motivation and Mrs. St. Peter's persona, there are several important aspects that a reader could compare and contrast with Cather's other female characters. The first is that it does not seem that Mrs. St. Peter has an overwhelming need or desire to influence the thoughts or opinions of those outside of her family unit. The Professor referenced Hamilton's community in the passage above, but the plot develops no particular issue or concern for which Mrs. St. Peter was lobbying. While she certainly engages her guests and many in her husband's academic community, she is not positioning him or their family for a different economic status or political gain. Her pursuit is largely to preserve an existing family dynamic and to feel needed and involved, instead of creating something new. This lack of political motivation is very consistent with historical knowledge of Cather's disinterest or negative feelings towards politics.

The second important contrast to consider is how much of Mrs. St. Peter's sense of hosting and hospitality is a part of her being positioned as a mother and a caretaker to her daughters. While she is now "hosting" dinners with their husbands, the fact remained that she had been feeding them for their entire lives. Mrs. Forrester's and Mrs. Henshawe's lack of children created a different dynamic in that everyone who entered their home was a guest, and while Mrs. St. Peter had a new house which had never been home to her daughters, there would always been a different sense of familiarity. Her interest to being a good host to their husbands, however, is different and provided a new challenge, as well as people to charm and impress. The reader also now has an opportunity to compare and contrast the St. Peters' relationship with the marriages of their daughters to see if those younger women were already or might someday experience the anxiety that their mother faced. Much of this observation could stem from Cather

feeling a lack of being cared for by her own mother, and yet observing the relationship her maternal grandmother had with her father. While there is nothing in these sources noted on their interaction, based on how both interacted with Cather, this could have been a model that Cather had seen growing up.

The idea of whether or not one "hosts" one's own children creates a slightly different comparison to the other female characters in the ability to assess whether Mrs. St. Peter's actions were more selfish or selfless. In looking more closely at the relationship she developed with her sons-in-law, a reader could make the argument that she was helping her daughters, as she always had. Much of the scheming, entertaining, and coddling of these younger men could have ostensibly been for the benefit of the daughters' marriages and helping to bolster the egos and careers of these young men. Yet, a reader could argue that there is something selfish about wanting to charm the daughters' husbands. While there was really no malicious intent or competition with her daughters, the need to have their attention and to seek praise and admiration from them could be construed as a selfish motivator to be such a good host. In actuality, the answer is that it was probably good for the psyche of both the young men and for Mrs. St. Peter, as well as easing some of the emotional burden from her daughters. Providing a comfortable environment in which the family could spend time, visit with guests and explore these new adult relationships was beneficial to everyone except the Professor. Unfortunately, as the narrator of this story, that dynamic was not illustrated in detail.

The third comparison to Cather's other female characters is how the women's own natural beauty and choices in clothes, hairstyle and jewelry influenced men's perception of what kind of host they are. Professor St. Peter's mere observation of his

wife's "always such nice hands" when pouring him coffee added to her ability to host, the way that Mrs. Forrester's dangling earrings added sparkle to her already-sparkling personality. Even Mrs. Henshawe's "curl about the corners of her mouth that was never there when she was with people who personally charmed her" worked in reverse and could withdraw her good host status instantaneously upon sight. In all of Cather's works, the conversation about skin complexion, hair, and general appearance are inextricably mingled with the assessment of good hosting and the more natural grace and beauty were present, the more hospitable one was agreed to be. Even Mrs. Forrester, who was well-known in that "she was attractive in dishabille, and she knew it" was given this qualifier when she had youth on her side. In each of these books, the older the woman got and the less her natural beauty seemed evident, the harder it was to maintain the qualities of good hosts. It is also noted that these observations may have been evidence of Cather's admiration of women, although the evidence falls short of confirming she was a lesbian.[24]

In summary, Cather's female characters have striking similarities and differences in both their behaviors and motivations that reflect the influences in Willa Cather's life, as well as the modernist period. Each of these women delivers hospitality in a meaningful way, but their motivations and degrees of selfishness change the how welcome they make people feel overall. Knowledge of these characters is useful prior to putting Cather into conversation with Virginia Woolf.

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[24] See Acocella, 55-58.

CHAPTER 3

THE BRITISH PERSPECTIVE: VIRGINIA WOOLF AND HER FEMALE CHARACTERS

While Willa Cather's work has been debated as to its feminist merits, Virginia Woolf's feminist perspective has often been the cornerstone of the discussion of her work. Her views on opportunities for women, as well as a variety of other topics, were shaped by the structured home in which she grew up. Adeline Virginia Stephen was born in London in January 1882 to parents Leslie Stephen and Julia Duckworth Stephen. This was a second marriage for both parents, so Virginia grew up in a family with a total of eight siblings, four of whom were children from this marriage and the other four were half siblings from the previous marriages.

The most noted traits of Virginia's mother were her striking beauty and her dedication to caring for her family, "generally feeling men needed to be protected, while women can take care of themselves. She did not choose her daughter Virginia."[25] Nevertheless, the premature and sudden death of her mother in 1895 changed life considerably for Virginia, and also created a significant divergence in Woolf's life from Cather's rebellion from all things feminine. Without her mother to coddle the delicate ego of her father (her parents serving as the models for Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*), Virginia and her sister were thrust into the early position of providing the

[25] Lilienfeld, "Re-entering Paradise," 170.

emotional support that he had previously needed from his wife. This formative time created strong feelings for Woolf about her father. Her attitude toward her father alternated, as she herself described it between 'passionate affection….passionate hatred.'"[26] Many sources confirmed that her mother's passing, the difficult relationship with her father, and then the death of her sister, led to a troubled time for Virginia and the beginning of the psychological issues that plagued her until her death in 1941.

Much like her feelings about her father, Virginia Woolf's life story took on its own version of the "doubleness" frequently seen in her literature. Very different from Cather who lived and expressed herself as she was so moved, especially in her teenage years, Woolf's family upbringing necessitated her have a highly developed social demeanor regardless of her own feelings. On the surface, Leslie Stephen's family functioned as a part of gentile society, although behind closed doors his stepson was sexually molesting Virginia and her sister.[27] To the outside world, however, Virginia was raised as a proper socialite with breeding, whose responsibilities including attending and hosting parties, in addition to caring for her father.

As Angela Insegna's dissertation explores, "that Virginia Woolf loved parties is not a state secret"[28] and her own love for good conversation, while maintaining an active distaste for boring social events can be seen in many of her stories. Yet, there is also considerable evidence that when Virginia was introduced to London society, she was "more interested in reading than chattering with people who 'laugh at the things one cares

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[26] Thomas S. W. Lewis, "Virginia Woolf's Sense of the Past," *Salmagundi* 68/69 (1985): 192.
[27] See ibid., 190.
[28] Angela Suzanne Insegna, "Looking Together United Them: The Party at Play in Virginia Woolf's Canon" (Ph.D. diss,. Auburn University, 2004), 1.

about." [29] The intersection of Woolf "the intellectual" and Woolf "the socialite", as well as her extreme feelings about achieving accuracy in both arenas, demonstrates "Woolf's critical engagement with the snobbish attention to manners and propriety inherited from her parents."[30]

When a reader attempts to explain Woolf's feelings on either of these topics or find the chronology of events through her work, it is clear that she "never set down her ideas about the past in any systematic fashion which we might term a 'philosophy.'"[31] As a result, readers and critics can see a blend of the real characters in her life, as well as the different sides of her personality in all forms of her work- novels, essays, letters, etc. For example, "*To the Lighthouse* enabled Woolf the novelist to conform her own past in much the same way her fictional artist does." Mrs. Ramsay is widely interpreted as a version of Virginia's mother serving as "the woman who has given her husband solace, made his barrenness fertile once again, renewed his strength; the woman who sought to dominate and control the lives of her children and guest, to marry everyone off, and to satisfy her own desire through these unions."[32] Understanding Virginia Woolf's initial female role model and the complex web of selfish and selfless ways she served others is a key to deciphering Woolf's novels. Couple that motivation with Woolf's own staunch interpretation of how an individual properly hosts others and it is easy to determine why Woolf's novels are a part of this exploration of hospitality and modernist literature.

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[29] Lewis, "Virginia Woolf's Sense of the Past," 189.
[30] Sean Latham, "*Am I a Snob?": Modernism and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 90.
[31] Lewis, "Virginia Woolf's Sense of the Past," 186.
[32] Ibid., 192.

The feminist perspective that Virginia Woolf brought to her work, as well as feminist interpretations of her work, also helps determine a deeper understanding of what hospitality means to her female characters. The first important influence to explore is Woolf's opinion of marriage. Noting the disparity in her parents' marriage, she had well-established thoughts on what a woman sacrifices to be a good wife, which translated to the lives of both Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay. Woolf's impression was that much of the heavy lifting in both the physical and emotional aspects of a relationship became the work of the wife, which would translate directly to how comfortable family and strangers felt in a woman's home. It also meant that women did not have the time and energy to pursue what was interesting to them, forgoing that to be good hosts.

Still, when Leonard Woolf proposed to her, Virginia wrote:

> "We both of us want a marriage that is a tremendous living thing, always alive, always hot, not dead and easy in parts as most marriages are. We ask a great deal of life, don't we? Perhaps we shall get it; then, how splendid!"[33]

This thought indicated, despite her trepidations, her personal hopes for her own marriage, despite her fear of intimacy and her perceived limits for women once married. Woolf explored these limits (or perhaps, more accurately, the freedoms that single women enjoy) more broadly where "in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf imagines the fate of Shakespeare's equally brilliant sister Judith. Unable to gain access to the all-male stage of Elizabethan England, or to obtain any formal education, Judith would have been forced to

[33] Mitchell Leaska, ed. *The Virginia Woolf Reader (*Orlando, FL: A Harvest Book-Harcourt Inc.,1984), 348.

marry and abandon her literary gifts or, if she had chosen to run away from home, would have been driven to prostitution."[34]

This applied logic, which might seem hyperbolic, is more realistic than one would hope and in a closer reading, is akin to the justification of American writer Emily Post. Post dictated that acting with decorum and maintaining a socially acceptable lifestyle was the only way to honor your family and safely avoid personal ruin. Woolf's suggested situation implies also that a female, even with Shakespeare's talent, would have had to put service to a husband and family first. This fundamental unfairness can be seen in many of Woolf's works as she struggled to find satisfaction on behalf of her female characters.

While Woolf further articulates aspects of male-female relationships that are unfair, she also addresses the difference in male and female perspective. As Woolf wrote in "Women in Fiction" in 1929, "when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter values-- to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important."[35] This particular quote could be applied broadly, but is relevant in the works explored here for two reasons. The first reason is related to the pursuit of delivering hospitality and making people feel welcome. So often the acts associated with good hospitality seem insignificant, yet makes all of the difference. The following sections will explore that idea in Woolf's work, but it can also

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[34] Jessica Svendsen and Pericles Lewis, "Virginia Woolf," *The Modernist Lab at Yale University,* accessed April 8, 2017, https://modernism.research.yale.edu/wiki/index.php/Virginia_Woolf.

[35] Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction," in *Granite and Rainbow* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960).

be seen in Cather's work. In *A Lost Lady*, imperceptible acts acclimate Niel to the niceties of good hospitality, but he could never articulate the details that made them so.

The second reason Woolf's comment is relevant to this discussion is that in both Woolf books discussed below, the husband and wife have difficulty communicating, and only through the lens of the reader can one hear the whole conversation. The key scenes between husbands and wives, and the ones that would allow the readers to best understand if the woman feels needed and validated by her husband, all exhibit this particular challenge. Whether they mean to be dismissive or manipulative or are doing some unknowingly, the spouses negate each other's idea of what is important and significant. Woolf refers to this as "altering values", but essentially she is saying that there is a desire to re-evaluate what the traditional male values. Both of these reasons justify much of the selfless behavior of the women in these novels. They aim to provide service that their husbands and guests may not even notice and continue to do it despite the fact that they are not being validated in a way that resonates with them, especially as they aged.

This analysis might lead the reader to believe that Woolf's feminist thought, influenced by observations of her mother, led her to create unfilled female characters as a way of exerting effort to re-establish new values and make judgement statements about hospitality. However, a reader cannot ignore aspects of Woolf's life that would have indicated there are parts of, not just her mother, but herself in these female characters who loved these events. Her own earlier-mentioned passion for good parties and respect for the well-heeled, helps to explain where Woolf's own motivations would have proved more selfish in her motivation for providing good hospitality. "Her late-life Memoir

Club confession is not entirely tongue-in cheek, when she admits to the attractions of the landed aristocracy: 'I want coronets, but they must be old coronets; coronets that carry land with them and country houses'[36]. 274). While critics know they can see Woolf's mother in Mrs. Ramsay, the reader can also see Virginia in Mrs. Dalloway and in Cam, as well.

In addition to the literary critiques dedicated to exploring Woolf's feminist perspective, there is also significant notice of how Woolf's work vividly and frequently speaks to the horrors and aftermath of World War 1. While Cather's work certainly alludes to the war and both the political and economic aftermath, much of her work is focused on the economic growth of the western part of the United States, which was closer to her passions. Woolf's work much more clearly aligned with the modernist articulation of hopelessness and despair after the worst had happened. It is possible that this trend is clearer in Woolf's work as World War 1 was significantly more devastating for Great Britain. Between the number of casualties, the economic impact, and the physically war-torn areas of Europe that Woolf would have been familiar with, it would have been harder to write about the positives and new opportunities than it would have been in the United States. Yet, with the weight of the war still on everyone's mind, Woolf was able to paint clear pictures of women continuing to deliver hospitality to their guests for a variety of reasons and with mixed results.

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[36] L. K. Schroder, "The Lovely Wreckage of the Past': Virginia Woolf and the English Country House," *English* 55 (2006): 274.

Mrs. Dalloway

Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* sets the scene perfectly for a female character to demonstrate her attempt to influence the world around her, as well as express her herself, using hospitality in the home. From the very first line of this novel declaring that "she would buy the flowers herself", Clarissa Dalloway uses her party to assert her authority, independence, and personality. Much like the other women discussed earlier in this work, Clarissa strived to find a place for herself in a new post-World War 1 world where the gender roles, politics and socializing have all changes, as she herself continued to age. Throughout the entirety of this novel, Woolf used Clarissa's party almost as a character of its own to interact with Clarissa Dalloway and her world around her. As this story takes place over one day completely dedicated to the preparation of a party that evening, Woolf creates a push and pull of the serious and the indulgent that allows the reader to draw conclusions about Clarissa, as well as her relationship with her husband, daughter, and assorted people in their social hierarchy. It also becomes a vehicle for which she interacts with a former romantic interest, Peter Walsh, who has returned to London after five years. Although not quite "a stranger," this unexpected visitor adds a different and estranging aspect to the party that amplifies how Woolf can use that event to make Clarissa feel both young and old, visible and invisible and relevant and irrelevant at the same time.

Each of these relationships allowed the reader to explore Clarissa's motivation for giving this party, as well as the ongoing series of parties for which she was well-known. Her motivation is complex and vacillates throughout the course of the day, but demonstrates that she has a number of internal and external forces pushing her to host

this party. First, there is much evidence that Clarissa used her social standing as a way to influence politics, although she did not hold any type of political office. Despite the fact that her husband was always running off to a "committee" meeting of some variety, Clarissa did not interact in official meetings, yet reminisced about how she had aspired to "reform the world". Inspired by her childhood friend, Sally, she was eagerly swept into the possibility that they were "meant to found a society to abolish private property" and spent hours talking about this and other ideals. This look back at these earlier conversations, although not a key to Clarissa's personality now, was one that "shifts in economic and social power were quietly acknowledged by Woolf."[37]

In the present, those ideals were long gone and she had been relegated to serving primarily in the supportive role as Mrs. Dalloway, wife of Richard, by hosting the Prime Minister and other important officials at parties in her home. What she noted in the outside world and her dedication to her husband provided her with a selfless motivation to create positive impact. By bringing influential people to her home and allowing them to socialize, Clarissa provided a medium for which they could continue their work, plus set an example of what society should look like. Her time spent walking through London made her keenly aware of the changes since the war had ended, yet she also desperately clung to more traditional rules of society and how hospitality should be delivered, even in the face of adversity and change. It was clear that Clarissa felt that, in "the tradition of public service", which she attributed to the Dalloway name, these parties were her contribution to upholding society and creating an environment to move political agendas for the men who made them.

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[37] Ibid., 267.

There was, however, equal if not more evidence that Clarissa's motivation could be perceived as selfish, as she was searching for attention and validation. While Mrs. Dalloway's party takes place in the last pages of the book, throughout the story Clarissa struggles with her own identity as both Clarissa, the independent woman, and Mrs. Dalloway, Richard's wife and Elizabeth's mother. When she described herself, she noted that "she has the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown." She also knew that she felt "very young; at the same time unspeakably aged." Much of Clarissa's solitary time leading up to her party was very focused on these senses. Repeatedly she commented on how she no longer knew who she was as an individual and had no real role in her own life. Her party allowed her to have a sense of control and decision making, when everything else seemed to be out of her hands.

Similar to *The Professor's House*, the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* dissected their own feelings and motivations, but were doing so through a retrospective look on aging and theorizing how they differed now from when they were young. It was through this lens, that most of Clarissa's self-doubt arose. She recalled her time growing up and her relationship with Peter, but also how she had been the recipient of attention in a way she would and could not be as a middle aged woman. The subject of aging came up frequently in this novel, often contrasting Clarissa with the thoughts and actions of the younger characters interwoven into the novel. One of Woolf's triumphs in this novel is her ability to reinforce this theme about the brutality and reality of aging. Woolf did this both directly and indirectly, creating a complex web of characters that provided the reader a lot of evidence that Clarissa would slowly grow increasingly invisible, and sadly, her parties perceived as more and more irrelevant.

Much of the Clarissa's fear and frustration of aging was articulated through her relationship with her husband and daughter. Unlike Mrs. St. Peter, mothering was not presented as a selfless act for Clarissa, but more of the stark realization that youth now belonged to her daughter instead. From an outward appearance perspective, this transition was validated by Richard and Peter's realizations of Elizabeth's beauty at the party- two men who had previously reserved their admiration for Clarissa. From an inward perspective, Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth, pondered how "she would like to have a profession" creating further distance between the life she and her mother would lead, but reminiscent of Clarissa's aspirations as a young woman. Despite their presence in each other's thoughts, Clarissa and Elizabeth barely interact directly throughout this story and Clarissa demonstrates no hospitality directed at making her daughter feel more at home.

In addition to the maternal relationship, which served more as an example of "before and after" than a show of selflessness, Woolf presents Clarissa's relationship with her husband as distant, creating a greater sense of isolation and need for validation. Clarissa and Richard had both physical and emotional distance, as well as an inability to communicate clearly. While they showed the "doubleness" of both caring for one another, as well as hurting and dismissing one another, the biggest takeaway of this relationship was that they were no longer in a mutual relationship and did not provide each other with personal fulfillment. Richard was able to find satisfaction and fulfillment outside of the home as part of important conversations elsewhere, while Clarissa was not. From that perspective, he had the upper hand to dictate the terms of the relationship as the dominant male.

However, with Clarissa's previous relationship with Peter, and then the arrival of Peter himself always casting a shadow into their marriage, Clarissa has the constant reminder to Richard that she was, at some point, desired, independent, and had authority to exercise decision making in her own life. The outcome of each of these dynamics, however, remained bleak. Much like Cather's female characters, Clarissa felt isolated from her spouse, even when feeling warm towards him. This loneliness and search for a sense of purpose left her to use hospitality as a means of finding validation she was not receiving from her husband, especially as she aged. It was not surprising that he shared no role in hosting this party and they did not demonstrate partnership in making guests welcome in their home.

The party itself brought all of this conflict, largely focused on Clarissa's internal and external struggle, to the surface. While this should have been the moment Clarissa relished most in the story, she realized that "every time she gave a party she has this feeling of being something not quite herself." Her social anxiety became clearer throughout the book and even as her party began Clarissa's prevailing thought was "Oh dear, it was going to be a failure; a complete failure". While both the reader and the characters have anticipated this party, the reader might not anticipate that Clarissa's engagement in the party to be so varied between her inner thoughts and external actions. While Peter, serving as a bit of a biased narrator during this event, described her as "at her worst- effusive, insincere", she just felt that while others could "go much deeper" she felt further apart and distant from the role she must play. Clarissa admits and laments that "she was forced to stand here in her evening dress. She has schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success." However, it was

obvious to the reader that her pursuit of validation was not successful and she did not in achieve a sense of self-worth in providing hospitality to others.

Yet, amazingly, that was not how she was largely perceived by guests while delivering the hospitality for which she was most famous. She embraced the social etiquette of the role, avoiding Peter and anything more than superficial conversation in fragmented segments of her own party. Her party did success and it was only in the last lines of the story that she was ready to truly engage in conversation and Peter noted "It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was." Only in that moment, and only in Peter's eyes, did the genuine version of herself come through. However, for her less "knowing" guests, she did what many of the female characters did in order to be described as good hosts. She used her charm as her most distinguished hospitable trait. She even noted earlier in the story "how much she wanted it- that people should look pleased as she came in" and that "her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct." This served her guests, if not her, well in maintaining her reputation of a good host, even if many who were there did not understand the intense pressure she put on herself to perform in these settings.

In the end, the reader has sympathy for Clarissa Dalloway. Her party was a success, but her personal goals for hosting the party were not. This middle-aged woman was not able to recapture her youth, particularly influence politics as she so hoped, and, most importantly find satisfaction in her hosting capacity. Clarissa concluded this party still distant from her husband, confused by her relationship with Peter, and striving to maintain a social standing which outsiders granted her, but judged her for at the same time. This brilliantly written story covered a tremendous amount of detail for one day in

the characters' lives, but could make readers question their own motivation for providing hospitality and the outcomes they hope to achieve.

To the Lighthouse

The final novel in this conversation, and the second one written by British author Virginia Woolf, is *To the Lighthouse*. This work can be compared and contrasted to both the Woolf and Cather works in a variety of manners. The first important contrast of note is that Mrs. Ramsay, the lead female character in this novel is only present in the first section. The beginning of the second section "As Time Passes" reveals that she died unexpectedly after the first section concluded. However, this one section and, within it, a very significant scene exploring a dinner hosted by the Ramsays, provides enough information on Mrs. Ramsay's motivations to be able to add concrete evidence to the discussion. Within this section, Woolf creates a very complex character who has influenced her guests in significant ways, but also leaves a legacy that continues after her passing. Many of her characteristics impact her ability and desire to be hospitable in the portion of the book in which she appears.

The first important topic to visit in this novel is the discussion of whether or not Mrs. Ramsay was truly motivated to be hospitable. In yet another version of "doubleness", she and her husband hosted multiple guests in their summer house, yet neither of them demonstrated a firm desire to be good hosts in the most traditional sense. In strong contrast to all of the other women in these stories, Mrs. Ramsay never conveyed a level of enthusiasm for the hosting role, nor expressed interest in speaking at length with most of the guests at the house who were identified as "exceptionally able" and

"great admirers" of her husband's philosophical works. Yet, while the guests were largely there to placate and feed the ego of Mr. Ramsay, he too did not have a particular passion for being a good host.

The summer home setting of this story played an important role in helping to define what hospitality should look like, as Woolf's interpretation of the country home had its own codified rules for demeanor based on her own experiences. Woolf was enamored of this lifestyle and in her writing said, "the country house serves in some symbolic capacity as a focus of community traditions and values, and offers opportunities either for the reflection on the loss and decay of what the "great house" represents, or celebration of its renewal and transformation"[38] The Ramsay family, and especially Mrs. Ramsay, could be viewed as the provider of those opportunities, bringing together disparate parties and "serving as the point of intersection and interconnection for forces originating elsewhere."[39]

Drawing the conclusion that Mrs. Ramsay had begrudging motivation to host these guests in her home in the effort to mollify her volatile husband, then the reader can begin to explore how she is using this opportunity to influence the world around her. As these guests were already enjoying their summer home, there are two additional reasons articulated as to why she would want to be a good host and create a welcoming environment. The first is that, much like Woolf's mother, she had a soft spot for men and a strong inclination to care for them. She articulated that "she could bear incivility to her guests, to young men in particular, who were poor as church mice." Her effort to teach these young men about the comforts of a good host and to socialize them outside of their

[38] Ibid, 256.
[39] Ibid., 276.

more meager existence was an important mission for her. Sending them back out into the world as more gentile and better mannered men would be a success. This quality is shared with Mrs. Forrester who groomed Niel throughout his life and used this same logic as her motivation to host local young men at the end of the story.

The second selfless motivation was to help guests find companionship while staying in their home. The feminist "double" to this argument is that Mrs. Ramsay is only promoting the traditional social agenda to couple the guests in her home, but largely this effort seemed benevolent. She used her hosting as an opportunity to create an environment for single men and women, who she deemed socially awkward and may have issues finding their own spouse, to find a partner with whom to share their lives. She believed that "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life" and supported that belief by pairing up her guests. She used her hospitality in the hopes of fulfilling what Mrs. Ramsay believed would be the ultimate goal for women- to have children- as she herself always loved to have a baby. Woolf may not have believed this to be true, but her fictional version of her mother did.

From a more selfish perspective, Mrs. Ramsay had two different motivations for hosting people in her home. The first is similar to the each of the other women discussed in these books. Mrs. Ramsay knew that she was a beautiful woman and, although she was aging, "she bore about with her, she could not help knowing it, the torch of her beauty; she carried it erect into any room she entered; and after all, veil it as she might, and shrink from the monotony of being that it imposed on her, her beauty was apparent." As this beauty was a source of strength for Mrs. Ramsay, she often felt the need to test its power over the men that were staying in their home. These periodic attempts to see how

they responded were just an amusement for her, but provided a confirmation that this power still existed and that these "great admirers" of her husband were admiring her as well.

She did have some trepidation about losing the power of her looks and charm, but this was only evident in conversation about her beautiful daughter, Prue. Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay share the comparison of their aging selves through the lens of watching their daughters come of age. Woolf uses this relationship differently than Cather in *The Professor's House* as she uses the social scenes not as an opportunity to help and support the daughters, but as a visual transition of how the daughters are now catching the attention that would previously have belonged to Mrs.Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay. While this was a continued theme in *Mrs. Dalloway*, this dynamic was present but did not monopolize as much of Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness in *To the Lighthouse*. It could possibly have because Prue was one of eight children, instead of one, and Mrs. Ramsay was significantly more focused on her youngest son's experience in this first section of the book.

Despite that nuances of that particular comparison and unlike the other female characters explored in this paper, Mrs. Ramsay was different in that she did not host guests and test the power of her charm and beauty as a way to validate her own self-worth. In a striking difference from the other novels, it was her husband who suffered from a crisis of insecurity who needed these guests for validation. This resulted in Mrs. Ramsay's second selfish motivation for providing hospitality- placating her husband. From the first interaction in his book, it was clear that Mrs. Ramsay's priority always had to be to cater to the changing moods and whims of her husband who was prone to temper

tantrums, often at the expense of his children. As Mrs. Ramsay's main goal was to preserve the peace in her home and raise her children to be positive adults she was hoping them would be, anything that tempered Mr. Ramsay's outbursts would be a welcome distraction and a good enough reason to provide hospitality.

When comparing Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's relationship with the other marriages seen in these books, a reader could conclude that theirs was the most tumultuous. While the Henshawes also had degrees of drama, they presented a unified front for the purposes of making people feel welcome in their home and contributing to Myra Henshawe's success as a host. In this particular story, Mr. Ramsay most resembled Professor St. Peter in his disinterest in hosting and, during their most significant dinner party, Mrs. Ramsay wished that he would facilitate the conversation "for if he said a thing, it would make all the difference" in the success of their dinner.

Yet, that particular encounter, as well as most of their others, could be interpreted by the reader as a series of pushes and pulls in the Ramsays' relationship. Woolf leaves work to do by the reader in each of scene where they interact. There is a complex dynamic of words said and not said that represent the full range of emotion. From Mrs. Ramsay's perspective, one could start from the fact that "there was nobody whom she reverenced as she reverenced him" and vacillate to the fact that "she could not understand how she had ever felt any emotion or affection for him." The words said and not said between them tells an entire story about whether they were ever able to make each other comfortable and comforted, much less create that welcoming experience for others.

As a result of this relationship, Mrs. Ramsay's questionable interest in hosting, and the nature of the audience at their summer house, her hospitality was not altogether

successful. She had mixed results in socializing the young men that were there. Plus, those men did not wholly placate her husband, as he was easily annoyed by having guests in the house and the formality by which they dined and entertained. It was clear that Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay had different standards by which they should and would treat their guests. Also, she had some success at her matchmaking endeavors, but still could not convince her single, female artist-in-residence that being married would create a better life for her.

Much of this failure was caused by the primary challenge to Mrs. Ramsay's ability to host. Most of the people who were at her most significant dinner party did not wish to be there. Mrs. Ramsay could not get her husband to engage as first, and then when the men finally were talking amongst themselves, "now she need not listen" and could go back to her preferred internal dialogue, as she did not really want to be engaged either. In this manner, Mrs. Ramsay shared many characteristics of Mrs. Dalloway. She had already been employing her secret weapon by "making use, as she did when she was distracted, of her social manner" and asking primarily rhetorical questions in order to stimulate conversation without having to be present in the moment. This act, however, was not lost on her guests.

It was not just Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay that were cordially participating at the table, but each of their guest's their inner dialogue indicated that they wished to be somewhere else as well. Several of the guests felt that conversation was trivial, boring, or just a waste of time compared to their preferred solitary activities of reading and working. Mr. Tansley, a curmudgeon of a guest who was widely disliked by Mrs. Ramsay and her children, was very critical of Mrs. Ramsay's insistence on participation in proper

hospitality and if given the chance “would sarcastically describe ‘staying with the Ramsays’ and what nonsense they talked. It was worthwhile doing it once, he would say; but not again.” By any measure, this would not be the conclusion drawn from successful hospitality nor the confirmation that Mrs. Ramsay had been successful making their colleagues feel comfortable at her table.

CONCLUSION

THE WARMEST WELCOME GOES TO:

In comparing the five women's desire to be hospitable, as well how well they were able to achieve their personal goals by doing so, the reader can make some conclusions about the most and least successful endeavors.

While it would be a tough decision about who actually provided the best hospitality of these women, this reader would conclude that Mrs. Marion Forrester in *A Lost Lady* was ultimately the best host for the majority of the story for a variety of reasons. First, her charm and genuine ability to be in the moment with her guests would provide the most genuine sense of a welcoming environment. Second, her positive interaction with her husband and their partnership in delivering that environment was clear to her guests and added to the guests' overall enjoyment. Lastly, the strength and authority by which she ran her house was comforting and assertive, allowing those who were there to relax with the knowledge that they were well cared for. These qualities, however, created the tragic contrast after her secret affair ended, her husband fell ill and passed away and Mrs. Forrester's perceived that her age had eroded her luster. Each of these qualities resulted in her behavior as "a lost lady" who acted desperately, but throughout the tragic downfall of Mrs. Forrester, there were still signs of the woman who they met as the story began.

If comparing these women's success in achieving both their selfless and selfish goals by hosting, the conversation is a bit more complex as "success" is a relative term in these achievements. For the most part, these women were only partially successful in achieving their goals. However, this reader would assert that Mrs. Lillian St. Peter in *A Professor's House* would be named the most successful in achieving her personal goals for being a good host and for having the greatest success in finding validation in her motivations. While she did not have particular political aspirations, she had always been a good host to the Hamilton academic community, and in this story, yearned to find satisfaction and attention while her husband proceeded to distance himself from their marriage. Mrs. St. Peter's ability to engage her daughters and their husbands, as well as feel good about herself with their attention was the greatest personal success of all of these women in their effort to find validation as they aged.

While Clarissa Dalloway as a host did not receive highest mention for either of these topics, it is clear that Virginia Woolf should receive praise for best use of hospitality as a tool in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In addition to creating a party that almost served as a character of its own, Woolf also was most successful in creating the conflict between political and personal motivations for hosting parties. She also had the best depiction of how one woman could have such a differing internal dialogue from external conversation in the throes of hosting. Woolf's ability to tell this story, interwoven with all of the other characters she developed was brilliantly accomplished and while Clarissa was not successful, Woolf's telling of her story was exceptionally effective.

Modernism and Hospitality

Throughout this paper it has been mentioned that these books demonstrate several characteristics of modernist literature. These characteristics vary a bit from the American and British perspectives, but regardless of the side of the ocean in which the story takes place, the manner in which hospitality is delivered is used to convey modernist traits. In addition, the female characters who serve as the hosts in these books further demonstrate modernism, as well as the complex role of women in society at this historical point on both sides of the Atlantic.

First, it is key to set the stage for the timing of these novels, all written within ten years of the conclusion of World War 1. As discussed earlier, the historical implications of the war and its impact on all political, economic and social circumstances was broadly felt. The literature written after that period had two distinct traits relative to the war. The first result was frequent plot references and character development based on the most significant world event at that point in history. The second result was that the authors were more often looking for beauty in brokenness, as so much was broken by the war that could not be put back together again. Instead, a new reality set in which required authors, poets, and artists to help others find what could be beautiful in a much-altered world.

Mrs. Dalloway included the most frequent and blatant mentions of the aftermath of World War 1 and, most descriptively includes a character, Septimus Smith, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Clarissa Dalloway almost constantly compares pre- and post-World War 1 in her walk around London, mixing the significant with insignificant details. She noted that "the War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin". In a much more tragic storyline,

Septimus Smith ultimately killed himself (although was later an inconvenience for holding up party guests) because he could not get treatment for psychological damage caused by witnessing the atrocities of war.

Cather's most direct and relevant references to World War 1 were in *The Professor's House* and caused a significant change in the fate of many of the characters. This was revealed early in the story when the announcement was made that the St. Peters' daughter's house would be named for Tom Outland, her intended husband and true love, who was lost in Flanders. If Tom had not died in World War 1, the entire scope of the story would have been different for the family. In *A Lost Lady*, as well, the opportunity for the next generation is summarized as challenged, partially due to the economic boom and then bust as the United States expanded, but also the influence of war on that global economy.

Despite the impact of World War 1 and the direct references in these works, Woolf and Cather were each able to capture the beauty in brokenness that is unique to modernist literature. The best example of that concept in each of these books are the female characters presented for discussion in this paper. Each of these women were strong characters with clear motivation, and yet in some way each was broken. They had been hurt or neglected by the men around them. They were unsatisfied by what was often permitted of them given the social circles and historical period in which they lived. They were also trapped by the insecurities in their own minds as they aged. And yet, each one successfully made others feel welcome, when they chose to, by sharing their charm and grace, largely keeping their suffering to themselves.

Along those same lines, another key trait seen in many modernist works is the idea of loneliness and isolation. Whether characters were attempting to reinvent themselves in order to recreate their past, create a new existence in the present, or improve the future for themselves and those around them, each modernist character had much work to do introspectively and in the physical space around them. Stylistically, and as seen in each of these works, modernist characters also leave work for the reader in interpreting the motives and outcomes of their thoughts and actions about just how lonely and isolated they are. Indicative of the "doubles" that often exist in modernist literature, another trait mentioned earlier, many of the most isolating scenes in these books were depicted in the social scenes explored in this paper. Some of the most striking moments of despair were painfully detailed by Woolf as the characters struggled to be both within the moment and outside of it. This is seen in the dinner party scene in *To the Lighthouse*. Also, the entire premise of being alone at the lighthouse for a month, described early in the story, and then the pursuit to travel there in the end, speaks strongly to this modernist trait and mirrored the journey of many individuals in that story along the way.

Another "double" that exists in modernist literature that is seen in each of these novels is the contrast of hope and hopelessness. Much of this trait was conveyed by the younger generation, frequently serving as the narrators of these books or the children of the protagonists, while the main characters explored their own goals for satisfaction. Both Niel in *A Lost Lady* and Nellie in *My Mortal Enemy* demonstrate these qualities as their lives were more complicated early-on than the women they discussed. In *A Lost Lady*, Niel's opportunities were compared to the older generation including, much to her chagrin, Mrs. Forrester. Cather wrote that "The world did not seem over-bright to young

people just then" creating a contrast to the much higher level of enthusiasm Mrs. Forrester had when she came into Sweet Water as a young bride and the hopes that the railroad and associated industry brought to the town. For Nellie, hard times hit her much earlier in life than the older generation as well, leading her to reconnect with the Henshawes. Yet, for both Niel and Nellie, they maintained a hope right through the end that first and foremost, the adults they admired would maintain the same charm that had enraptured them initially, and secondly, that they would age in a less tragic manner and without their dire outcomes endured by the adults they had admired.

The final trait seen in modernist literature, which Woolf and Cather capture in their books, also serves as a "double" to the suffering seen in World War 1. The characters in these books are frequently seen demonstrating a joie de vivre or the enjoyment to life. This idea was demonstrated by Cather in Mrs. Forrester's enthusiasm to return to her active social life in Denver. It was also demonstrated in Mrs. Henshawe's socialization with her artistic friends who found beauty in the world around them and could capture the moment in a song. Even *The Professor's House* demonstrated Louie Marsellus' overzealous approach to hosting friends, paying for trips and showering his wife with gifts in his efforts to capture living for the moment. Woolf's approach was slightly more tongue-in-cheek in her presentation of the party and social culture in *Mrs. Dalloway*. It was hardest to see this concept in *To the Lighthouse*, but even there, the characters pursuing their passions demonstrated great enthusiasm for their art, writing and studies.

Conclusion

The concept of hospitality is ever-present in both British and American modernist literature. While it is infrequently called that specifically and is mostly presumed to be a part of female characters' household responsibilities, the scenes that exhibit hosting and inner and outer dialogue during these encounters set the tone for these works modernist literature. As the exploration of these five books demonstrated, there are also a number of important conclusions that can be drawn both about the external politics of these events, as well as the internal psychological needs of the women who hosted them.

The first conclusion is that female writers of modernist literature demonstrated that both the characters in their books and society at large were not prepared for a seismic shift from women serving predominantly as the hosts and caretakers of the men in their lives. It provided societal stability about gender norms, a comfort level to those who benefitted, and a practical division of labor that allowed men to pursue their professional endeavors. The men, however, often enhanced the welcoming tone by participating in concert with their wives in socially-accepted roles of hosting.

The second conclusion is that the women who were in these hospitality roles were aware of external political pressures and continued to use their social influence to devise strategies and exert influence on the world around them. This might have been different if they had greater opportunity to take on more formal business and political roles, but in the absence of those opportunities, they used the circumstances they had to elicit the responses for the causes that were significant to them.

Next, it is important to note that in each of these novels, while there were clear societal forces that predominantly put women in the role of delivering hospitality, the

female characters were also searching for important validation of their self-worth at the same time. There were aspects of their actions that conveyed the selflessness of caring for others and serving their friends and loved ones, but there were also many aspects that conveyed a need for attention and validation, much of which was justified but based on more selfish, than selfless motivation.

In order to determine what was selfish and what was selfless, the reader needed to see that the women's relationships with their husbands in these stories largely dictated how much validation was required of their self-worth, and as a result, what type of hospitality they provided and to whom. Interestingly, whether the woman had children or not, did not seem to play a key role in defining self-worth the way interaction with a spouse did. This was true in both the American and British works, with In the Lighthouse being slightly the outside of the norm in this conclusion for other reasons related to the marital relationship. This conclusion also reflected the relationships that the authors had with their own mothers and from observing marriage throughout their childhoods.

As these women and their husbands aged, however, there was increased intensity surrounding this need for validation and articulating the woman's self-worth. The psychology of the aging process, the changes in a marital relationship, and any number of external factors like social and economic conditions played a role in this factor. However, in all cases, it was true that as time marched on, the intensity of the dynamic grew.

Lastly, it is also a true that while these novels explored the motivations for providing good hospitality to their family and friends, there was equal opportunity to explore how the use of hospitality supports often-seen modernist literary tools. In each of these books, there is a sense of "doubleness" to the stories and characters, as well as a

sense of loneliness and isolation that is even a double to the social elements explored. Readers also see the impact of World War 1, both on the individuals, as well as the economic and political climate and a sense of hopelessness about what individuals and society do after the unimagined worst has happened. On the lighter side, readers also see the urge to live for the moment, enjoy life, and of course, host a good party or two.

Further Thoughts

If this paper were to be expanded for further research or publication, there are several directions in which to take this initial paper. The first direction would be more inclusion of feminist theory research and how that might have impacted the writing and character development of each of these characters. While this work has briefly touched on the role of women at that moment in history, as well as the literary criticism of these two authors, there is significantly more work that could be completed as it relates to the authors themselves and the characters developed and how they might compare or contrast to historical figures of that time.

A second direction would be more inclusion of the psychology of the validation of women who had children versus women who did not. In this work, it is concluded that the relationship with the husband had a significantly larger role than children in determining a woman's self-worth, but this reader would imagine that significant research has been done on the psychology of marriage with and without children and how that may have played a role with the authors and with the characters.

The third direction is a deeper historical perspective on the evolution of both hospitality as an industry and how it changed over time. Given the role that entertaining

at home played in politics and economics, it would be interesting to see how those roles and the influence of women in “non-professional” roles was trivialized as more restaurants and outside options were available. Also, it would be interesting to see how the gender roles changed as hospitality became more of a profession and less of a household management task. There are very successful academic programs for hotel and event management, but their tasks are largely to train future management so the evolution of their craft historically, as well as the liberal arts applications are not frequently discussed. The merging of these two fields for a greater understanding could be beneficial to both the humanities and hospitality for further research and for business development.

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VITA

Full name: Marti B. Winer

Place and date of birth: New York, NY- August 18, 1975

Parents Name: Judy and Mike Winer

Educational Institutions:

Secondary: G.W. Hewlett High School, Hewlett NY June 1993

Collegiate: Drew University, Madison, NJ BA May 1997

Graduate: Rutgers University, Newark, NJ, MBA, May 2006

Graduate: Drew University, Madison, NJ MLitt, May 2017