

THE MODERN HOSTESS

“SHE MUST ASSEMBLE”: THE MODERN HOSTESS
IN
CHOPIN, WOOLF AND FITZGERALD

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the hostess figure in Modernist literature from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century as she assembles her environment and, furthermore, her evolving sense of self and “womanhood.” The party scene will be examined in three texts to illuminate the concerted work of the hostess to compose her public and private realms and selves. A close reading of these scenes yields a similar observation: each author employs the party scene to dramatize the awakening of their heroine to the fraught duality of her role as a woman subjected to societal demands and private, disquieted stirrings within. In this way, these texts uniquely stage the development of the New Woman of the fin-de-siècle. In conjunction with a historical examination, a consideration of hospitality theory enriches these readings. Jacques Derrida’s discussion of the guest-host wager works as a point of leverage in reading the common moment in each party scene when the protagonist’s constructed sense of self-as-host reaches an inevitable breaking point and causes the host to reframe his or her sense of self. In each of the three scenes the hostess is left markedly divided with a deeper understanding of her position as a modern woman straddling public and private obligations. This thesis chronologically traces the hostess’ increasing development: Kate Chopin frames the earliest fracturing of Edna Pontellier who is left to drift away in *The Awakening*, in *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf depicts Clarissa Dalloway’s jarring evening but allows her to return to her life a quietly changed woman, and ultimately, F. Scott Fitzgerald portrays the hard won social and mental emancipation of Nicole Warren Diver in *Tender is the Night*. This thesis aims to highlight the party scene and hostess figure as important literary tools that demonstrate the fraught awakening of the New Woman in modernity.

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INTRODUCTION

A look back to Renaissance drama illuminates the party scene as something commonly employed to draw together principal characters in one climactic and largely telling moment in a story. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Thomas Kyd employs the party scene to dupe and stage the murder of several unknowing characters in the name of revenge (IV, iii-iv). At a party held to celebrate the upcoming nuptials of Bel-Imperia and Balthazar, a scorned father Hieronimo stages a play-within-a-play for the entertainment of many noble guests. Hieronimo manages to fool his son's murderers into playing characters in the play who will be "killed," succeeding in stabbing them in a grand spectacle with all the party guests witness to his "justice." In these scenes Kyd gathers an entire community together under the guise of harmless festivity and then provides the climactic action and accompanying ethical commentary of the *Tragedy*. This tactic is famously adopted in Shakespearean theatre: the ghost of Banquo intruding on the composed dinner party in *Macbeth* at a dramatic peak in the narrative. Following Renaissance drama, modern works of fiction frequently employ the party scene to assemble the characters in a narrative and make use of the extraordinary, climactic potential of these events. The party scene has found its way into Modernist and realist novels and is similarly exploited for its dramatic potential. Furthermore the concept of the "party" itself, beyond the notion of the written "scene," as reflective of true lived experience in modernity also seems a chief concern for Modernist authors interested in portraying the varied dimensions of social realism; they stage the interpersonal wagers it involves, the particular method behind its construction, and its ultimately unplanned results chiefly and deeply affecting the host at work.

This thesis' particular subject is late-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century works of fiction set in a Western, upper-class context, that figure the party scene, its extraordinary progression, and affected human responses in congruous ways. Indeed, in these novels, the party scene functions *first* as a dramatic stage for an unexpected climactic moment, the composed splendor of the scene making the breaking point all the more palpable. Yet in the Modernist style – with its experimentation with internal narration – the party scene is also figured in its deep affect on the host him/herself, the protagonist. The three texts in this project all contain a female protagonist who acts as an assembler of guests at one or more climactic junctures in her narrative, and expresses her thoughts in such distinctly modernist narration – ranging from stream-of-consciousness to free indirect discourse. This thesis maps out the development of the hostess' conception of her selfhood and womanhood – in the context of the Cult of True "Womanhood" and the "New Woman" as political concepts of the fin-de-siècle. The thesis analyzes the action surrounding the preparation and execution of their party scenes. Analysis of these scenes yields a common observation about the party scene as a Modernist literary tool: the party scene dramatizes the multidimensional *assembly* of the hostess – of her material environment (firstly), her upper-class community and public persona (secondly) and, ultimately, her awakening sense of fractured self and womanhood. This thesis proposes the hostess' assembly as a prominent literary trope that helped define the New Women's movement at the turn of the century through the use of experimental, deeply candid internal narration and the dramatization of the hospitable act; the act's imminent fracturing prompting the acknowledgment in the hostess of the flaws in her publicly imposed sense of self and ideal "Womanhood" and her subsequent awakening to a divided sense of self in modernity.

The three party scenes to be examined are all darkly glamorous in their own way and develop unique, dynamic heroines. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin writes the life of Edna Pontellier as she grapples with stirring questions about her only option in life as wife-and-mother. Edna holds a dinner party as a kind of emancipatory celebration, determined to leave her husband and household behind to start a life of her own. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf describes the day of Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for and executes a perfect dinner party, describing simultaneously harmonious and alienated emotions. Finally, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* depicts Nicole Warren-Diver as she hosts a party alongside her symbiotic husband Dick, an occasion that marks the beginning of her ultimate endeavours for personal autonomy. Though these scenes are historically distinct and do suggest different fates for their hostess based on this discrepancy, all three party scenes elucidate a central public-private dichotomy that marks the hostess' gathering behavior and thought development over the course of their narratives. Each woman begins her party with a desire to assemble her "best" public self, in accordance with polite social expectations, and then methodically gathers together her peers and material surroundings in a similarly harmonious manner. The gathering or "assembly" – drawn by the author and played out in the hostess character – exhibits this consistent duality between material and mental gestures. Each painstakingly prepared party scene, however, fractures. The action reflects a common moment in each scene where the hostess finds herself isolated or alienated and left to face with her private, often disenchanted, thoughts about her roles and behaviour. Each hostess in her dark moment confronts the reality of her fractured sense of self, between who she is and must be in her public world and who she is in her private world. And yet this sense of personal division does not

dissolve the hostess' character. Each hostess is left – to different degrees of survival depending on each text's historical positioning – with a more enlightened perspective on her personal autonomy in her household and community, and strongly voices her progressive desires and stirring questions for the readers. In this way, the hostess remains the “assembler” both prior to, during, and after her party – though this role markedly evolves in the reader's perception as the plot develops.

The three hostesses in this project provide, in progressive conversation, a timeline of the awakening New Woman in a Western context and dramatize various degrees of emancipation from gendered social strictures according to their historical place on the spectrum: from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. With the rise of Modernist writing comes this new kind of heroine who impulsively enacts her public obligations just as she begins to fundamentally question them. Each climactic party scene provides a unique glimpse into the motives and obligations behind the woman's public composure as well as her jarring reaction to the inevitably flawed nature of social assumptions of “Womanhood,” concerted hospitable acts and idealistic Victorian-era conceptions of innately whole and inalterable identities (particularly for wives and mothers). Each chapter will focus on one novel and its principal hostess, considering her development of a different consciousness during and after her party. A historical examination of New Womanhood as it pertains to each novel's context will be used to highlight the hostess' existent gendered boundaries (family, work, peers) and the political and personal gravity of what questions she ultimately asks and answers for herself about the act of hostessing. For it is in reflections on her hostess-work that each hostess ultimately voices an indictment of the forced, public, obligatory nature of the act and furthermore an appreciation for the private self-

assembling it signifies. Finally, the hostess assembles an authentically observed, *divided* knowledge of her self and sense of womanhood just as she has artfully – if compulsively – assembled her guests in the party scene.

In conjunction with historical analysis, this thesis considers hospitality theory, which helpfully informs the inevitable fracturing observed in each party scene by theorizing the impossibility of the execution of an ideal hospitable act. This theory helps explain the pivotal jarring moment in each hostess' party scene where her social and personal composure falls apart, prompting the hostess to see the flawed nature of not only the calculated hospitable act but also the gendered Victorian ideals they depend on. For the party is more than a scene the author describes or summons for magical and dramatic effect. It is also something she or he employs in the narrative to speak to the dimensions of a social group or invested individual (the hostess). Jacques Derrida has articulated the implications of the guest-host wager, the impossible welcome, and the fragility and imminent fracturing of the host's identity. Tracy McNulty, building on Derrida's theoretical analysis, usefully incorporates the role of gender in society into hospitality relations. These concepts will be central to the discussion as they come to bear in the written scenes. Hospitality theory, as a reflection on the dimensions and wagers of social interaction, is critical for this investigation of the hospitable act, or party scene, and the hostess figure as they speak to timely and complex human experience. This project aims to combine this theory and the questions it asks about hospitality and its effect on conceptions of selfhood – so strongly reflected in the action of each narrative – with the evolving gendered conditions figured in the novels to harness the symbolic value of these recurrent and deceptively superficial scenes. A theoretical approach to these readings also allows

this discussion of the evocative nature of the party to survive its specific literary contextualization as hospitality theory and its expressions in everyday lived experience remain of contemporary political and ethical concern.¹

In the interest of space, this thesis' scope is restricted to an analysis of three novels in detail. However this historical and theoretical investigation applies well to other modern Western texts. An earlier novel that could precede an analysis of *The Awakening* is Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905). This text depicts Lily Bart's disillusionment with ideals of social grandeur and admirable visions of lovely "Womanhood," and there is one scene in particular where she is ideally – and critically – made to stand in a frame (or "tableau") for guests' to observe during a large party, an "ideal" feminine subject that bears criticism. Nella Larsen's Harlem-Renaissance novel *Passing* (1929) perhaps more explicitly demonstrates the assembling activity of a hostess. In the novel Irene, a mulatto woman, contemplates the racial politics of upper-class party assembly and grapples with her love/hate relationship with a socially rebellious friend Clare. Other texts by Virginia Woolf and F. Scott Fitzgerald – this thesis only considers one work of each – would also fit into this dialogue to varying degrees. Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) depicts Mrs. Ramsay's carefully composed dinner party in great detail, recalling the hostess' material composure and its symbolic value as examined in this thesis. Fitzgerald's canonical *The Great Gatsby* (1925) also figures some significant female voices in elite "West Egg" that comment on the constructed nature of the grandeur of the Jazz era

¹ The literary investigations to follow are only isolated examples of hospitable action taking place in the home and of a certain class and era. While they remain meaningful and authentic visions of life at the turn of the century – providing a critical feminine voice and example of the guest-host wager – I would like to acknowledge the great scope of hospitality theory's manifestations in discussions on topics including international politics and surveillance (two areas with which Jacques Derrida is concerned in his lectures on the subject).

and roles for women. The text also carefully describes and employs grand party scenes as dramatic tools of a publicly-masked and internally troubled host.

The three investigations to follow parse the party scene to show the public and private wagers involved in the hostess' preparation for the event and experience of her own assembly. Each analysis will follow her awakening to the gendered impositions of the act and her expressions of a desire for a broader definition of self as divided between two realms and selves. Ultimately each woman indicts the Victorian ideal of the whole, untroubled feminine identity and demands of her as an inherently maternal caretaker. Each hostess, put through the hospitable narrative arc of her author, survives her awakening with an evolved knowledge of divided selfhood as a woman straddling both the public and private spheres in modernity (indeed, as all women do). Each narrative, in its own way, posits notable futurity for the New Woman through a measured depiction of her work as hostess.

This thesis, finally, aims to illuminate this period in modern fiction as a critical turning point for the Western feminist voice in previously condemned "decadent" or "elitist" literature of everyday social experience; to read carefully the common and telling method beneath the hostess' madness. Situated at only the *beginning* of a potentially greater dialogue of socio-critical feminist critique in Modernist fiction, this thesis' discussion survives well beyond the inciting era examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

The Hostess, Awakening: Analysing Edna Pontellier and her Party

"I may as well admit that this is my birthday, and that I am twenty-nine. In good time I expect you to drink to my health. Meanwhile, I shall ask you to begin with this cocktail, composed – would you say 'composed'?" – with an appeal to Miss Mayblunt – "composed by my father in honour of Sister Janet's wedding."
Before each guest stood a tiny glass that looked and sparkled like a garnet gem.

"Then, all things considered," spoke Arobin, "it might not be amiss to start out by drinking to the Colonel's health in the cocktail which he composed, on the birthday of the most charming of women – the daughter whom he invented." (Chopin 83)

Alcée Arobin's clever "sally" (83) ensures that Edna Pontellier's party begins on a jovial note; Mr. Merriman is overcome with laughter while Miss Mayblunt marvels at the Colonels' artistry. By now, the select group of invited guests have gathered around a luxuriously decorated dinner table helmed by their candlelit hostess. She orchestrates the evening so that only her most pleasant acquaintances will surround her to celebrate not only her birthday, but, more significantly, her move from the house of Mr. and Mrs. Léonce Pontellier to her very own "pigeon house." Yet like the transition from one house to another, Edna's party signals a great shift in her life and therefore involves significant effort and thought on her behalf. The merriment that follows Arobin's remark characterizes only the *surface* of Edna's party, which composes Chapter XXX of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Upon closer reading of the events, it seems that Edna harbors more anxiety about being "invented" than the laughter might suggest. Edna's underlying disturbance in the greater scene is certainly characteristic of her thoughtful and somewhat dark personality, as explained in the summary of existent scholarship to follow. Yet there seems to be something more complex going on in the juxtaposition of Edna's sense of having 'composed' something – her party – and her feeling the pressure of being imposed on *herself*.

Many of Chopin's contemporary critics condemned Edna's action and greater value in the novel citing a selfish, or at best, superficially-concerned character. Yet the underlying *danger* of Edna's work – as demonstrated in the undertones of such criticism – was her honest depiction of an unsatisfied turn-of-the-century woman and her thoughts outside the bounds of "wife and mother." What seems to be at stake in modern considerations of the text is the value of Edna's character not only as a vision of the "New Woman," but as an early instance of the *female* "host" as imagined in American fiction. This chapter aims to place Edna within existing scholarship on New Women in critical conjunction with Jacques' Derrida's theory of hospitality in order to highlight the layered work that Edna performs both consciously and unconsciously. The party scene itself will function as an instructive space where Edna's public intentions and private confusions conflate, depicting the modern literary "hostess" as she intuitively composes her space and is composed *herself* by this work. Edna's "assembly" work cannot be entirely complete (by the nature of the hospitable act) or satisfactory (by nature of the socially-constructed Victorian self she initially seeks), but proves productive by the end of the novel when she is able to conceive of herself in her true division between roles and "selves," apart from what her socio-historical environment dictates for "womanhood." Though her fate is often read as a tragic or disappointing end to her journey, there should be no doubt that Edna's awakening serves as a critical lens for the reader to also consider the modern hostess' positioning where the public and private so grandly collide.

Before considering Edna as hostess it is important to identify her character, like her author, as a member of the New Woman movement of the turn of the century. In her book *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski outlines the particular historical and

political moment out of which Chopin's hostess was born. In the interests of feminist scholarship, Felski considers common attitudes pertaining to gender at the turn of the century through to the modern age. Felski emphasizes the importance of academic and literary "accounts of the modern age" that dramatize and personify "historical processes," particularly in the way that their subjects embody symbolic meaning (1). The gender of the subject is of chief concern for Felski, as it often influences the direction of the narrative, what is included in the "historical knowledge" it represents, and most importantly the "philosophical *assumptions* underlying our interpretations of the nature and meaning of social processes" (my emphasis, 1). *The Gender of Modernity* proceeds to specific social processes in modernity on a symbolic level, something this chapter aims to do with the social fiction of *The Awakening* in mind.

When discussing heroines of the European fin de siècle, Felski considers the private space as essentially instructive of greater concerns of women in modernity, suggesting that such "intimate relationships emerge as the central arena within which the contradictions of the modern are played out" (3). She further characterises this intimate space as, "a domain where natural and timeless emotions [are said to] hold sway," particularly for women (3). This timeless role for women was considered by men in modernity to be a kind of safe house from the rapid innovations and "chaotic change" brought on by developments in modern science and thought (Felski, 40). In *Women and Economics*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman identified the home at the turn of the century as the only remaining "sanctuary" (overseen by the woman):

Our thrones have been emptied ... Our churches have been opened to the light of modern life ... We are chilled to the heart's core by the fear of losing any of these ancient and hallowed associations ... In homes we are all born. In homes we all die or hope to die. In homes we all live or want to live. For homes we all labor, in them or out of them. The home is the centre and circumference, the start and the finish, of most of our lives.

The woman therefore was meant to embody a critical “stability and continuity,” a being that would exist “outside of history” in her “hallowed” sedentary position watching over the home (Felski, 40-41). Since the maternal home would come to signify “wholeness and self-contained completeness,” female subjectivity was considered to be entirely “homogenous” and free from any contradictions in the psyche – “as the very opposite of the split subject” (Felski, 41, 48). This primary assumption about the static, almost indifferent, subjectivities of women must be indicted when reading the “processes of social change” to come in modernity (3). Felski posits that analyzing depictions of modern femininity “brings with it a recognition of the profoundly *historical* nature of private feelings” (my emphasis, 3). These feelings are best read in the feminine realm of the everyday and mundane, those so often dismissed portions of a woman’s life (Felski, 28). Indeed, Edna’s seemingly trivial, socially-expected work of receiving guests could be overlooked in *The Awakening*, but following Felski’s move, this chapter aims to identify the hostess’ subjectivity as essentially multifaceted and changing with the socio-cultural fluctuations of the time period.

Chopin dramatizes her own answer to the looming and controversial “woman question” of the turn of the century, following the dissolution of the “seemingly stable ideological edifice of the Victorian marriage,” and sets her female protagonist in the upper-class American South (Felski, 146). Despite some forms of feminism existing in the Victorian era and the “woman question” dating back a few decades, Elaine Showalter carefully notes in *The Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle* that the turn of the century provided a uniquely strong feminist moment in public political consciousness (147). The “New Woman” written movement was

coined in England in reaction to the downfall of Victorian ideals and appealed to those women who yearned increasingly for emancipation; New Women's texts were often characterized by their details of unfulfilling unions and moves toward independent education and employment (Felski, 146). The movement offered a feminist perspective during a period laden with popular "decadent" male authors, such as Oscar Wilde, to provide an alternative view on issues of sexuality and "coming-of-age" (Showalter, viii). Showalter identifies the turn of the century female author as the critical "missing link between the great writers of the Victorian novel and the modern fiction of Mansfield, Woolf, and Stein" (vii).²

Chopin's dramatized feminist concerns in *The Awakening* align explicitly with the New Woman movement of the late nineteenth century. Ann Heilmann pays particular attention to this relationship in "*The Awakening* and New Woman Fiction." Heilmann identifies the American text as a significant literary "quest for female self-determination" (87). She explains that the novel concerns itself with many of the key components of New Woman fiction as a genre, which include "marriage, motherhood, women's desire for a separate identity and bodily autonomy" and considers them in light of women's impending political awakening and "spiritual epiphany" (Heilmann, 93). Barbara C. Ewell similarly locates Edna Pontellier in the New Woman tradition in "Kate Chopin and the Dream of Female Selfhood." Ewell recalls Felski's characterization of homogenously uncomplicated, indifferent female selfhood and argues that Chopin "affirms the difficulty of the dream of female selfhood in a society

² This thesis project follows Showalter's logic and aims to locate Chopin's heroine in primary relation to the New Women perspective as it pertains to Virginia Woolf and F. Scott Fitzgerald's female heroes.

that defines women as [constitutively] selfless” (164). Ewell goes further to indict the limitations of turn of the century senses of “selfhood” in general, chiefly for men, which assumed a unified ego or “I” as “only and always in control” (146). The implication of this assumption is that the subject is “never subjected to its responsibilities and relations to others, as women inevitably are” (164). Therefore the notion of Victorian-era selfhood breaks down, or is importantly questioned and reframed, in the presence of the woman seeking it. In the three turn-of-the-century narratives of concern in this project, the female subject is depicted instead in her realistic heterogeneity or *fractured* understanding of self as she exists between her public and private realm – what Chopin depicts so lucidly in her figuring of Edna Pontellier.³

This chapter’s reading of Edna Pontellier consciously avoids two conventional readings of Edna’s character: the superficial, careless Edna and the overly-romantic, solipsist Edna. In the former reading Edna shirks the realities of her communal and personal responsibilities (particularly to her husband and children) and is read as an immoral and even mentally ill character. In the latter reading Edna is depicted as an indulgent woman overcome by adulterous love whose action is read as a pathetic, illusory attempt at autonomy. Chopin’s contemporary critics often espoused one reading or the other. One reviewer judged the text in *both* ways, as follows:

It is rather difficult to decide whether Mrs. Kate Chopin ... tried in that novel merely to make an intimate, analytical study of the character of a selfish, capricious woman, or whether she wanted to preach the doctrine of the right of the individual to have what he wants, no matter whether or not it may be good for him (“Fresh Literature” [from “Contemporary Reviews”] 169)

³ Ewell illuminates the role of the New Woman realist narrative to reframe an understanding of seemingly stable “I”-based subjectivity that Tracy McNulty will recall later in her theorization of “the hostess.”

This comment is indicative of a fairly common negative reaction to the text from Chopin's contemporary Southern critics, many who implicitly opposed the rising New Woman movement and literature developing in modernity. When the reviews were positive, the lingering romantic readings of the text remain as one critic noted that Edna ultimately, "fails to perceive that the relation of mother to her children is far more important than *the gratification of a passion*" which she or he believes is the only meaningful aspiration of Chopin's heroine (my emphasis, "New Publications" [from "Contemporary Reviews"] 167). Yet upon a closer and crucial reading of the text *surrounding* the central romance of *The Awakening*, the "love story" becomes an unfitting explanation to account for Edna leaving her husband, claiming a house of her own and swimming out to her assumed death. Indeed, Chopin undermines this potential reading of Edna's relationship with Robert LeBrun by voicing the deeper ontological concerns of her increasingly conscious narrator. In the early action of the novel Edna breaks down crying on a few occasions when she finds herself overcome by an "indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness" (8). Chopin characterizes these contemplative moments as entering, "like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day" (8). This "mist" reappears in Chapter XXVII, after Edna's lover Alcée Arobin has left her home. Chopin articulates Edna's "awakening" desires for autonomy as she recounts her unsatisfying relationship to her husband *and* infatuation with Robert:

multitudinous emotions ... assailed her ... There was her husband's reproach looking at her from the external things around her which he provided for her external existence. There was Robert's reproach making itself felt by a ... more overpowering love ... Above all, there was an understanding. She felt as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes ... among the conflicting sensations which assailed her, there was neither shame nor remorse. There was a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love that had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips (Chopin 80).

Here Edna is conscious of her husband's oppressive hold on her, materially speaking, and even Robert's hold on her through "overpowering" affection. When the strange, thoughtful "mist" passes over her consciousness Edna sees that Robert's "love" is not the cause of her new sense of freedom and enlightenment. Edna's *jouissance* in her "sensations" instead comes from within as she awakens to what she sees to be a more authentic, if divided, subjectivity of her own. Edna's developing consciousness is continually represented by this "mist" or moments of perceived foreignness that she senses within herself, which this chapter's following attention to hospitable relations will help theorize. Yet Chopin also articulates Edna's awakening as: "a certain light [that] was beginning to dawn dimly within her, - the light which, in showing the way, forbids it" (14). This quote reflects the historically-perceived hopelessness of a completely satisfying reconciliation for the New Woman with her dividedness between public and private obligations and "selves" (which includes both ingrained identities and role-playing). Chopin theorizes this problem as Edna – only at the cusp of her feminist movement - tries to compose a new sense of self in her party, to formulate what she sees as "the beginning of things, of a world especially" that is, in being a beginning, "necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic and exceedingly disturbing" (14). The omniscient narrator prophetically muses, "How few of us ever emerge from such a beginning! How many souls perish in its [sea-like] tumult!" (14).

Both the morally-condemning and lovesick readings of Edna undermine the duality of her role in her public and private moments, the dividedness she negotiates within, and ultimately work to demean the very conscious and modern feminist thinking that Chopin portrays through her heroine. For Edna is positioned significantly

between moments of poetic transcendence and her very real social, economic, and political rebellion; a complex experience which seems to falter under such quick and sexist judgment. Edna's unique position between her public role as an upper-class woman, wife, and mother and her private concerns regarding her awakening desires for autonomy is demonstrated in Chopin's problematizing of the turn of the century, middle to upper-class "mother-woman" role. Edna's adoption, and eventual rejection, of this role is a fundamental debate between Edna and her husband Léonce and her very "maternal" friend Madame Ratignolle. Edna initially begins to define herself autonomously as she distances herself from her husband and unsatisfying external expectations of her.

Before Edna hosts her going-away party, from the house of her husband and all its "oppressions," she has already shown signs of deviating from her role as Léonce Pontellier's proper wife. Léonce sees Edna, fundamentally, as an extension of his manhood and property.⁴ When his wife gets burnt during their vacation by the sea Léonce, "look[s] at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (Chopin, 4). Edna is also depicted as one of a myriad of objects in Léonce's home, which he is so fond of surveying "to see that nothing was amiss" (48). Chopin names Léonce's luxury items as "household gods" whose value lies in, simply, his possession of them: "[Léonce] greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his" (48). Léonce's deeply *essential*

⁴ The essential link between male, masterful subjectivity and objectification of women is a central point of research in Tracy McNulty's book.

relationship with his deified goods certainly helps explain his extreme anxiety once his most prized possession, Edna, becomes absent from his masterly shrine.⁵

In addition to being Léonce's aesthetic object, Edna is also expected to be a fitting mother for his children – arguably two more sacred possessions under his roof. Léonce often "reproache[s] his wife for her inattention" and what seems to be "her habitual neglect of the children," despite the fact that her care for them is expressed on many occasions while Léonce has no interaction with his sons at all. Léonce maintains that his wife is failing in her "duty," though this was admittedly "something he *felt* rather than perceived" – referencing a deeply imbedded social expectation that Edna does not align with to his satisfaction (my emphasis, 9). Chopin has the children's absent father ironically ask, "If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it" (7)? Despite Léonce's character being a critique of masculine expectations of the time period, Edna's satirically-portrayed female peers are entirely enamored with him, particularly when he sends them chocolates – as if material proof of his masculine competence and desirable worth: "And the ladies, selecting with dainty and discriminating fingers and a little greedily [at the chocolates], all declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world." Chopin ironically adds that, "Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better" (9). Indeed, in the opening action of the text Edna has resigned to social perceptions of Léonce as competent and that she must, "take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality" with her husband (Chopin, 9). Of course this initial "reality" comes into question as her coming-of-age narrative progresses.

⁵ A condemnation of Victorian idealized command of self, particularly as it relates to overarching "enlightened" *male* mastery, is also satirized by Chopin as Léonce's public and privately-invested "world" (maintaining appearances for his peers *and* himself) exemplifies a very simulated and precarious grasp of self.

As Edna grows resistant to her role as proper wife and “mother-woman”, she begins to take command of her own day-to-day life by ignoring her reception days. *The Ladies Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (1860) by Florence Hartley outlines the strict expectations of the lady of the house on reception days in the late nineteenth-century Western household:

Let nothing, but the most imperative duty, call you out upon your reception day. Your callers are, in a measure, invited guests, and it will be an insulting mark of rudeness to be out when they call. Neither can you be excused ... Having appointed the day when you will be at home ... you must, for that day, prepare to give your time wholly to them.

Indeed, Edna feels her “most imperative duty” is to avoid “giving her time wholly” to anyone out of oppressive expectation, which most particularly, speaks to her obedience to her husband and his social circles. She does not wait to be “excused.” Léonce is perturbed when he finds out Edna has been neglecting even more “duties” and exclaims, ““Why, my dear, I should think you’d understand by this time that people don’t do such things; we’ve got to observe *les convenances*” (49). Léonce begins to wonder “if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself,” or certainly, what Chopin names her “fictitious self” that Léonce had come to know and covet (55). He insists: “I’m not making any fuss over it. But it’s just such seeming trifles that we’ve got to take seriously; *such things count*” (49). But how do they count? The role of the host-guest relation is a chief concern of the middle to upper-class Southerners of the time period to establish good character. Yet this relation is also employed by Chopin in an inverted way. The party scene in *The Awakening* demonstrates how Chopin adapts the classic host and guest binary to dramatize Edna’s unique concerns and actions as a modern woman

contemplating subjectivity, taking the reins on an opportunity to assemble her peers and self in her own right.

Another important counterpart to Edna's developing understanding of New Womanhood is her friend Madame Adele Ratignolle. Adele is a quintessential member of the Cult of True Womanhood, as is considered by most characters in the text to be the ideal wife and mother – whom Chopin, indeed ironically, names the “fair lady of our dreams” (9). Chopin first distinguishes Edna and Adele in a subtle manner by commenting on the nature of their hands, which symbolically speaks to the nature of their work as women. While Edna's hands are “strong” and coarse, Adele's hands are described in a deliberately overdrawn manner to highlight her ideal mother-work: “never were hands more exquisite than hers, and it was a joy to look at them when she threaded her needle” (Chopin, 9). The characters' physiques also contrast, as Adele is characterized by her ample, nourishing bosom and fragile white skin and Edna is notably, “rather handsome than beautiful ... [having] a certain frankness of expression and contradictory ... features” (5). This comparison places the delicate mother-woman in contrast to the defiant, almost masculine New Woman who surely would seem at the time, “contradictory.” Chopin thus emphasizes the binary positions on womanhood: the strictly traditional and defiantly modern. Edna goes on to characterize the mother-woman role when thinking about Adele as one who, “idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals” (9). Of course Edna grows to reject these sanctified strictures as she achieves more distance from them. Though Edna is “fond of her children” she notes that their physical absence hints at a freedom from maternal responsibility which, “she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her”

(19). Adele is horrified by Edna's proposition that Adele's singular role in life as mother-woman may be constructed, or secondary to her own mysterious selfhood. Edna repeatedly asserts: "she would never sacrifice *herself* for her children ... 'I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself ... it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me'" (my emphasis, 46). Adele concedes that she does not conceive of any "self" apart from her day-to-day life as her children's mother, and is satisfied as such.

By the middle of the novel, Edna shirks her "mother-woman" role in favour of an attempt at artistic womanhood. She cultivates a closer relationship with the anti-social pianist Mademoiselle Reiss and contemplates a creative lifestyle, which foreshadows her party where she becomes a composer herself of sorts. Edna, however, finds little deep satisfaction in these creative pursuits like sketching and painting, as in her mother-woman work, as Mary E. Papke observes in "Kate Chopin's Social Fiction": "To be a mother-woman is to abjure the self for the sake of others; to be an artist-woman is to live celibate, to give all one's love to expression. Edna proves incapable of sustaining herself in such *solitude*" (my emphasis, 82). So Edna must pursue a different kind of *communal* work to appeal to her inner and more private stirrings within, that other portion of her divided selfhood that she has felt, however unconsciously, all her life: "Even as a child she had lived her own small life within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively a dual life – the outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin, 14). Edna finds herself bringing together these public and private impulses in the scene of her party.

As a “New Woman” Edna is intent on ushering in a new phase of her life, so it is fitting that Chopin chose to frame this by having her protagonist physically welcome others into her convention-laden, private space – her home. While Chopin does not explicitly voice Edna’s deeper motivations for holding her party, this should not signal a wholly superficial scene of Chopin’s or empty, mechanical behaviour of her main character. Indeed, as the party progresses it becomes clearer that Edna may have underlying method to her madness. Hospitality theory provides a useful point of leverage into this dense scene to theorize the work of the host or hostess.

Hospitality entails essential political and ethical concerns in the intersection between the public and private domain, and so, offers a theoretical viewpoint into a reading of Edna’s realist narrative as hostess (certainly as intended by Chopin) and also the party scene of *The Awakening*.⁶ Relations of hospitality belong to “a social practise [...] [they are] the reciprocal bond of obligation linking members of an extended society” (McNulty, x). In a home of the host where any host and guest commune, whether by invitation or chance, is where the complex conditions of hospitality are read. Jacques Derrida discusses such interactions at length in his lectures transcribed (and translated from French to English) in *Of Hospitality*.

Both Jacques Derrida and Tracy McNulty after him map out the concept of “absolute hospitality” alongside the laws/institution of hospitality, distinguishing and

⁶ Derrida references the simultaneously public/private space that is of concern in this chapter in the closing moves of his lecture, “The Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad, from the Foreigner” (January 10, 1996) as translated by Rachel Bowlby in *Of Hospitality*. Derrida posits that, “a reflection on hospitality presupposes, among other things, the possibility of a rigorous delimitation of thresholds or frontiers ...but first of all between the private and the public” (47-48). The party scene as a “threshold” is helpfully informed by the hospitality theory Derrida illuminates.

drawing links between the ontological ideal and the moves of men. Absolute hospitality for Derrida is fundamentally “unconditional” in humans and requires that: “I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner [or stranger, guest] ... [but] that I *give place* to them, that I let them come ... without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their name” (25). The hospitable welcome, what Derrida names “the law of [absolute] hospitality,” involves the host “giving place” or right-to-exist to the foreign guest in his private home, without demanding anything in return. Yet in being an “ideal,” absolute hospitality is never fully or faithfully actualized in actions under its name; Derrida likens this to the relationship between “justice” and institutional laws: they consistently prove to be heterogeneous but are often closely linked to the point of indissociability (25-26). The concern then, for Derrida, is taking on the ethical implications of these hospitable *acts* which he calls “the *laws* of hospitality” (my emphasis, 81) after Emmanuel Kant in *Toward Perpetual Peace*. Derrida considers the implication of these “laws” or relations by analyzing the host-guest relationship. Derrida emphasizes that a consideration of hospitality is fundamental when conceiving of the very “being” of the foreigner, or guest, as he reads “The Foreigner” character of Plato’s *The Sophist* (9). In this narrative, a “Foreigner” enters into a host Parmenides’ home. In doing so however, the foreigner establishes his place within the house of the “masterful” host, meaning that his foreign “being somehow *is*” in valid existence upon his entry (my emphasis, 9). However this relation demands that father Parmenides’ solipsist mastery of the space is suddenly put into question, and therefore the foreigner’s “being” amounts to a significant threat (7). Hospitality is concerned with the fragile “being” of the host and guest in this way, as they meet and negotiate in the home.⁷

⁷ The home is also fundamentally *created* by this interaction, produced through a host’s “welcoming”

One of Derrida's observations in the lecture "Step of Hospitality"⁸ particularly addresses this chapter's interests in analyzing the layers of the party scene. When thinking about Pierre Klossowski's *The Laws of Hospitality*, Derrida posits that "laws" of ideal hospitable relations can be conceived as written on a metaphorical page that is: "'Under glass,' ... intangible, presumably, but visible and more than visible, *readable* as the being of written laws must be ... They are there, under glass, to watch over the guests and over their own perversion" (my emphasis, 85). These seemingly "intangible" hospitable relations going on among the "guests" – let us imagine the party scene – are certainly most "readable" in the literary form. Chopin depicts these visible laws or relations in fascinating ways as Edna acts as hostess to her guests, and eventually, is mentally overcome by this liminal role. Edna's momentary transition from the host/master to the foreigner/stranger in her own home, a scene to be examined closely in the latter portion of this chapter, is similar to a situation conceived by Derrida: the "perverting" hospitable transaction that paradoxically alters the host's fundamental understanding of his subjectivity. Derrida posits that the master of the house "'waits anxiously on the threshold of his home' for the stranger he will see arising into view on the horizon as liberator" (121-122). Derrida explains this logic of the guest as a potential, perhaps unconsciously desired "liberator" of the host:

It is *as if* the stranger or foreigner held the keys ... could ... liberate the power of his host; it's *as if* the master ... were prisoner of his place and his power, of his ipseity, of his subjectivity (his subjectivity is hostage). So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage – and really always has been. (123-124)

declaration (this welcome is never ideally harmonious, as will be discussed).

⁸ From the lecture, "Step of Hospitality/No Hospitality" (January 17, 1996) as translated by Rachel Bowlby in *Of Hospitality*.

Derrida's thinking here is one of the chief lenses that will be carried through an analysis of Edna's position as hostess to her guests in this chapter, as Chopin theorizes a similarly unexpected inversion. Derrida suggests here that the relations of hospitality blur the distinctions between the foreign guest and the masterful host. In so eagerly and habitually receiving the guest/stranger "as if" the guest can supplement his subjectivity, the host articulates a primary need to remedy his/her limited "being." The host strangely *requires* the arrival of the stranger to approach a sense of self even though this process, as we have learned from Derrida's reading of Parmenides, will first fracture the understanding self. This requirement is a strange "must" of hospitable action that this chapter will consider in Edna's own invitation of guests and subsequent internal dissolution. Derrida evokes the question: why "must" the host enact his own self-division?

Tracy McNulty more specifically articulates hospitality throughout Western religious and philosophical history in *The Hostess: Hospitality, Femininity, and the Expropriation of Identity*, and provides a fundamental basis for thinking about the significant role of women in hospitable relations. McNulty is similarly interested in the implications and symbolism underlying hospitable acts and follows Derrida's insight on the host-as-hostage to his "masterful" sense of self. McNulty expands on Derrida's notion of the host, positing that being a host requires that the subject open his/her identity "to what is unfamiliar to it" (xiv) (which recalls Derrida's aforementioned, strange logic of the host's impulsive invitation of the stranger). McNulty focuses on this, "fundamental tension within the hospitality relationship: between [the masterful] identity and relations" enacted by it (xiv).

Key to McNulty's study of hospitality is an etymological analysis of the terms pertaining to hosts/masters and guests/foreigners. McNulty identifies the fascinating duality of the Latin root word for both "guest" and "host" in "hostis" (ix), what Derrida fittingly names a "paradoxical filiation" (21). McNulty digs even deeper into the Latin term for the "master of the house," *potis*: "before he had any subjects, the master was his own subject, a subject properly speaking; the roots *-pet-*, *-pot-*, and *-pt-*, [of *potis*] ... originally signified 'personal identity' ... Hence *potis* identifies not only the master, but the master who is 'eminently himself', the personification of personal identity" (ix). This logic of the master - apart from the foreign guest - being characterized by his ipseity, his isolated understanding of personal subjectivity, is essential to McNulty's further study of the host (and recalls the aforementioned nineteenth century notion of selfhood characterized by Barbara C. Ewell - the self secure in its "I"-ness). For when the invitation and the home come into play, this ispeity or "sovereignty of the subject itself" becomes threatened – again recalling Parmenides' threat (xii). McNulty suggests that the hospitality relation "call[s] for an understanding of the *subject*, as hospitality is thus to oppose to the notion of identity – with all that it implies of the self-identical, the total, and the integral – an understanding of subjectivity as *foreign to itself*, as nonidentical" (my emphasis, xix). Hospitality relations articulate the subject as having a "foreignness" about it, which begins to answer Derrida's question about why the subject welcomes the imminently fracturing guest. McNulty wagers that because "something must support [the guest's] challenge to identity *from within*," the host's subjectivity must contain a certain foreignness *inside* as well. It then stands to reason that "the dispossession of identity [with the entrance of the guest/foreigner] is uncannily internal to identity itself" (xxii, xix). A large part of Chopin's novel is devoted to depicting this

stirring, foreign self within Edna's private subjectivity, and critically, when she is "master of the house." McNulty identifies the master as one who, "gathers together and disposes of what is proper to him" (x). This notion of "gathering" for the purposes of offering "proper" hospitality and being a "proper" host is a main consideration of this study of Edna Pontellier, as her work to construct the space, guest list, ambience and trajectory of her party will be examined alongside her attempted "gathering" together of a composed sense of self before she leaves her husband and their home. Of course this naturally-inverting hospitable action serves to fracture and ultimately allow the hostess knowledge of her divided sense of self.

Tracy McNulty's builds on Derrida's understanding of hospitality (always thinking in light of Derrida as her research advisor) as her primary focus is on the role of the *woman* in relation to the concept of the host. McNulty proposes why the female hostess has been typically overlooked in philosophical, social and literary theory thus far: "While the host is determined as the perfect embodiment of identity ... the hostess [being a woman] is often cast as bereft of individual identity and lacking in ipseity, an indeterminate 'thing' rather than an integral moral person" (xlii). It is this superficial objectification of the woman from antiquity through modernity that McNulty takes up in *The Hostess: Hospitality, Femininity, and the Expropriation of Identity*. In keeping with this investigation on Edna as a hostess on the cusp of New Womanhood, McNulty identifies a dismissive reading of the hostess that recalls Chopin's contemporary critics, as the hostess is commonly deemed to be "capable of dissimulation, or of acting without regard for civic or moral law" (xlii). The dismissal of Edna on grounds of poor "morals" recalls Chopin's contemporary critics and Edna's fictional peers. McNulty goes on to emphasize how the female hostess is so often conceived solely in relation to her male

counterpart, the truer host, being the “personal property” that defines this master’s identity, recalling the previous discussion of Léonce’s objectification of his wife (xxxvi). And finally, of most fundamental concern for McNulty, the hostess is often conceived as “lack[ing] unified personhood” that is essential to the typical masterful identity (xliv). McNulty’s main concern is identifying feminine hospitable practice in historical narratives to indict “personhood,” as she sees the hostess as the most useful figure to demonstrate “the alterity within personhood... the internal marking of the Other” that debunks the masterful self-identity as Derrida alluded (xxv).⁹ She suggests that across cultures and religions the feminine has been related to the “‘beyond’ of privative identity” as women are more commonly attuned to the entrance of the guest into the sanctified, private home than their male partners (xxvii).

The analysis that follows on Edna’s party should be briefly distinguished from McNulty’s approach. McNulty predominantly concerns herself with feminine objectification, her “belonging” to man, to highlight “the presence of something improper within the host’s personal property” and therefore, subjectivity (xxviii). The analysis in this chapter is not concerned with indicting the failures of male subjectivity as host, but does aim to question a host’s subjectivity. While Edna is certainly treated as “thingly” (to use McNulty’s vocabulary) by her husband Léonce, Edna acts in her own right as a hostess apart from her role as his constitutive object (McNulty, xxvii). In other words, Edna is not simply a part of Léonce – she is notably part masterful and part foreign in her shifting cognizance of *herself*. Indeed, the interest of this analysis of *The Awakening* mirrors that of McNulty’s project and Derrida’s lectures in its examination

⁹ McNulty references Levinas as a thinker who has proposed the feminine as being specially attuned to ‘the Other’, though she remarks that he “tends to link this ‘feminine hospitality’ to qualities supposedly innate in women, like maternal love, empathy, or care” (xxv). Levinas’ thinking is important to depart from in this chapter, in light of the New Woman helming the party.

of the “fundamental tension at the heart of the hospitality relation: between identity as a whole or one and identity as split” (McNulty, xliii). An analysis of her host-work then dramatizes the aforementioned “paradoxical filiation of *hostis*”, as Edna embodies, and Chopin theorizes, both the jarring foreign feelings and blissful moments of balanced mastery in her assembly (Derrida, 21).¹⁰

Concerted criticism on Edna Pontellier’s dinner party is relatively limited within Kate Chopin scholarship. Due in part to the many contentious issues that *The Awakening* evokes including adultery, suicide, and racial and class divisions, the party scene is often overlooked. One of Chopin’s contemporary critics commented on Edna’s moments of interiority, or internal monologue, writing that, “It gives one a distinct shock to see Edna’s crude mental operations” (“New Publications” [from “Contemporary Reviews”] 167). Modern academics read further into Chopin’s experimental writing of Edna’s developing consciousness, but remain divided on Edna’s account of her dinner party. Sandra M. Gilbert notes in “The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin’s Fantasy of Desire” that the, “party scene ... has been ignored by many critics and puzzled a few” (42). Dorothy H. Jacobs is one critic who dismisses Edna’s work here as lacking essential “direction” and method in “The Awakening: A Recognition of Confinement” (90). Jacobs argues that Edna only experiences pleasure and solitude when alone or swimming, overlooking Edna’s quiet contemplation and strange enjoyment at her dinner party, something she characterizes

¹⁰ I would like to briefly acknowledge Peter Melville’s text, *Romantic Hospitality and the Resistance to Accommodation: Rousseau, Kant, Coleridge, and Mary Shelley* which also takes on Derridean hospitality in light of literary texts that frame hospitable relations. For indeed, this thesis follows in the general tradition of Melville as he uses hospitality theory to expand a reading of specific guest-host wagers in fiction, though Melville’s focus is primarily on the role of the guest or “stranger” as opposed to the host. Melville’s thinking aligns strongly with this thesis’ assertion that the guests entrance into the home necessarily threatens the host’s “self-sovereignty.” Melville also importantly emphasizes and critically demonstrates the impossibility of the ideally hospitable relation that Derrida proposed through a reading of Romantic texts (Melville, 22).

as basically “hopeless” (86, 80). While Gilbert focuses particularly on the classic mythical imagery she reads in the party’s description, she does make some important observations of the event as a whole which she aptly describes as “extraordinarily complex [in its] literary structure, a scene whose images and allusions as well as its dramatic plot suggest surprisingly rich veins of symbolic significance” that no doubt require closer reading (44).

Gilbert begins by describing the party as a “ceremonial celebration of her departure from one household and her entrance into another,” which is the most basic reading of Edna’s event. Of course the symbolism of the event runs deeper to mark her claims to autonomy, as the space becomes a “spiritual and material room of her own” (42-43). Gilbert emphasizes that this is one of the longest episodes in the novel, yet reveals what she sees to be a “secret, inexplicable sadness” (43). While she acknowledges past readings of the party as another “half-mad housewife experience” or “unfocused yearning for roman[ce]” (43), Gilbert cannot account for that moment of “sadness” of Chopin’s “magical hostess” (44). She references Bernard J. Koloski’s essay, “The Swinburne Lines in *The Awakening*” that speaks to a looming force over Edna’s party. Koloski notes the two lines spoken in the scene by the guest, Gouvernail “under his breath,” that originate from Algernon Charles Swinburne’s dark poem “A Cameo”: “There was a graven image of Desire/ painted with red blood on a ground of gold” (85). Koloski reads this reference as reflecting, “the atmosphere of impending death that is often noticeable in the novel” (608). He argues that the poem does not so much reflect “the presence of Desire” as “the aloof figure of Death who watches over all the activities taking place” (309). No doubt Koloski is reading this party in light of Edna’s perceived suicide at the end of the text, which he deems “no surprise” (610).

Only the party *does* seem to address a great deal of desires, particularly Edna's in her careful composition of guests and deep immersion in the sensations of the event. The lines of the poem also take on a different meaning in conjunction with the argument of this thesis: that there lies an uncanny presence within the host and his/her party that must be acknowledged as part of his divided subjectivity. The lines reference the entrance of the fearsome ("blood") onto the luxurious backdrop ("ground of gold"), an artistic vision that mirrors Edna's darker, more personally fundamental contemplation that enters into her opulent party.

Cristina Giorcelli, somewhat problematically, addresses Edna's ontological position in "Edna's Wisdom: A Transitional and Numinous Merging." Giorcelli characterizes Edna by her "ambivalence" when contemplating her selfhood, which is fitting considering her quick progression into New Womanhood, but criticizes her "indirect method" of contemplating reality (110, 121). She argues that, "Edna's cognitive process is thus based on *fiction* ... she yearns for abstractions, for illusions" (121). While the dinner party is certainly fantastic in its luxurious description and Edna finds herself immersed in sensation, it does not seem to read as "fiction" or "illusion." In fact, the party scene is one very concrete moment in the text where Edna is firmly located between her public and private environments and senses of self. This scene importantly frames her developing ontological position through physical and material, albeit sumptuous, relations with her guests. Heilmann emphasizes the convention of New Women writers to "frequently emplo[y] sensational plot elements in exploring feminist themes" and that "the carnivalesque feast ... stages a *symbolic over-enactment* of the anarchic spirit that distinguishes the 'free woman' from the

wife” (my emphasis, 89, 95). Chopin has to be bold to do justice to this very real and climactic occasion in Edna’s personal development.

The hospitable relations taking place during this dinner party recall aspects of Derrida and McNulty’s vision of the hostess’ position. Edna’s impulse in this critical scene of *The Awakening* is to assemble her guests alongside her new subjectivity apart from Léonce and her lover. While she consciously attempts to gather her peers harmoniously in one space to emphasize her novel sense of self as an autonomous “master” of her home, Chopin also makes a point of theorizing the complications of this hospitable action. Chopin seems to propose in Edna’s progressively fracturing assembly that the hostess is *constitutively* divided in her subjectivity – something which she dramatizes through Edna’s moments of darkness during her opulent gathering. Edna’s “assembly” works to highlight the impossibility of wholeness in the hospitable act, but also emphasizes the authenticity of the *divided* self – between private questions and stirrings and the need for public “appearances” and composure, the demands of the outside and inside. Chopin’s realist depiction of her awakening woman could not be more fittingly framed than in her complex work as “hostess,” coming to grips with her position straddling the public and private realms simultaneously.

The party in Chapter XXX sits at the narrative crux of *The Awakening*, and in celebrating her awakening independence from her husband, is also fittingly revealed as Edna’s *birthday* (Gray, 68). To be sure, this positioning of the scene makes Edna’s dinner party a critical moment for Chopin in demonstrating how far Edna has come in her autonomy and where she may go from there. As Edna carefully controls her peers’ experience of the magic of her party and establishes her new identity at the head of the grand table, Edna’s party scene is instructive of her two inseparable works as hostess:

that which assembles and attends to others and that which assembles and attends to the self.

Edna joyfully anticipates her move to the small house down the street from her mansion that is, significantly, not owned by Léonce Pontellier. She assumes that Léonce will think she is “demented” for embracing these new feelings of independence and leaving him, that she would have to make some kind of explanation, but asserts to herself that, “whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself” (76). Léonce’s almost comical reaction to this notice is to stage renovations on the home so there would be good reason for his wife to living elsewhere. He places an advertisement in the local newspaper to alert his peers that the mansion was simply undergoing, “sumptuous alterations” (89). For, indeed, all Mr. Pontellier concerns himself with is “saved appearances!” (89). Edna soon tells Mademoiselle Reisz about her idea for a celebration of the move, enticing her to attend the “grand dinner” by promising to “give [her] everything that [she] likes to eat and to drink. We shall sing and laugh and be merry for once” – strangely, Chopin follows this joyful invitation with a condition, that Edna then “uttered a sigh that came from the very depths of her being” (77). Certainly Edna desires this party in a more fundamental and longing way to actualize her new autonomous “being,” that like Mademoiselle Reisz, has been stifled and is starved for air. However, in only knowing one way to compose a sense of her self and allow it a public presence, Edna follows the tradition of her husband and “hosts” in their home. Jennifer B. Gray argues in “Escape of the “Sea”: Ideology and *The Awakening*” that Edna takes the place of the “male role of her husband” in giving the party in her husband’s home (68). This adoption of old social mores for self-definition, along with the inevitable flawed

nature of the hospitable act, foreshadows the fracture to come in Edna's careful assembly.

Edna carefully selects and invites her guests "with discrimination" and method, planning on an "even dozen" to surround her table – though the ten that are able to attend still provide a "comfortable" group (82). Significantly, those absent are Edna's very traditionally feminine social peers Madame LeBrun and Adele Ratignolle (who has succumbed to another one of her ladylike "spells"). The absence of these traditional figures of "proper" femininity gives the party an air of potential for Edna to espouse, even for a moment, a different kind of womanhood. Edna poses at the head of the table as hostess with her resident alpha-males Arobin and Monsieur Ratignolle symbolically seated to the *side* of her (82). Once she has gathered her peers together she experiences enjoyable conversation and the first moments of peaceful luxuriance between host and guest. The guests are amicable with one another, as recounted in the initial excerpt from the party scene that begins this chapter. The men and women begin by interacting equally and politely, feigning interest in each others' stories and striking up conversation with whoever happens to be seated next to them regarding books, music or the economy. Indeed, Edna's guests enter into her home and observe polite, constructed social convention. Edna's masterful composition, it seems, begins on an ideal harmonious note. Of course as the sensuality of the party develops the hospitable relations deepen and evolve.

Edna's dinner party is depicted as similarly pleasant and balanced in its décor, food and music. Chopin pays particular attention to describing the different sights, sounds and textures of the room to draw the reader into Edna's sensuous party. The table is first described, being of central material importance to the gathering, as

establishing the initial “effect of splendour” (83). It is covered with rare textiles of silk, satin and lace, and soft-lit with wax candles that emphasize the silver, gold and crystal implements arranged across the table. Lush roses intoxicate the guests in their fragrance and appeal to the women, themselves laden with glittering jewels (83). The chairs surrounding the table have also been gathered together by the hostess, as “the ordinary stiff dining chairs had been discarded for the occasion and replaced by the most commodious and luxurious which could be collected throughout the house” (83). Indeed, the hostess carefully re-assembles her husband’s property to compose her own dinner table more suited to *her* comfort and intent as host. She even seats her likeminded more-feminist friend Mademoiselle Reisz on a few cushions to account for her smaller stature, symbolically lifting her up to the opulence not normally offered to her as a forthright, unmarried woman (83). The ambience of the scene is bound together by the music, coming from somewhere unseen, “of mandolins” which Edna has strategically placed “sufficiently removed to be an agreeable accompaniment rather than an interruption to the conversation” – reminding the reader that she maintains a method beneath the perceived magic of the selected guests (84). The music is complimented by the watery lull of a fountain that mingles with the scent of “jessamine,” alluding to a serene garden outside the room - as if the guests were isolated in a dreamlike Eden (84).

Peter Melville describes the magical quality of the doorway into the home in *Romantic Hospitality and the Resistance to Accommodation: Rousseau, Kant, Coleridge and Mary Shelley*. Melville posits that whoever is allowed inside the household is afforded a kind of “shelter from the storm” from being permitted into the private, “guarded” and “concealed” space – momentarily anyway, before the threshold

is complicated by the guest-host binary (27). Edna's household mirrors these qualities on the night of her party, as the select guests are afforded a unique experience in the private fantasy she paints in her dining room. This safety the guests and Edna feel in the party room as the event progresses recalls the "wholeness" that both Felski and Gilman deemed a "characteristic" expectation of the feminine-helmed household. Indeed, this magic of the welcome, the fantasy or sensation of the harmonious assembly is key for Edna as hostess, yearning to claim her public identity. For certainly Edna is the most important symbol of her rich composition, sitting so regally at the head of her table and dressed much like it in lace, crystal and hazy candlelight:

The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. There was a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders ... There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone (Chopin, 84)

Edna's importance at the table is signified by her affluent dress, atop her head is a "magnificent cluster of diamonds" sent by Léonce in his absence – likely in the interest of keeping appearances again (83). The latter portion of this description of Edna depicts her initial role and masterly quality as hostess, a distinct "attitude" or portion of her subjectivity that believes it "rules, looks on, stands alone" – of course this is the same singular subjectivity of both the typical host and nineteenth-century self that has proven to come into jeopardy in the presence of the guest (84). The material nature of her position at this point is also precarious, as Edna has never found satisfaction in being one possession amongst many in Léonce Pontellier's home. Still, in these opening moments, "a feeling of good fellowship passed around the circle like a mystic cord, holding and binding these people together with jest and laughter"; Edna

enjoys a brief, ideal moment of successful public and private hospitable composure (84-85).

Soon these sensual effects start to massage Edna's guests into familiarity with one another, changing their disposition in fascinating ways. Mrs. Highcamp grows infatuated with the young and handsome Victor LeBrun, seated next to her. As she drinks and eats she "[hangs] with languid ... interest upon the warm and impetuous volubility of her left-hand neighbour" (Chopin, 84). The warmth and languor of her interest characterizes the guests' relations with one another as the night grows later. Soon Mrs. Highcamp crosses the boundary of the hostess' table and takes some roses to weave into a garland for Victor. Mrs. Highcamp adorns Victor's head with the garland making him appear as if "a magician's wand had touched him, the garland of roses transform[ing] him into a vision of Oriental beauty. His cheeks were the colour of crushed grapes, and his dusky eyes glowed with a languishing fire" (85). Victor slowly transforms into his own magical, regal vision at the table, reclining in his own chair and coveting his glittering champagne. Even Mrs. Mayblunt starts to "[lose] herself in a rhapsodic dream as she looked at him" (85). Edna observes this costuming with mostly neutral interest, but this does mark a change in the scene where the guests have become "at home" in her party. This foreshadows Edna's coming moment of confusion when her role as hostess begins to feel strangely disrupted.

Though initially harmonious and seemingly perfect, Edna's party grows fraught with moments of deep contemplation on behalf of its beautiful host and composer. The magic and shadows contained in poetry of this chapter make it one of the most compelling scenes in the novel. These darker moments of Edna's dinner party employ a technique that will become popular in modernist fiction, particularly in

women's literature: interiority and stream-of-consciousness narration. These internal moments mark and depict the entrance of the "unknown" or the foreign that balances Edna's mastery of her gathering thus far.

Edna's darkness intrudes on her household shortly after her guests have been invited inside. Despite having enjoyed herself up to this point in the text Edna is struck by the same emotions that left her crying on the beach in the summertime, those "misty" oppressions. While observing her guests surrounding her midway through her party, Edna is overcome by a feeling of "hopelessness" which she describes as "something extraneous, independent of volition" – the unexpected entry of external foreignness into her happily balanced party (Chopin, 85). Edna is consumed with an "acute longing" that she vaguely attributes to "her spiritual vision of the beloved one" which signals "the unattainable" (84-85). This reference to the "beloved one" may be to the object of her prior affections, Robert, who is missing from the table, but judging by Edna's aforementioned assertions that lovesickness was not the cause of her revelations, this spiritual moment is more open to interpretation. All that Edna can be sure of is that her party has changed in the presence of the uncanny longing for an unreachable part of her "spirit" or subjectivity. The entrance of the guest through hospitable relations has caused this hostess to reframe her ipseity to address another spiritual, deeply private aspect of herself deep within, and so she sees that even in her careful assembly she remains divided in her evolving sense of self.

After this harsh realization, Mr. Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz's satiated departure further marks the "break [in] the pleasant charm" of the night (Chopin, 85). Mademoiselle Reisz "descend[s] from her cushions" back to her real stature, and Mr. Ratignolle "gallantly" guides them both toward their own homes (85). Edna starts to

falter after this display of conventional male “care” for a woman she had conceived as wholly independent and ambivalent towards polite society. Following this departure, the dark shift in Edna’s wellbeing culminates in a tense moment between herself and her guest Victor Lebrun as he seems to symbolically usurp her role as the powerful “host” of the party – the same host-guest inversion that Derrida theorized as a result of host’s impulsive welcome of the guest to define his subjectivity. The crowned and costumed Victor’s consumption of wine has moved him to confident silence and “reverie” (85-86). He proceeds to sing for the guests, after some prompting, the very same song that his brother Robert LeBrun had sung for Edna during that summer of her initial awakening. Edna is struck by this reminder of her lover Robert and the command he maintains over her affections. No doubt Edna feels threatened by this uninvited guest entering her party through Victor, as she demands that he stop: “Stop! ... don’t sing that. I don’t want you to sing it” (86). Edna grows anxious and smashes her wine glass, spilling wine on Arobin’s legs and Mrs. Highcamp’s gown – the composed hostess fracturing with the glass. When Victor does not stop singing out of jest Edna stands to forcibly cover his mouth. He kisses her hand, maintaining his charming façade, and agrees to stop. Edna reacts to this indiscretion by removing his rose garland and “[flinging] it across the room” (86). Her comment to him following his de-crowning is ironic considering her own posing that determined the conditions of the party: “Come, Victor; you’ve posed long enough. Give Mrs. Highcamp her scarf” (86). Edna physically breaks the final construction of her assembly in rejection of masculine role-reversals she sees and the deeper, strange confusion about her selfhood and desires that her party has invited into her consciousness. Edna is left

feeling intruded-on by her public world and jarred by her unsatisfied private self that refuses to yield under her constructed finery.

Chopin frames this dramatized hospitable moment by having Edna's guests exit into the night as the mandolin players leave. She paints a vision of "the voices of Edna's disbanding guests jarred like a discordant note upon the quiet harmony of the night" (Chopin, 87). Now instead of providing a comfortable number of friends for a magical assembly, Edna's guests – their voices that emphasize their painfully apparent being – have become a disturbance to the solitude of Edna's controlled evening. In the following chapter, Edna discusses her emotions surrounding the party with Arobin, remarking that: "I feel as if I had been wound up to a certain pitch – too tight- and something inside of me had snapped" (88). Indeed, Chopin's hostess has found herself wound by society, and then wound on her own accord, until she snaps into a more authentic reality and understanding of her strained position between selves and realms. Robert and Edna drive past the Pontellier mansion later on after her party, which she describes as now "broken and half torn asunder" under renovations which symbolically mirrors Edna's own sense of self after leaving the space (94).

When Edna's party ends that note of "discord" lingers. Swinburne has echoed into the air and prophesized death. And fittingly by the end of the novel the reader walks with Edna into the ocean and grows exhausted with her. As she swims out further than she can return from, Edna reminisces about a moment in her childhood that she previously recounted to Madame Ratignolle: running through a field of tall grass, as if swimming, and feeling as if "I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it. I don't remember whether I was frightened or pleased" (my emphasis,

Chopin, 17). Edna equates this moment in her childhood where she realizes the positive potential in wandering into the unknown with her swimming, something she previously described as “a feeling of exultation ... as if some power of significant import had been given her soul ... She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before” (27). Indeed, by the end of the text, Edna has immersed herself into the pursuit of both freedom *and* the unknown, attending to both her autonomous and foreign private parts of her awakening self. Edna’s forges on in the face of the unknown, recalling Showalter’s summation of the difference between the male and female artists of the fin de siècle:

while the male artists in the fin de siècle saw the prospects of a coming apocalypse, and feared the death of familiar structures ... women writers had less to lose in the disappearance of old cultural forms and much to hope for in the birth of a new century. They described their sense of transition in feminist allegories which acknowledge the failures of the present and dangers of the future, but refuse to turn back (xviii).

Edna has left behind her old “old cultural” oppressions in hope of being born anew and, despite the “dangers of the future” as depicted by the tumult of the sea, she has no intention of turning back out of fear. It is fitting that the water surrounding her threatens death but also signals birth for Edna, an inverted baptism. If this is in fact Edna’s end, which is mostly implied but accepted now as fact by scholars, there stands the dangerous possibility of ultimate *moral* judgment. Indeed, Chopin’s contemporary critics leapt on the opportunity to use this scene to prove her ultimate failures as a character and woman, justifying her immorality or basic insanity. Like the party scene however, this scene offers a strange catharsis. It is fitting that a discussion of Edna’s party begins this final chapter, as if to imply that the two events be conceived of together. As Edna walks toward the ocean, Victor recounts to a friend Mariequita the

details of Edna's "veritable Lucillean feast" and describes his hostess as "blazing with beauty ... at the head of the board" (106). Edna's strong statement of being a powerful, female head of household – in all her desires for independence and self-definition - remains even as she walks into the unknown.

Showalter considers the ending of Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* when thinking about Edna's end in *The Awakening*. At the end of play a mother Nora similarly leaves her husband, feeling held back from an autonomous life of her own outside the mounting pressures of her household role or proper "appearance" and her "duty" toward her children (impatiently emphasized by her husband Torvald just as much as Léonce). Showalter recounts a reaction from Edith Lees after viewing the first performance of the play in London:

women in the audience, ... lingered after the play, 'breathless with excitement ... We were ... almost savage in our arguments. This was either the end of the world or the beginning of the new world for women. What did it mean? Was there hope or despair in the banging of that door? Was it life or death for women? ... Was it revelation or disaster? (vii)

Indeed, this question would remain after a female reader of the turn of the century would read Edna's journey in *The Awakening*. Did her move signal the tragic despair espoused by Chopin's literary critics, or did it signal the strange and somewhat frightening "beginning of the new world for women"? The party scene of *The Awakening* frames the new consciousness of the modern woman, situated between her public and private life, as she attempts to form her new world and subjectivity. The chapters to come in this thesis will continually re-consider this position into the early-twentieth century, to map out the growth of New Women as they awaken to social strictures and become hostess to the new and unknown. Papke concurs that *The*

Awakening is a most appropriate, if conventionally uncommon, “prelude” to twentieth century experimental, feminist novels to come (87-88).

CHAPTER TWO

Experiencing “the perfect hostess”¹¹ in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*

“[Virginia Woolf biographer Quentin Bell suggests that] [t]o some extent [Clarissa Dalloway] may be identified with [socialite] Kitty Maxse, and Kitty’s sudden death in October 1922 - she fell from the top of a flight of stairs and Virginia believed that she had committed suicide - almost certainly helped to ... give that book its final character.” (Philipson, 133)

“And yet for [Clarissa’s] own part, [hosting] was... too much like being—just anybody, standing there; anybody could do it; yet this anybody she did a little admire, couldn’t help feeling that she had, anyhow, made this happen, that it marked a stage, this post that she felt herself to have become, for oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven in at the top of her stairs. Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background, it was possible to say things you couldn’t say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper.” (Woolf, 151)

The widely observed structural relationship between the narratives of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* critically influences a reader’s understanding of the text as a whole. Often the question becomes whether the overarching story is one of tragic social oppression or hopeful resilience, based on the perceived fates of these central characters intended to mirror one another.¹² As varying scholarship on *Mrs. Dalloway* demonstrates, critics’ impression of Woolf’s ultimate worldview consistently references their *sense* of the meaning of the relationship between the hostess and the madman (or woman, if one parallels Woolf’s hostess with Kitty Maxse), whether it be a tragic expression of social bondage or indication of the ultimate freedom of the soul. It is important to identify a reader only having a “sense” of the characters and action in this novel, as Woolf’s narrative technique of free indirect discourse only allots the reader a descriptive reading of *experiences*. Woolf’s characteristic manner of storytelling makes the reader privy to a character’s thoughts “verbatim” while also employing a third person

¹¹ This is Peter Walsh’s reprimand of Clarissa’s changing character upon being courted by a young Richard Dalloway, and will be analysed below (Woolf, 53-54).

¹² Morris Philipson notes that Woolf explicitly stated in the 1928 Modern Library edition of the novel that Septimus was intended to be Clarissa’s double (133-134).

narrator to describe action (Snaith, 63). The result is a narrative that embraces ambiguity between what is being authoritatively reported and what is simply being shown, where private voices and a public voice are conjoined (Snaith, 64). In *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*, Anna Snaith observes that this narrative form does not attempt a complete or reconciled “synthesis” of the public and private realms, but importantly allows a portrayal of combined, “distinctive voices” (65). In this way *Mrs. Dalloway* does not impose a “hierarchy of meaning” and instead allows all voices equal validity for a reader’s contemplation (76).¹³ While this technique bears further analysis later in this chapter, it is important to identify Woolf as primarily “a describer rather than an explainer” (Payne, 10) which opens discussion on new understandings of the central characters in the novel, their experience, and the greater meaning of *Mrs. Dalloway*. This chapter aims to expand upon current discussions of Clarissa Dalloway’s role in the novel by considering how her role as “hostess” informs her character and actions/reactions, particularly leading up to and during her party where she thoughtfully assembles her social and progressively existential landscape. Without attempting to pin down an “intended” final worldview of Clarissa Dalloway, this chapter will articulate her positioning between the private and the public – as spaces and senses of self – to explain how her role and experience as hostess dramatizes changing Western understandings of female selfhood and “womanhood” at the turn of the century. The second excerpt provided at the outset of this chapter references a possibility that Clarissa Dalloway sees in her parties: that

¹³ Snaith goes on to reference scholar Melba Cuddy-Keane who explains that free indirect discourse also helpfully “acknowledges and incorporates the active and reactive nature of our thinking” (my emphasis, Snaith, 76); what more fitting illustration of this dual nature than in the increasingly blurred parallel between the initially controlled, deliberate thinking of the hostess and the spontaneous musings of the invalid?

these extraordinary events within real life might provide a unique opportunity for people to “go deeper” (Woolf, 151). Indeed, the party scene and lead up of *Mrs. Dalloway* offers a clear, dramatized vision of Clarissa as she assembles her external world and awakens to her private concerns within it. A “stake driven in at the top of her stairs,” Clarissa looks down on her composition of peers with the knowledge of her private room waiting behind her. She does not fall like Kitty Maxse from her position as hostess; instead, her surrogate Septimus leaps and provides Clarissa with a jarring understanding of his oppressed plight and their kinship in this regard. This chapter aims to trace Clarissa’s historical positioning, character, narration and actions in order to articulate the second and further developed hostess – after the overwhelmed fate of late nineteenth-century Edna Pontellier – whom Woolf has decidedly left standing after facing her divided consciousness of self and womanhood.

As in the previous chapter, an examination of the specific historical moment of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* is necessary as it illuminates the greater conditions to which her protagonist is “host.” Critic Alex Zwerdling notes that Woolf was “deeply engaged by the question of how the individual is shaped (or deformed) by his [or her] social environment” and that Woolf’s novels for this reason “are rooted in a realistically rendered social setting and in ... precise historical time” (69). Unlike Kate Chopin’s account of the late nineteenth-century American South, Woolf sets her party in early twentieth-century urban England. Advanced in time, *Mrs. Dalloway* depicts the first post-war period in the modern Western world. This time period in Great Britain is characterized as a world where, due to massive casualties and national distress, “[s]cientific, religious, and heroic faiths have been smashed ... The cross, the

aeroplane [or new technologies]... no longer bring human beings together” as faithfully as they would have (McLaurin,13-14). Clarissa faces a social reality where new faiths must be nurtured both publicly and privately to re-assemble English society in a meaningful, sustainable way.

The novel begins as Clarissa passes through the streets of 1923 London and observes the climate around her after the war has officially ended. Woolf employs parentheses in the novel to allow her characters asides which provide meaningful – if not wholly conscious – commentary on what they are asserting to themselves. Clarissa supposes that though “The War was over” it was not “over” or forgotten by “(... some one like Mrs. Foxcroft ... eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed ... or Lady Bexborough ... with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed ...)” (Woolf, 2). Despite noting this sadness, Clarissa goes on to declare to herself outside of the parentheses: “but it was over; thank Heaven – over” (2). This division of Clarissa’s conscious declarations of renewed normalcy to herself, outside the brackets, is important to emphasize. In the analysis to come, Clarissa will prove to think in this manner where her private thoughts, questions or emotions are intruded on by public influence, in this case, the national narrative espoused by post-war reconstructing Great Britain. A resolved and refreshed social climate, for Clarissa, is reflected in the presence of the royal family being back in London (“The King and Queen were at the Palace”), “the whirling young men, and laughing girls,” familiar “dowagers” back to running errands, shopkeepers returning to their sales, and a general “beating ... stirring” sensation of resuming pre-war life all around her (2-3). Clarissa notes a rising sense of “absurd and faithful passion” within her from being surrounded by the living after such a long period of death and uncertainty for her nation and people. This dual

feeling of seemingly illogical yet strangely calculated fervor runs through Clarissa's hostess-work to come (3). Jacob Littleton characterizes hostess-work in its desire for fostering real "collective experience" in the absence, or general decline, of popular religious sentiment and names Clarissa's compulsive assembly of her community as a kind of "faith." This faith, Littleton qualifies, is like religious faith due to the grains of uncertainty seen in her thinking (Woolf's parenthetical narration) that are "characteristic of all faiths" in this particular "cultural moment ... [of] crumbling Victorian certitude" (40-41). Traces of questioning within her faithful assembly will be critical aspects of Clarissa's character study to come as this chapter establishes the nuances of Clarissa's "faith" in, and vision of, her social world and role within it.

Clarissa continues to walk down Bond Street and poetically names her modern post-war surroundings "this late age of the world's experience," which displays her very communal, shared vision of the death and destruction suffered in the First World War. She expresses that this experience "had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing" (7). For Clarissa, her fellow British people all carry the weight of the world's greater suffering but most importantly, have gained an "upright" attitude toward the past and firm desire to move forward as a nation, something she equates with an innate strength and dignified resolve. Clarissa feels she is very much a part of this joint effort for resilience. This central notion prompts Clarissa's personal efforts to endure "The heat o' the sun," or darker moments in life, to come in the novel.¹⁴ Maria DiBattista explains that women "of a certain class" in Clarissa Dalloway's specific social setting were "conscious inheritors and continuers of the tradition of

¹⁴ A more detailed analysis of Clarissa's refrain of this line of poetry from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* will come in the latter portion of this chapter.

public service, hostesses who, reluctant to inflict their individuality, bury their private grief” (51).¹⁵ Certainly this onus of “public service” is critical in Clarissa’s practical and dramatized work as hostess in the novel. As previously suggested, Clarissa’s work becomes almost religious in its faithful dimension, and scholar Morris Philipson suggests that her parties as “ritual” helps those feminine “inheritors and continuers of ... tradition” carry essential English mores from the past into the future:

[Ritualized] morality ... relates them to the idea of mankind ... those no longer alive but who have created their civilization ... those not yet born who will inherit their civilization. They are, thus, carriers of life ... they are each host bodies ‘entertaining’ a degree of historical and contemporary and, therefore, future-oriented life (130-131).

Philipson employs the metaphor of English citizens as “hosts” given the job of “entertaining” the past and future of “the Nation,” a hallowed spectre that certainly plays a role in prompting Clarissa’s work as hostess. As she continues to walk down Bond street, Clarissa feels a “burning” intrigue and awe of a passing royal carriage and its “magical,” though mysterious, nameplate as it stalls the crowd around her (Woolf, 14). In this almost surreal moment of deep intrigue, Clarissa “stiffen[s]” and assumes that stoical bearing she spoke so highly of in her countrymen. She consciously resolves that that night, she will firmly “stand at the top of her stairs” in hostess-ship to her guests and positive uniting purpose (14). Clarissa’s husband Richard Dalloway later similarly expresses a deep admiration for “Buckingham Palace” as it “stand[s] to millions of people” and reflects on the feeling of great

¹⁵ Women’s responsibility – as opposed to *men*’s of a certain class – to perform specific and uniquely *essential*, morality-related “public service” will be considered further on in this chapter when discussing *Mrs. Dalloway* and early twentieth century “Womanhood.”

“continuity” that it elicits within him (103).¹⁶ No doubt this was Woolf’s critical suggestion that Clarissa, initially, concertedly embodies the beliefs of her husband. Philipson posits that national displays and sentiment in the novel are “metaphors for ... balance” and principally concerned with the ambiguous “public good” – something that he helpfully compares to “any party” of the time period where the measure of success is the “majority of participants ... feel[ing] that, there, they are at their *best*” (my emphasis, 131). The terms for being at one’s “best” to service the public “good” remains a floating ideal during Clarissa’s own party, and exhibits the deeply public negotiations Woolf’s protagonist is host to. Indeed, the maintenance of nationhood becomes an increasingly imposing feeling in the novel. Big Ben resounds through the text reminding Clarissa of the moment as it cuts through whatever reverie she is absorbed in, reminding the reader that this external force is – like the sound – “irrevocable” as well.¹⁷

Apart from public post-war national anxieties, *Mrs. Dalloway* also observes important historical changes in feminist thought – through a portrayal of Clarissa’s relationship with Doris Kilman – and traces the thinking of New Women a step further from the preceding chapter in this project. In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, the principal hostess Edna Pontellier experienced and was significantly disturbed by the initial stirrings of her divided subjectivity as a woman between her private and public obligations. In “A Literature of Their Own” Elaine Showalter explains Edna’s

¹⁶ Of course being the kind of observational, as opposed to astutely critical, political text that *Mrs. Dalloway* is, there are many counterpoints to the hallowed nationhood espoused by the upper-class Clarissa and Richard. Peter Walsh and Septimus provide many occasions where the (almost self-consciously assertive) English nation, the continued militarization of youth, and patriarchal and governmental authority are clearly critiqued. However Clarissa’s conscious embrace of this public impetus is of the most critical importance to this particular study of the novel.

¹⁷ The sound of the bell tower resounding through the air in the novel is commonly characterized by its “irrevocable” quality.

understandable difficulty with her weighty realizations by characterizing Chopin's historical period of literature as "the end of the 'feminine' period, with its cautious conservative texts" and establishing "the 1890s [as] the *beginning* of the 'feminist' period" (my emphasis, Schaffer and Psomiades, 14). Certainly Edna's dizzied reaction to her rising awareness of self and womanhood was symptomatic of her position at only the very forefront of the feminist tradition. Though Chopin had personally engaged in scholarly discussions on feminist issues (as previously discussed in Chapter 1), a realistic depiction of Edna required that she feel and react to the true weight of her duality having had no proper education on the topic. Though part of an American tradition, Chopin's dismissal of the concept of the masterful feminine self – dramatized in the fall of her heroine from the fin-de-siècle ideal of maternal wholeness and selflessness (Felski, 41-48) through problematic hospitable action – closely mirrors Woolf's central notion of diminishing the Victorian construct of self-possessed identities as portrayed in Clarissa's experience.¹⁸

As in *The Awakening*, Virginia Woolf's treatment of the "woman question" of the fin-de-siècle in *Mrs. Dalloway* is complexly nuanced. Woolf's difficult and at times almost ambiguous portrayal of Clarissa's meaning or "true" character – free from the omniscient third person narrator's judgment of her actions or convictions – has been argued as lamentingly characteristic of Modernist and Bloomsbury writers by critics. Snaith observes that these critics get lost in Woolf's embrace of "indisputable complexities ... and contradictions" (5). Indeed, harnessing those precise

¹⁸ "Victorians privileged what Maude Ellmann describes ... as 'the unified transcendent consciousness that the nineteenth century had understood as 'personality.'" According to Ban Wang ... 'this nineteenth-century tradition of conceiving of the subject as self-contained, as independent of social structure ... [implies] the aggregate and monolithic nature of the subject.' Victorians celebrated the idea that the subject was stable, whole, and unified..." (Forbes, 38).

moments where social contradictions come to light is an important aim of modernist fiction; countering “taken-for-granted assumptions,” dogmatism, and ideals of constant Western “progress,” to realistically frame the modern in its characteristic “uncertainty and crisis” (Snaith, 14). Like Chopin, Woolf develops a deeply conflicted – and critically controversial – society woman as she reflects on timely social concerns around her. The chief difficulty with Edna Pontellier as a protagonist, for most of Chopin’s contemporary critics, was her radical rejection of mores of proper feminine behaviour. Furthermore, she was notably rougher in appearance (called “handsome”) and considered masculine in her desires for autonomy. While the decidedly fine-boned Clarissa is in more strict alignment with expectations around her for pleasing feminine appearance and polite socialization, she does come to occupy the head-of-the-household position at her party while her husband plays a virtually invisible role. Scholar Peter Conradi highlights Henry James’ “hostile” indictment of “the cult of the hostess” (as if a parody of the Cult of True Womanhood) and realm of her power in *The Awkward Age* (1899), a text Conradi argues is the first instance where the hostess in literature is identified as deeply threatening to society. Fittingly, the text was published in 1899 as the New Woman and modern feminist movement was gaining significant momentum. The text speaks to James’, and his generations, fear of “the masculinization of women” (Conradi, 446-447). Certainly Clarissa does yield a unique kind of power over her community and household in her physical assembling act, and this is one way in which Woolf suggests that, as hostess, Clarissa contributes to a powerful feminist cause. However it is the development and growth of Clarissa’s *voice* that seems most strongly applicable to characteristic New Women’s themes in the modern novel. These themes include a female character re-considering

her conception of “marriage, motherhood ... [and] separate identity” and critically thinking about how she has adopted these concepts and their effect on her autonomy (Heilmann, 93). As previously suggested, Woolf makes her reader privy to Clarissa’s conscious and unconscious thoughts as her day progresses which provide a fuller sense of the contradictions in Clarissa’s everyday life. Once Clarissa reaches her private room and epiphany by the end of the text, a scene to be considered in detail, she embraces and voices so poetically the central facet of New Womanhood at the turn of the century as Rita Felski articulates in *The Gender of Modernity*: “the figure of the New Woman was to become a resonant symbol of ... a bold imagining of an *alternative future*” (my emphasis, 14). Clarissa’s ultimate enlightenment to her fraught position between her private and public sphere as a woman and sudden realization of her kinship with socially-strained Septimus, prompts her to contemplate her own existence in more critical detail. While Clarissa does not suddenly or dramatically shake off the obligations of her marriage and household like her predecessor Edna, she importantly thinks about the contradictions of her social life as it impinges on her personal sense of self and purpose. Clarissa’s strong, solitary and final voice at the end of this now canonical novel, indeed “resounds” like Big Ben’s chimes; her voice informs and then reminds her readers of the dividedness within self and womanhood in society that lies beneath even the most “perfect” assembly of community or gendered identity.

A modern feminist critique of *Mrs. Dalloway* has been taken on by many contemporary critics as this theme occupies a great deal of the subtext of the novel, particularly in regards to (1) Clarissa’s success or failure as a feminist/New Women’s voice and (2) the manner in which Woolf develops the characters of Doris Kilman and

Clarissa Dalloway in relation and opposition to one another. This chapter intends to focus on Clarissa's personal work as hostess and how this relates to timely feminist, and particularly New Women's, stirrings within her.¹⁹ Snaith describes the middle and upper class Western household, at the turn of the century, as a version of the Greek *polis* where women were "systematically excluded from the public sphere" and so, "excluded from speaking in public [or having a voice] and becoming individuals" (9). Furthermore, women in both historical realms were only "characterized by their maternal role and the efficiency with which they performed it" – recalling Edna's ultimate "failure" as a woman. While Snaith depicts women in Britain, generally speaking, as "trapped in the private home" she also acknowledges their role in facilitating aspects of the patriarchal public sphere (8). Indeed, though Clarissa's work is done solely within the bounds of her own household, the space of her husband and herself as his wife, she is not barred from having political effect in the public sense for this reason. In fact it is almost more realistic as a member of the just-now-awakening middle-upper class, that Clarissa first work and contemplate from *within* her allotted realm than begin by rejecting it completely. Like Edna-as-hostess before her, Clarissa begins to think about her marriage and roles even as she aligns with them; the party scene is the climactic moment where she is host to the contradictions within these constructs *and* becomes aware of her desires for autonomy and a more authentic sense

¹⁹ Doris and Clarissa's fraught relationship is important to comment on briefly. This juxtaposition of characters highlights the political fervor and brash method of feminist thinkers of Woolf's time period (Doris), a sometimes "narrow" or absolutist movement she did not entirely align with (Marcus, 216, 212), and the stunted and patriarchally-burdened thinking of her feminine peers of the middle and upper-class (Clarissa, pre-enlightenment). Their fight over possession of Clarissa's daughter's mind and future aspirations represents the clashes women felt even between themselves as expectations and opportunities for women began to shift. While Tuzyline Jita Allan argues that Woolf extends only polite, "aesthetic sympathy" to Doris' side of the feminine thought (35), Clarissa is not without some understanding for her adversary. For "Miss Kilman ... had become one of those spectres with which one battles in the night" (Woolf, 9), signaling Clarissa's conflicted but deeply seeded understanding of what coming battles Doris stands for.

of self in the assembling act. In comparison with Edna who was hell-bent on physical and dramatic emancipation from her oppressors and social strictures, the more private epiphany of Clarissa and internal narrative experimentation of Woolf could appear less aligned with women's advancement. However like Chopin, Woolf was also continuously engaged in political debates of her time period and very *publicly* supported women's suffrage (Snaith, 3). Conceptualizing Woolf's feminism requires more tempering though, particularly considering the remarkable and somewhat "entitled," "possessive" embrace of her work by the Western academic feminist community beginning in the 1970s (detailed by Snaith, 5). For though Woolf engaged and wrote about political issues, Laura Marcus explains that Woolf was likely constrained by "classical feminisms" which espoused equality between the sexes based on some innate *sameness*, whereas Woolf was markedly more concerned with existing assumptions and decisions based on "the differences between men and women"; she was fascinated by timely understandings and *constructs* that affected feminine interests in society (what Marcus names "social feminism," 216). In this way, Woolf was chiefly concerned with the nature of "[W]omanhood" (my emphasis to name an imposing historical concept) as opposed to defining women in any essentializing effort. Woolf does not spend time defending Clarissa's intellect or basic validity, and focuses instead on placing her character within her very real, problematic social realm of public and private service to greater Womanhood of the time period.

Mrs. Dalloway employs its secondary female characters' voice and experience to inform Clarissa's position in the novel, thereby avoiding any obvious authoritative indictment that might approach the act of propaganda that Woolf is said to have opposed. For example, society-woman Millicent Bruton's character comments that

she requires Hugh Whitbread's help writing an official letter to an editor because of his "being so differently constituted" (96). For Lady Bruton, this means that as a man he was equipped with a "command of language" (96). The floating third person narrator observes Lady Bruton's logic, as perhaps she would not have been able to on a conscious level:

Lady Bruton often suspended judgment upon men in deference to the mysterious accord in which they, but no woman, stood to the laws of the universe; knew how to put things; knew what was said; so that if Richard advised her, and Hugh wrote for her, she was sure of being somehow right (Woolf, 96).

Of course this logic is laden with patriarchal myths of innate reason in the male sex, but the passage also subtly implies that Lady Bruton knows only that, as men, Richard and Hugh are sure to be *considered* correct in the public sphere. While she notes the "laws of the universe," it seems that she would more fittingly have said "the laws of society," though it is likely that Lady Bruton – at the epicentre of the Western, privileged world – may have conceived of these things equally. Woolf goes on to deepen Lady Bruton's understanding of "rightness" by transcribing her thoughts after Hugh has completed the draft: "Could her own meaning sound like that?" (97). In framing the alienated Septimus and Clarissa's "meaning" in the story to come, Woolf suggests that the mode of communication employed by Hugh and Richard so deftly is not simply inaccessible to the oppressed in her novel but *incapable* of speaking to their experience.

Moments of questioned "womanhood" are widespread and diversely considered in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which this chapter argues for the hostess is so intimately related to the performance and divisions within *selfhood*. The notion of "proper" womanhood as it relates to Clarissa's hostessing is important to consider.

When Peter Walsh bitterly recalls the youthful meeting of his friend Clarissa and his adversary Richard Dalloway one summer at Bourton, he notes that:

Clarissa came up, with her perfect manners, like a real hostess, and wanted to introduce him to some one—spoke as if they had never met before, which enraged him. Yet even then he admired her for it. He admired her courage; her social instinct; he admired her power of carrying things through. ‘The perfect hostess,’ he said to her, whereupon she winced all over. But he meant her to feel it. He would have done anything to hurt her after seeing her with Dalloway (Woolf, 53-54).

This passage, on the clearest level, works to develop Peter’s mixed feeling of both jealousy and attraction to Clarissa’s social character. It reveals his own ingrained sense of proper English public duty to “carry things through” and maintain the strength of community. However on another level Peter indicts the false pretences of the woman-as-hostess who is made to act like someone else, divorced from her private life and emotion - in this way his comment can be understood as an insult to the reader. Clarissa’s *own* injury from this comment is more telling, as it suggests that she is not only aware of the public role she plays but also how it summarises her identity inauthentically (if favourably). For Clarissa, even in her youth and desire for courtship, expresses an essential unease with what public hostessing might come to mean on a deeply personal level. By the time she has grown up and raised the quintessential family, Clarissa has moments of feeling blissful and successful in her role as a wife and mother. However within some of these satisfied moments she maintains private questioning, for example:

That she held herself well was true; and had nice hands and feet; and dressed well ... But often now this body she wore ... seemed nothing – nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible ... there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this ... rather solemn progress with the rest of them ... this being Mrs. Dalloway (Woolf, 7-8).

Here, even as Clarissa recognizes her satisfaction of ideal “womanhood” in her adoption of a feminine and pleasant appearance, she feels her role in life has ultimately rendered her “nothing at all” and “invisible” in the position of lady of the house.²⁰ Clarissa also notes on a separate occasion that her household is ridden with “old devotions” and she exists within the home only to remind herself of them and don “familiar veils” (24). Certainly Clarissa’s portrayal allows Woolf to paint a sympathetic vision of the constraints of Womanhood as it is conceived by her peers and on a deeply fragile level, by herself.

The development of a feminist position in Clarissa’s narrative is perhaps more clear than a New Women’s position, as the latter tends to rely on more explicit desires and actions toward emancipation. However aside from Clarissa’s kinship with Septimus’ desire for escape the bounds of patriarchal society (to be attended to further on), there are moments where Clarissa distinctly recalls the definitively New Womanist Edna Pontellier. In one instance, upon considering her marriage, Clarissa muses that the personal distance between herself and Richard can be rationalized as follows:

there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife ... that one must respect ... for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one’s husband, without losing one’s independence, one’s self-respect—something, after all, priceless (Woolf, 105).

This conviction mirrors Edna’s assertion to Madame Ratignolle that she would not give up her independence for her children or her husband, and that this sense and possession of a private self is “priceless” to her. Both women carry this notion with them throughout their narratives.

²⁰ It is important to note that Clarissa’s public self is not frivolous or lacking in meaning because it often enacts a performance of “proper” femininity. Women have been highlighted previously as hallowed carriers of tradition and constructs - and therefore illuminate what these constructs might signify to women on a deeper level. This footnote is in specific response to Shannon Forbes’ argument that because Clarissa incorporates her public role into her sense of her self, she substitutes a Victorian fixed construct for any real “fulfillment” or “self at all” (39).

Before proceeding, a certain essentializing and therefore problematic trend in criticism of *Mrs. Dalloway* must be mentioned. Peter Conradi suggests that Clarissa-as-hostess fits within a tradition in the English novel “around the early twentieth-century” which he explains develops a “demi-goddess of the cult of personal relations” who is adept in “accommodation and reconciliation” (433). While Conradi agrees that, “[t]he appearance of the hostess at this [socio-historical] juncture ... coincides both with the incomplete Victorian emancipation of women and ... [a] crisis-ridden cultural pessimism” (433), he also problematically posits that:

it may therefore be that women come subconsciously to represent those forces which an overreaching ... Male hegemony has neglected ... [Woman] enshrines the lost wholeness of life. Thus, against the cult of business, money, and power ... [is]... the world of love, intuition ... and also of power ... the hostess brings people together in a relation which offers a transcendence of other available modes ... of communication (434).

First, this suggestion is reminiscent of the material Felski brought forward in the preceding chapter about fin-de-siècle assumptions about “timeless” women, their uncomplicated “wholeness” of self, and position in the safe-haven or “household” of society (40). Conradi correctly notes that the modern literary hostess emerges in tandem with the historical New Women’s moment (based on the re-framing of feminine portrayals), but then implies that her work in assembling people together is an innate quality she possesses in her femininity. The following specification bears emphasis: while the party scene *does* demonstrate a creative “power” in the hostess, implying that this method of communication is a natural, wholly satisfactory act recalls romanticized and essentialist visions of nurturing womanhood. It also neglects to acknowledge the roles and internal-divisions the woman is always host to, as well

as the reasons she may feel the need to assemble (it will not prove to be out of an innate aptitude for accessing a “world of love”).²¹

In the introduction to *Women and British Aestheticism* editors Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades suggest that British aestheticism bridges an important gap between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in women’s writing, which helps position *The Awakening* and *Mrs. Dalloway* in critical conversation. They argue that there is a “chain of women writers” at the end of the 1800s that preface “Woolf’s modernist generation,” rejecting the assumption that modernism arose from “a mess of decrepit traditional forms” – something this project argues in aligning Woolf closely with Chopin before her (16). Schaffer and Psomiades note, like Showalter, that the period of “decadent” writing in England was overwhelmed by male writers but not entirely limited to them. They note that female aesthetes had their place in this tradition as well, being just as interested in “art and daily practise,” “whether they were involved in the aestheticization of the everyday through dressing, decorating, and gardening ...” (5). Of course, Woolf’s observations of Clarissa’s work to come depends on this artistic appreciation, and lends validity to her daily work. These women writers embraced the decadent period’s “fascination with the unnatural, death ... the body” and characteristically aesthetic interests in “artifice, intense experience, the mixing of beauty and strangeness, and the desire to experience life itself as art” (3). These qualities, attributed to a literary period preceding Woolf could not be a more pitch-perfect description of her fascination with the party scene to be analyzed further in this chapter.

²¹ Of course, other women characters – including many of Clarissa’s polite guests - demonstrate that this knowledge of a dividedness within is not necessarily universal. Clarissa is but one voice of this recognition.

Schaffer and Psomiades also emphasize that Woolf's British aestheticist predecessors "used a variety of experimental literary styles" in their portrayals of an authentic modern feminine experience "including fragmented writing, stream of consciousness, dislocated point of view ... [and] nonrealist passages" (16). These narrative methods became characteristic aspects of Woolf's writing and are critical to examine in *Mrs. Dalloway* as they portray the depth of Clarissa's character and role as hostess. Alex Zwerdling notes Woolf's sharp "attention" to "individual consciousness" just as she was concerned with depicting realistic social situations (69). In her brief, private moments apart from her household duties and preparations for her party Clarissa's self-centered thoughts are transcribed most clearly. Yet following the tradition of free indirect discourse, these thoughts are continually faced with external social interjections that she or the narrator observe. Often for Clarissa, acknowledging her public consciousness' effect on her private moments is unconscious, though Woolf's decision as the Narrator to merge and problematize these realms is certainly deliberate. Free indirect discourse, as employed by Woolf, is often confused or conflated with practices of stream-of-consciousness narration and internal monologue.²² Snaith acknowledges that free indirect discourse, like stream-of-consciousness narration, is "the expression of a character's thoughts" and both methods reach a "deeper, nonverbal areas of image and sensation" than the practice of interior monologue (67). However free indirect discourse is notably unique and

²² Alex Zwerdling, I believe, incorrectly attributes Woolf's technique in writing Clarissa Dalloway as being of the internal monologue tradition. Zwerdling suggests that in an attempt to give validity to Clarissa's world "from the inside" (and indeed, keep the text from being solely an indictment of her own social system) Woolf employs "internal monologue [as] a form of sympathy, if not exoneration" (70). While I hesitate to claim Clarissa is not heavily satirized in some aspects, I agree that taking an internal perspective of her life, "makes it impossible to judge simply and divide the world into heroes and villains" (70) and spares the text from absolutism and a two dimensional portrayal, particularly of its female protagonist. However, free indirect discourse seems a more fitting description of Woolf's method, in contrast to internal monologue.

particularly useful in portraying Clarissa's character in her layers of roles and reactions. Free indirect discourse "captures" private thinking while also allowing the "presence of the narrator" or the "*public* element of the technique," separating it from more privately focused stream-of-consciousness narration (Snaith, 69). In considering a public point of view alongside Clarissa's private musings, Woolf establishes a more broad and authentic depiction of the significant bond between these worlds for her hostess.

The discrepancy between Clarissa's social and private concerns is no doubt difficult to discern at times,²³ but a close reading of a passage (such as the one to follow) provides the reader insight to just how essential both realms and roles are to her authentic sense of self as Clarissa Dalloway.²⁴ One scene that demonstrates this kind of dual-narrative is the one in which Clarissa has just finished speaking with Richard. Upon his exit, she comes to re-consider her purpose in her social circles as Mrs. Dalloway the hostess. Clarissa laments the latent criticism she feels from the self-righteous Doris Kilman and politically-fervent Peter Walsh about the senselessness of her parties, but asserts to herself that her work is not empty and is an expression of her affection for "life." Woolf then describes a moment that embraces the aforementioned non-realist effects:

Since she was lying on the sofa, cloistered, exempt, the presence of this thing

²³ Indeed these moments are made even more difficult by the convention of free indirect discourse that conflates the voice of the speaker, the private thought, with seemingly objective third-person narration (as previously suggested). These subtle moments require the reader to follow and identify "signs of internal thought such as free association and [or] fragmented sentenced structure" (Snaith, 63-64).

²⁴ Critics have often paid special attention to the title of the novel as an indication of Clarissa's bondage to a patriarchal system that would rename her as a wife and mother, or to use Clarissa's repeated phrasing of her shared fear with Septimus, would "force her soul." This chapter posits that her full married name – Clarissa Dalloway – is a better indication of the division between private and public allegiances that exists with the hostess as both 'Clarissa' (without surname and wife-hood) and 'Dalloway' (as a member of this class and system of expectation for polite members of Britain and women).

which she felt to be so obvious became physically existent; with robes of sound from the street, sunny, with hot breath, whispering, blowing out the blinds. But suppose Peter said to her, "Yes, yes, but ... what's the sense of your parties?" all she could say was (and nobody could be expected to understand): They're an offering... (107)

Here Woolf's prose becomes more fragmented to reflect the free associations going on in Clarissa's mind. In a way this passage acts as stream-of-consciousness as Woolf depicts a private thought unlimited to verbal expression with the physical intrusion of the personified breeze. However the interjection of Peter's voice tempers her private moment by allowing the public world back into her consciousness. Here Clarissa drifts away from the physical reality and symbolic weight of her household, "exempt" from its rational demands, but only until she reminds herself of imminent criticism from respected men around her pertaining to the quality of her feminine conduct. Furthermore this quick, almost blended, shift depicts her knowledge of her alienated public community who "could [not] be expected to understand" (107). In this manner Woolf successfully portrays Clarissa in her depth of character, attending to her private world and its validity, while also maintaining the outside world that will continue to define and require of her. Certainly Woolf maintains realistic political weight in her story of Clarissa that "shows" and therefore allows examination of "what we do rather than what we must be presumed to do" (particularly in this story, as a member of Womanhood) (quote by Payne, 10).

This chapter posits Woolf's broad-spanning vision of the public world of Clarissa and her peers as a consistently rich symbolic landscape for character development. In his essay, Morris Philipson suggests that Woolf's "shifting point of view" as Narrator frames her novel and its many characters in a kind of poetic "arabesque" of consciousness (126). As in an arabesque, the many diverse parts of the

narrative only come together meaningfully (or musically speaking, “harmoniously”) by the party scene at the end of *Mrs. Dalloway* where they are all in attendance. Each character contributes in his or her own way to a vision of Clarissa Dalloway, as “Clarissa” or as “Dalloway.” The party scene at the novel’s denouement, Philipson wagers, is a microcosm of Woolf’s meaning for Clarissa, a “vision of what is most true in individual psychology and ... valuable in social relations” in visible relation to one another (126). Certainly the other characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* add to the expanding understanding of the divisions within Womanhood in the time period, contributing to a fuller reading of Clarissa (“[the arabesque] shows how each element is an indispensable part of the whole” Philipson, 125).²⁵ For example, peripheral character Peter Walsh takes imaginative flight in a passage where Woolf uses modernist prose to articulate what being hostess may mean. Peter listens to the sound of the bells at St. Margaret’s church:

Ah, said St. Margaret’s, like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there ... I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven ... Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present. It is half-past eleven, she says, and the sound of St. Margaret’s glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest—like Clarissa herself ... coming down the stairs on the stroke of the hour (42-43).

This passage is not necessarily attributable to Peter Walsh or any other character in specific, as it seems to speak from a detached and surreal point of view to inform the reading. The church “speaks” and like Big Ben, reminds and tells the reader a story

²⁵ While this arabesque metaphor is helpful in considering the intersecting characters and plotlines in the novel, this chapter aims to distinguish itself from any suggestion that Clarissa achieves a lost sense of Victorian wholeness, a reconciliation with her Womanhood as it stands; Philipson characterises Clarissa’s party as an event where separate parts come together to establish a patterned sense of “completeness” (125) which markedly differentiates his argument from my own.

about what being hostess will mean. The hostess feels the impulse to be “perfect,” to be “not late” and conscious of the (time) constraints on her everyday life. Yet she knows of an inner individuality, a private sense of self or “something else,” that is locked into place by lessons of the past about gender roles and self-mastery and those strictures that exist in the present. The bells resound ceremoniously to remind the hostess of this knowledge, to remind the reader of this fraught position, and expresses the desire to be authentic to the private self (“to confide itself”) to free this truth (“to disperse itself”) and to be “at rest” from the pursuit of idealized self or womanhood. Clarissa listens to the bells of social obligation and follows their lead down her stairs as hostess, but also hears their deeper meaning in “the recesses of the heart.” Indeed, she listens to the bells just as she listens to Big Ben resound in the ending scene of the novel as she communes with Septimus’ message about fracturedness and freedom. Clarissa resolves to go back to her party and the deep sound “buries itself.” In this way, Peter’s private contemplation set in the public sphere demonstrates how Woolf’s written technique draws together the worlds and characters of her text to meaningfully inform Clarissa-as-hostess.

Theorizing Clarissa’s party scene is important to identify the underlying wager and ultimate internal effect of the hostess’ work. As in analysis of *The Awakening*, Tracy McNulty’s theoretical work on the role of the hostess within the realm of hospitality theory is helpful to take up. McNulty examines the position of “the host,” translating and expanding upon this position by factoring in a gendered context. McNulty conceptualizes “the hostess” in her very public work *within* her inexorable context dictated by socio-historical female roles and its “knowledge” of feminine

selfhood. The hospitable act (in this chapter the social gathering in *Mrs. Dalloway*) always “call[s] for an understanding of the subject,” particularly as it dramatizes the fractures within the host’s sense of composed, masterful subjectivity (McNulty, recalling Derrida, xix). For as Jacques Derrida posits: the host’s apparent “ipseity” in his home, his “place,” is always re-framed by the entrance of the “other” or guest that crosses this threshold and claims a valid place there (Derrida, 123-124); the public enters the private in the name of absolute hospitable ideals of communal welcome but ultimately, in practise, serves to identify the fragility of the host’s control over the experience and his “sovereignty” (Derrida, 25-26; McNulty, xix). Derrida notes that the host enacts his own self-division in the hospitable act. As previously suggested in Chapter 1, the host’s impulse implies his/her underlying need for the guest and this “liberation” on some level, which in turn indicates a need for freedom and access to a more authentic identity that acknowledges his or her flawed vision of self-sovereignty. McNulty concurs that hospitality “is thus to oppose the notion of identity ... implie[d] [as] self-identical ... total ...integral” (xix). She explains that the female host, like the male, invites the hospitable relation to draw together her public and private realms – an assembly which allows for her public identity to be tested and eventually exempt from a (characteristically Victorian) understanding of human identity as observably self-possessed. However as a *female*, the hostess – McNulty qualifies – is *first* inhibited by the social and political “knowledge” of her gendered potential for private “selfhood,” as she has been historically considered “bereft” of greater, intellectually complex “identity” (McNulty, xlii). The hostess’ first step then, is to assert her public identity in all the ways she knows how; this helps explain why the party-giving process is so often the first step of women in the first stirrings of self-contemplation.

The party is a most familiar public act of middle to upper class women, particularly in the early twentieth-century context, that asserts their valuable “self” (social facilitation being a highly meaningful act as woman of her post-war generation). This creatively-gathering self, however, proves to be reliant on public roles and social expectations and prompts the imminent fall-from-grace moment of “the host” which provides an understanding of the self that considers the “beyond” of imposed public identities of Womanhood. The hostess’ position is therefore fraught with primary historical questioning of the very validity of her subjectivity *and* the secondary, imminently flawed nature of her traditional hospitable acts. McNulty illuminates the theory behind the hostess’ impulse to gather and control, as well as why this act so commonly fractures her sense of self. In theory, reaching the end-point where hospitality has illuminated the division between the public and private selves within, the hostess can then gain a more authentic understanding of her divided positioning in her modern world. Woolf scholar J. Hillis Miller expresses a similar understanding of Clarissa’s hospitable act: “[she has] an impulse to create a social situation which will bring into the open the usually hidden continuities ... of person with person [host or guest], of person with the depths of himself” (94). Philipson also agrees with McNulty’s theoretical understanding of the hostess’ work, proposing that “in that area of experience shared by people ... one person comes to impinge upon another” and that “these effects may be supportive, or *destructive*,” indeed “the danger [for the hostess] ... is that some present experience will destroy whatever degree of integration the personality has ... achieved” (my emphasis, Philipson, 127). With *Mrs. Dalloway* specifically in mind, Philipson acknowledges the myth of a completely whole “personality,” explaining that “[t]he psychological drawback to placing primary ...

emphasis on the inviolability of personality [or a singular identity] is the consequent sense of loneliness” (127). Philipson describes Clarissa’s “loneliness” as demonstrated by her identification with the old woman living in a similar upper-floor bedroom across the road. Perhaps a better term for her feeling would be dissatisfied “alienation” from her private sense of self in embracing “the inviolability” of her public self. Philipson concurs, “no character in this novel is satisfied to live in ... confinement” and therefore each soul must go on to “reaffirm” his/her sense of self as he/she is “truly interrelated with others” (127). Certainly there exists, particularly for women at the time period, “the ... drive for integration ... [being] put together” (Philipson, 127) as she assembles her social world *and thus* on a more fundamental level finds a wholler sense of her self – if internally divided between realms. Shannon Forbes recalls a moment where Clarissa implores her reflection, pointed and pale, to display her “self” (40). Yet this is only possible when she can “call on her ... parts” to come together (37). This attempted definition proves unsuccessful, and it is only at the party scene when Clarissa comes face to face with the true dimensions of “Clarissa Dalloway.”

Clarissa’s party scene bears closer textual analysis to illuminate the specific negotiations between the public and private that Woolf depicts to develop her protagonist’s progressive consciousness. Clarissa initially gives voice to public social obligations that compose her polite feminine identity. However, she is not a two dimensional portrayal of a woman in complete and blind allegiance to the patriarchal demands around her. Shannon Forbes quite hastily suggests that Clarissa is “*absolutely* defined in terms of the role she has chosen to perform” (my emphasis, 39)

and therefore depends on her parties to embrace “any self at all” (43) though it seems clear that Woolf most critically establishes an *internal* world that Clarissa exists in.²⁶ Forbes builds on her condemning position to propose that Clarissa’s incomplete satisfaction with her public role – as demonstrated when she feels “not herself” at certain moments in her party – means that her public identity is “composed of absolutely nothing” important (43-44). This chapter’s analysis of Clarissa’s character however, *embraces* Clarissa’s very real public sense of self (which does yield great purpose to her²⁷) as it contributes to her greater identity as *both* a public and privately composed person. For while it is true that Clarissa resists “showing a sign of all the other sides of her” in her appearance (Woolf, 31), Woolf’s deeper depiction of her thoughts *as* she acts allows the reader to “tunnel” inside her.²⁸ By showing her meaningful inner conflicts, “Clarissa [is transformed beyond] an object of social satire to an *existential* heroine ” (my emphasis, Ruotolo, 99). Zwerdling concurs that despite Clarissa’s general governing-class allegiance, “the various strata of her personality” are intact, showing that “rebellion [and] conformity” are not necessarily mutually exclusive (79). Even in the briefest moments, Woolf depicts both Clarissa’s impulses to “conform” to her role as the proper wife and mother *alongside* her desires for personal autonomy. For example while walking, Clarissa thinks about “[h]ow much she wanted ... that people should look pleased as she came in [the room]” as a pleasant and proper example of a lady (Woolf, 7). Clarissa often uses words like

²⁶ Furthermore, hospitality theory helps explain how hospitable acts are never perfect and cannot define someone absolutely – or at least not in any realistic interpersonal conditions, which is certainly Woolf’s primary focus.

²⁷ Clarissa explains her admiration of “these hoary old Countesses” and society hostess’ as they “stood for something real to her,” and “doing something” as active members of society. Furthermore she feels her husband’s “public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit” has “grown on her” and influenced her appearance and the objectives tied to it (Woolf, 67).

²⁸ Lucio Ruotolo employs this term of Woolf’s for her own literary method (98).

“absurd” and “silly” to dismiss her thinking when questions enter into her mind, stating that “it was silly to have other reasons for doing things” beyond upholding social appearances (7). Woolf then allows a private desire to slip through Clarissa’s consciously-assertive public sense of self: “Much rather would [Clarissa] have been one of those people who did things for themselves [like Richard], whereas ... half the time she did things ... not for themselves; but to make people think this or that ... Oh if she could have had her life over again!” (7). Woolf, in no uncertain terms, simultaneously honours Clarissa’s dual sense of self without judging one allegiance more true than the other; for indeed, Clarissa cannot conceive of herself without her household to gracefully maintain (and parties to compose, celebrating “life!”) *and* her little room at the top of the stairs for private reverie. Clarissa’s position does not lack verisimilitude. Snaith provides some historical background on Woolf’s similar position as an author negotiating between her public and private concerns. Snaith opposes “Quentin Bell’s biography [that] infamously figures Woolf as excessively private ... divorced from ... the public realm” and the crippling pathology he implies (2). She explains that while “Woolf is figured as *imprisoned* within a private realm” (2) by Bell, a woman writer writing from a private position and about private thoughts should not be equated with surrender or “exile.” Woolf acknowledges the realistic position of other women in society and provides “liberating ... access to the public sphere through writing” (2). Certainly Woolf was aware of the “public/private dichotomy ... [so] integral to women’s history” as it justifies patriarchy (9). Snaith summarizes Woolf’s assertion of the value of speaking from, and so giving voice to, work in the private realm as it resonates outward: “the tyrannies of the public world are the same as those in the private realm ... [p]atriarchal oppression exists in both, the

private realm is not ‘outside’ politics, therefore women’s experiences are integral in addressing that oppression” (9).

Clarissa’s *work* as hostess, her party creation, is often likened to creative control or artistry, again like Edna. As an artist of her environment, Clarissa “transmute[s] personal experience and feeling into a public act” (Littleton, 36). Clarissa reacts to her feelings of internal fragmentation – and anxieties about the communal distance of her post-war society – by composing her peers around her and composing her self as hostess. Clarissa expresses this dual desire as she contemplates her creation of parties:

could any man understand what she meant [...]... what did it mean to her [...]... Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater ... she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste ... and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? ... Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write, even play the piano... (Woolf, 107-108).

Here Clarissa expresses her conscious social responsibility, her ingrained national impetus, to draw her community together for “the greater good.” Yet Clarissa also uses this method of assembly to remedy her desire to “create” or “offer” something as a human being. Clarissa wonders, “to whom?” is her gift of combination? A detailed analysis of the party scene to follow will articulate how her consciously communal “gift” subtly transforms into an assemblage that services her own need for authentic individuation most of all.

The party scene *Mrs. Dalloway*, like the others examined in this thesis, runs much deeper than its superficial details and its hostess’ premeditated intentions suggest. To be sure, these carefully assembled details and the hostess’ evolving thoughts prove most meaningful in the development of the female protagonist’s

character and the greater authorial commentary on her environment and potentiality (as a subject, citizen, member of “womanhood”). Woolf considered the ways in which physical architectural space could be used to emphasize the public-private dichotomy that “alienated” women of her era from certain forms of expression (Snaith, 12). In her climactic party scene, Woolf creates a consolidated environment that will highlight the effects of “personal experience” and “cultural history” as they appear in realist material conditions of the Dalloway’s drawing-room (12). Maria DiBattista helpfully articulates the drawing-room as a “mediated” space “between the public streets and the private rooms” of the house (51). In this middle-ground, Clarissa brings together members of socially-influential but admittedly “dull people” – such as the dry Hugh Whitbread or the somewhat underwhelming Prime Minister – as well as “odd unexpected people ... an artist sometimes; sometimes a writer” (Woolf, 67-68) like intellectual “Professor Brierly ... a very queer fish” (Woolf, 156). In this assembly Clarissa maintains a controlled “network of visiting, leaving cards, being kind to people” and facilitating mutually satisfying conversations between the more awkward guests like the pathetic Ellie Henderson (Woolf, 67-68). In Clarissa’s drawing-room she allows her public into her private home to assemble her worlds in manageable proximity, an act she believes will be for not only “the greater good” but her appearance as a proper and admirable social lady.

The party scene also acts as a kind of “stage” that produces a new event, as occurred in Edna’s party. Forbes identifies the party as a “stage” or platform as follows:

her party seems a stage on which each of her guests, like actors in a play, are taken out of their ordinary worlds and placed in different clothes against a different background ... this [allows for] role-playing ... causes her guests, like

herself, to seem ... unreal, and yet the performing ... in some sense, causes her guests to seem even more real (44).

Forbes identifies the special allowance of “role-playing” that the party scene seems to provide for both guests and hosts. This act fosters a sense of the surreal as Clarissa’s party, and Edna’s before her, foster an almost too-perfect atmosphere where guests costume themselves in special clothes and are consumed by the constructed reality of the moment. In this special reality guests are free to give in to the fantasy and even hedonism of the experience, and with their everyday personal concerns stowed away in a coat room, soon become heightened versions of their public selves. Forbes characterizes the “performing” of the party guests as “more real,” as they emphasize the very public roles and world Clarissa is host to. However the party space simultaneously allows Clarissa, as a party-attendee, to be able to embrace the space’s “special intimacy” and then “speak more freely from the hidden depths of the spirit” to indicate a very *private* sense of self she hosts as well (Hillis Miller, 94). Indeed, in some moments Clarissa adopts a heightened social self as the head of the event and at others, quite seamlessly in the loud and colourful tumult, slips into her more personal sense of self. But a more detailed analysis of the moments leading up to, during, and after her party are required to adequately articulate the party environment and the special moments of self understanding it provides for the hostess.

Clarissa’s party begins as an idea, a tradition, that Clarissa carries with her throughout the single June day *Mrs. Dalloway* describes. Clarissa’s “belief about life,” as it requires communal celebratory expressions of resilience and composure, “indicates how much of her personality is involved” in her need to create parties (Littleton, 43); her logic is infused in “every aspect of her gathering” (43). Clarissa, as creator, composes an occasion where, “[l]ike a conventional drama” (42) the social event is

lifted out of the realm of the mundane. Philipson quotes scholar Josephine O'Brien Schaefer on Woolf's characteristic depiction of parties in her novels *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*:

the party is something that lives ... spatially in the area ... [and] in thoughts and emotions ... shared emotion spins threads between people ... Like the guests at the party, the reader becomes aware of the atmosphere of the party. Here is the intensified reality, the heightened sense of existence that ... Woolf and her Bloomsbury friends so highly valued ... almost ritualistic dinners are enjoyed by the guests whose existence ... is affirmed by the participation in the eating and drinking (29) (Philipson, 142).

Here Schaefer explains Clarissa's methodical control, like Woolf as the greater Narrator, as she draws together her guests in a special atmosphere. This atmosphere's "intensified reality," as previously mentioned, provides the occasion for a social ritual that affects its participants on a deeper – and in Clarissa's case, more existential – level of signification. Before Clarissa's own party, Woolf already has this tradition of creating the extraordinary event in her mind and makes her reader familiar with the party's affective potential. Woolf describes a lunch at Lady Bruton's home, the one that Clarissa was left out of to her deep disappointment (was she not welcome because of a poor public appearance? Why could she not go as Richard's polite wife?). Woolf carefully describes this small lunch party in its methodical and flawless detail, as everything is organized toward making the everyday get-together "a grand deception":

there began a soundless and exquisite passing to and fro through swing doors of ... maids ... with a wave of the hand, the traffic ceases, and there rises instead this profound illusion ... about the food—how it is not paid for; and then that the table spreads itself voluntarily with glass and silver, little mats, saucers of red fruit ... in casseroles severed chickens swim ... the fire burns; and with the wine and the coffee ... rise jocund visions before musing eyes ... eyes to whom life appears musical, mysterious; eyes now kindled to observe genially the beauty of the red carnations which Lady Bruton (whose movements were always angular) had laid beside her plate, so that Hugh Whitbread, feel[s] at peace with the entire universe and at the same time completely sure of his standing (Woolf, 91-92).

In this moment the party scene is characterized in its ability to promote awe and wonder at the perfection and ease of the movement it makes. The food appears as if on its own,²⁹ the table is personified as it “spreads itself” for the guests, the ambience is warmed by the blazing fire and massaging spirits. The guests’ “eyes” or perspective is then altered to envision life as more “musical” or harmonious, and they are “kindled to observe” what art(ifice) Lady Bruton has so carefully composed. When the party is successful, stuffy but accomplished men like Hugh Whitbread find wholeness in their world and are assured in their public selves. Still, Woolf notes again in her parenthetical technique, Lady Bruton is “pointed” and drawn together herself. This act of being a proper hostess is deeply personal for her. It is no wonder that Clarissa calls on her admiration for Lady Bruton when consciously justifying her own parties. As Clarissa prepares for her party that night, she observes some last minute details of her household (seemingly taking care of themselves, see footnote 19) such as “clean silver [being ready] for the party” and the “sounds” of mops and servants’ organization (Woolf, 32). Then, “pausing on the landing, and assembling that diamond shape, that single person,” the traditional “angular” composition, she focuses fully on her party (32).

Clarissa’s party runs relatively smoothly, though she must sometimes re-assure herself of its success in her own mind. A reluctant Peter Walsh observes the scene from the end of Clarissa’s street as he approaches her stately home: “cabs were rushing round the corner, like water round the piers of a bridge, drawn together”

²⁹ This is decidedly problematic, as both Lady Bruton’s and Clarissa’s servants are barely acknowledged in their efforts to create the space. No doubt this is part of Woolf’s satire of the social elite surrounding her and their ignorant dismissal of the value of their servants hard-earned efforts and role in their homes as *people*. Edna makes a similar omission as food and silverware seem to magically appear before herself and her guests.

(Woolf, 145). This quotation provides an effective metaphor for Clarissa intent to “draw together,” with the force and urgency of flowing water, her community and sense of purposeful public selfhood. Reluctant to see Clarissa as Mrs. *Dalloway* but eager to see her as his former love, Peter prepares himself mentally for “entering the house, the lighted house, where the door stood open, where the motor cars were standing, and bright women descending” (145-146). The house is a lit beacon that draws the other characters in the novel in to Clarissa’s assembly. As the party gains momentum, Clarissa greets her guests and happily observes, “her rooms full, heard the roar of voices, saw the candlesticks, the blowing curtains, and the roses which Richard had given her” (152). The saturation of Clarissa and her guests’ senses mirrors the scene created in *The Awakening*: the flowers, the voices blending together, the soft candlelight and warm breeze. At one moment where a curtain blows out into one of her guests, Clarissa has a brief moment where her assembly seems to come apart. She self-consciously laments, “Oh dear, it was going to be a failure; a complete failure” and suddenly becomes aware of “Peter out of the tail of her eye, criticising her” for being that perfect hostess he hated (148). She spirals under his gaze that “made her see herself; exaggerate,” re-questioning the meaning of her efforts to kindle togetherness, “Why, after all, did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire?” (148). The moment, as if only a hint of what is to come, passes when she spies the guest simply “beat back” the curtain and “go on talking” which resolves her construct and assures her that “it was going to be all right now,” quickly qualifying, “– her party” (150). She vows to “stand there for the present,” as if moving would disassemble her, as people continue to enter in a river-like “rush” (150). When Clarissa comes to feel the “effort” of her work moments later, and

question if her role as a hostess is personally meaningful to her (could “just anybody ... do it[?]”), she consciously reminds herself of her creative power, standing as “a stake driven at the top of the stairs” (151). And though Clarissa repeatedly senses that her party offers a chance to “go much deeper” into her sense of self, she says “not yet” – at least until she has moved to the safety of her private room upstairs (151). Clarissa spends the rest of her public moments at her party, “prancing, sparkling” around the room and expressing her desired appearance of the hostess who can gather people and herself together to “sum it all up in the moment she passed ... with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element” (154).³⁰

As previously suggested, the action of the party dramatizes the imminent fracturing effect of hospitable assembly on the hostess’ self-sovereignty. Harold Bloom identifies the trope in *Mrs. Dalloway* of “the self as the center of a flux of sensations” and certainly this is how Clarissa’s identity is depicted in the context of her party (3). However to grasp the deeper thoughts and sense of self within her, Clarissa must take a moment of her own within the tumult. The perfect assembly of the party conveniently *must* break for a moment, like her public self, to highlight something more of the hostess. In the “intoxication of the moment” floating around her drawing-room, arm-in-arm with the Prime Minister, Clarissa feels a joyful “tingle” inside her (154). However this feeling is flanked by a “hollowness” that she describes as “at arms length,” at least until she retreats to her private space. What seems to

³⁰ An important distinction should be made here between the hostess figure of concern in this chapter and the “hostess” as a name for any woman who “successfully” mediates her social environment. Philipson states that Clarissa questions her life in her “weak” moments and is composed and creatively-powerful in her “strong” moments as a “fulfilled” hostess (135). Not only does the hostess (figure), particularly in this time period, always face fragmentation (as will be suggested) but this suggestion of women’s creative power is dangerously reminiscent of “her milieu’s vision of feminine nature as inherently nurturant of interpersonal connection” (Littleton, 46). Ruotolo also problematically suggests that for Clarissa and even *Woolf*, interpersonal “connection is all” (108).

prompt Clarissa's withdrawal into her private selfhood is a dark moment where loaded hospitable relations reveal the threat of the guest to the hostess' composed sense of self. Lady Bradshaw approaches Clarissa at her party and in a hushed voice shares with her a tragic story of her husband's patient Septimus Smith's suicide. The narrator posits that Lady Bradshaw tells Clarissa out of a strange sense of bonded femininity, an attempt to commiserate over over-worked husbands and the weight they both bear. But this jarring interjection, in an attempt to shore them together as women, only serves to alienate Clarissa from her happily composed understanding of the women's public world. Suddenly, Clarissa is shaken from her masterful sense of "upright," "pointed" self as her balanced realm is disrupted: "Oh! ... in the middle of my party, here's death" (162). Clarissa is prompted to retreat to the room where she believes, "the Prime Minister had gone with Lady Bruton" to seek out her beacons of hope for assembling in the interest of nationhood and Womanhood. But she finds that "there was nobody ... There was nobody. The party's splendour fell to the floor, so strange it was to come in alone in her finery" (162). With the spell broken, Clarissa is forced to face the story of Septimus' death and what it represents to her:

her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it ... he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming) ... [but there was] a thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter ... obscured in her own life ... This he had preserved ... Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them... (162-163).

Clarissa immerses herself in imagining Septimus' fall from the window and why he must have leapt. Putting herself so fully into Septimus' body is an effective metaphor for the union Woolf will go on to make between their characters' vision of life. At this

moment, Clarissa has a disturbing inkling of understanding for Septimus' stifled position as something that is masked in her own "wreathed" public life, but cannot fully attend to what they desire to "communicate" as yet as "people kept on coming" into her rooms. Clarissa vaguely conceives of a "centre" inside herself and Septimus that their worldly experience seems to distance from them.

The progression of the party section of the novel provides the occasion for Woolf to explain a woman's negotiations between public and private worlds, particularly as the experience – split by "downstairs" and "upstairs" –articulates the very moment where she awakens to her divided sense of self as a modern woman in society. The "dark moment" or moment of private retreat in the novel is of critical importance for articulating this split as Clarissa conceives it. The moment acts as the kind of "spiritual epiphany" that Heilmann characterized of New Women's literature (93). While some critics pass this scene off as Clarissa succumbing to "isolation" or "dread" she feels in her party (Henke, 134), or deem Clarissa as ultimately "cold" or obsessed with "death" (Hillis Miller, 96), her communion with Septimus' experience can be read less literally. Zwerdling likens Clarissa's retreat to embracing that "privacy of the soul" she articulated as being her "bedrock value" in her life as Mrs. Dalloway (80). At this moment of solitude, Clarissa re-thinks her idea that as a woman she must kindle her community "rubbing stick to stick" in an attempt to constantly "revive" – particularly in light of Septimus' decision to die (all quotes to follow 164-165). At first his suicide seems to her "her disaster – her disgrace" as she takes responsibility for keeping her peers together and satisfied on some level (recall the role of women as maintainers of communal livelihood and sustaining tradition). Her work as hostess then comes to her mind, as she had, like the ladies around her,

“wanted success” as a gatherer and composed woman. Then suddenly, prompted from her unconscious, Clarissa immerses herself in her “privacy of the soul” to really think about her lived experience as a woman. She remembers “the terrace at Bourton” in her youth where she was a free and radical young woman with Sally Seton, and how she grew to lose herself in “the process of living” as a wife and mother. Looking out at the sky from her window, she remembers doing so at Bourton: “[m]any a time had she gone ... when they were all talking, to look at the sky; or seen it between people’s shoulders at dinner.” Drawing together a previous moment in her life with her current feeling, Clarissa observes that she sees “something of her own” in the sky out her bedroom window, in-between the stiff shoulders of her public world. Grasping this sense of her private self, Clarissa starts to indulge in a vision of a personal place in the sky or world apart from all the rest. An old woman across the road, secluded in her own attic bedroom, stares out at Clarissa through her lit window – an uncanny reflection of this private sense of independent womanhood – and after sustaining Clarissa’s awakening gaze, goes off to bed. Clarissa then notes that though she expected to see “a solemn sky” when she looked out her window, expected to see a darkness when she finally looked into her private world, she now sees a sky that is “new to her” with wispy clouds that signal a “rising wind.” This sense of something progressing, her private self moving forward, paints an apt metaphor for Clarissa as an awakening new woman. Clarissa ends this reverie by noting the fascinating dichotomy between the party below, “people still laughing and shouting in the drawing room,” and the communal vision of the old woman. As the blind closes on the woman’s bedroom, Big Ben strikes. Clarissa is reminded of the time and her allegiance to it, feeling that “she must go back” to her guests. Though now she has an understanding

of Septimus, “the young man [that] had killed himself” and thinks that “she did not pity him” - she repeats this line twice as a conscious assertion of her strange communion with Septimus: “[for] she felt somehow like him.” Clarissa then recalls the line from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* that she read in her youth (and thinks about in the opening moves of the novel, 6-7): “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun/Not the furious winter’s rages.” This thought comes to her in Woolf’s free associative manner of narration, just as she thinks that she is somewhat proud of Septimus for “throwing it away.” Clarissa, however subtly, associates Septimus’ embrace of his own understanding of the world with hers. As previous internal narration from Septimus’ point of view explains, he jumps out of his window during his only moment of mental lucidity which he is trying to save from the influence of an oppressive doctor who will always claim that he is “ill.” Septimus therefore maintains his authentic vision of life, and his freedom, by “throwing away” his allegiance to the shackles of the social institution that binds him. Though Clarissa does go back to her party, she now goes back with the knowledge of her private self that understands social oppression and strictures and can envision the dream of freedom of thought and independence. Clarissa bravely, “fearing no more,” returns to her party and the moments of failure and social disconnection she will inevitably feel, the dregs of a nation touched by death, but takes with her a new sense of her world (public/private) and an inkling of how the winds may be changing. The end point of the novel for Clarissa is not completeness or control, but an understanding that she is divided between roles in the world as a woman. Woolf provides a strong voice to both dimensions of this position in her social-realist novel and so, honours its valuable verisimilitude.

At the end of *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier walks into the ocean and is overwhelmed by memories of her youth and a heavy feeling in her body and mind. The reader is left to wonder if she drowns, as she starts to swim further out and grow tired. Chopin paints an early historical hostess in her awakening to her strict public allegiances and rising private desires and vision of self. While many critics assume that Edna was simply too weak to handle this knowledge and therefore succumbs to death, there is a kind of brave agency expressed in her escape from her wifely-home and full immersion into the sea and her own mind. Like the draw of the sea for Edna, Clarissa is beckoned by a vision of a windy sky over her mundane life. Like Edna, her understanding of self has fractured and expanded in the metaphorical act of hosting her party. While there was no going back to the shore for Edna, at least in all likelihood, Clarissa decides to go back to her party downstairs – but with a renewed presence. Peter Walsh notices a strange sense of “terror” and “ecstasy” as he sees Clarissa re-enter the room (Woolf, 172), which is helpfully explained by Joseph Conradi’s previously discussed notion of the hostess as “demi-goddess” in the Bloomsbury novel (433). The “demi-goddess” is reminiscent of the Romantic “view of woman as dangerous but redemptive; or redemptive because dangerous” (433). Indeed, Clarissa is a sign of both redemptive assembly for her society but also a dangerous shift in the winds of feminine understanding of self. Conradi notes that, “A demi-goddess has ... a better than average chance of immortality” (433). Perhaps this is why Woolf has Clarissa survive beyond Edna, progressed in history, and represent a glimmer of sustainable change in the future for women. In this way, Clarissa becomes the voice of survival of the New Woman post-awakening. However is not until a later historical incarnation of the hostess when she can fully escape her oppression/

oppressors and assert a life of her own, as represented in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*. Zwerdling notes that "Woolf was too convinced of the fundamental inertia in human nature and institutions to imagine a *radical* transformation" at this point in time (my emphasis, 81). Clarissa, in her own context, represents only a turning-point in the changing consciousness of women as she recognizes that though "the external level may be" at times "a mockery of the inner self, it is, at the same time, a part of the self" and *must* be faced (Lee, 22). This is one crucial step toward the authentic, self-possessed identity the hostess seeks and the catharsis this provides. Edna recalls the sounds of dogs barking far away as she immerses herself in the ocean, reminders of her life back on land. Clarissa also envisions a summer's day where:

waves collect, overbalance, and fall ... and the whole world seems to be saying 'that is all' ... even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, That is all ... Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall ... listens to ... the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking (Woolf, 33-34).

Strangely drawn together in this moment, Nicole Warren Diver will join these two women at the sea in *Tender is the Night*. She will immerse herself in the history of her striving predecessors, collect it and – not without struggle – commit it to the waves. And in this "sighing collectively for all sorrows" she will "renew" her understanding of her self and "womanhood" and begin to live anew from there.

CHAPTER 3

“The Divers,” Divided : Reading Nicole as Hostess in Tender Is the Night

“A lot of people thought it was a fake, and perhaps it was, and a lot of others thought it was a lie,
which it was not”

– F. Scott Fitzgerald, as quoted by biographer Arthur Mizener (159).

In response to criticism of the inauthenticity of the action in *This Side of Paradise*, his first novel, F. Scott Fitzgerald made this calculated admission. While the “fake” scenes of the tumultuous lives of the young and wealthy in the novel were wholly conceived in Fitzgerald’s adult imagination – the author remained certain that his vision of the underlying corruption in affluent, boom-era lifestyles had been true. Fitzgerald carries this suspicion of the magnificent façade of upper-class 1920s America into *Tender Is the Night*, flushing out what contradictions and questions lie beneath. Above all, Fitzgerald holds the conviction that his “stories of the elite” should not be dismissed as “unreal and unsubstantial” based on the perceived superficiality of the upper class (Scribner, xiii), but appreciated as sharply critical microcosms of the ideals of American society. Indeed, in Fitzgerald’s social fiction characters have the resources and freedom to seek out and fully experience “the good life,” and ultimately reveal the darker side of these ideals: the work and sacrifice required to maintain them. In *Tender Is the Night* Fitzgerald dramatizes this “privileged” lifestyle, depicting a couple of ex-patriots in Europe, Dick and Nicole Diver as they exist within their social sphere and private realms. An increasing disjunction between these understandings of self – the public and the private – provides the occasion for Fitzgerald to peel back the composed, handsome masks of his couple to reveal the sacrifices they both make to sustain their ideal identities and life together. This chapter, in conversation with the preceding essays, will focus on the

evolving selfhood of the hostess in the modern novel as read through the party scene. However to grasp and analyze Nicole one must also read Dick, as their parasitic relationship and its eventual dissolution most clearly illustrates Fitzgerald's critique of Nicole's compulsive hostess work and the façade it maintains. Parsing "Dicole" to extract the New Woman whom Fitzgerald allows to escape her social strictures – the only independently surviving hostess of this study – will illuminate the common oppressions, desires, and consequent actions of the hostess figure and finally illustrate her emancipation.

Fitzgerald wrote his novel from the vantage point of the early 1920s into the 1930s - post World War I and prior to the Great Depression – observing Western men and women's participation in a new and precarious lifestyle that inspired the action in *Tender Is the Night*. In the decade after the First World War the social "atmosphere" for Westerners was irrevocably changed by widespread loss and disenchantment with authoritarianism alongside new economic prosperity, a combination, which Brian Way explains, "turned people's minds to more immediate satisfactions" (12). With this decidedly more hedonistic outlook, Puritanism and old mores for social behavior "crumbl[ed] away" (12). Milton R. Stern explains (and implicitly criticizes) the changing attitudes of this decade noting that it was marked by "the loss of the kinds of identities associated with stable societies, social altruism, and personal responsibility" (99-100). These rebellious people also exhibited an increased interest in personal "existential" experience (103) over the nebulous societal "greater good." Fitzgerald named this era between 1919 and 1929 "the Jazz age" (Way, 9). He would characterize this period in his novels as rife with "romance, success, degeneracy ... madness and disaster" where handling "moral and social complexity" was - or should

have been - a chief concern (9). He also defined the period as a time in human history where people were “deciding on pleasure” above all else (10), no doubt in the face of old morals and resources being swept away by the war. Fitzgerald’s vision of the era is depicted chiefly through the symbolic scene of “the cocktail party,” “a new social form ... where men and women met to drink, to flirt, to dance” and soon to become a “national institution” in the place of the old (Way, 12-13). Fitzgerald’s fictional parties – including the arguably more famous occasions in *The Great Gatsby* - are now known as both “dramatic settings” and memorable, palpable images, representing a strange conjunction between brilliant creativity and a sense of emptiness or lack in self and society (Way, 31). The party scenes of *Tender Is the Night* - to be analyzed here - epitomize this composition of precarious romantic “success” and proposed social “disaster” threatened by the Jazz Age.

Aside from the breakdown of popular belief in order, intuitional systems and the public good, what seems to account for criticism of the decade (by critics of the decade) are sudden changes in hallowed mores of gendered behavior that would threaten the ideal family and community unit. Indeed, indicting Jazz-age individuals’ waning sense of “responsibility” and “stability” is reminiscent of fears surrounding the New Woman. The increasingly demanding “woman question” was definitely on Fitzgerald’s cultural radar (Stern, 99). Way posits that “sooner than anyone else” in popular literature, Fitzgerald predicted Western women’s accelerated acquisition of social freedoms “with the coming of the Jazz Age” (10). Tiffany Joseph characterizes this era as a time “marked by an intensified attention to gender” which resulted in the questioning of “repressive gender identities” (64). Joseph recalls suffragettes’ political strife as well as the opportunity for women to enact typically “male,” essential

financial roles in their households that were “previously denied [to] them,” with their previously breadwinning husbands away at war (64). Joseph also highlights changes in women’s dress restrictions like “rising hemlines” and “increasing sexual openness” in the changing landscape for Western women post-war (64). Women’s “interrogation” of “gender identities” (65) matched the aforementioned “existential” mood of the age. Naturally, these changes would be “met with backlash” and condemnations of the New Woman, like the Jazz-era citizen, as “irresponsible” and “unstable” (64). Nicole Warren Diver comes to represent these fearsome changes. With the “destabilization” of the Cult of True Womanhood along with fledging Victorian ideals of unshakable wholeness of self (as has been traced through this project) Nicole comes to embody the larger concern of modern gender conceptions and *expectations* in the new world. Fitzgerald fascinatingly combines the dinner party trope with changes in women’s conception of self: the figure of the hostess consistently straddling the demands and influences her perceived public role while awakening to her increasing knowledge of a private self, eventually growing to understand her modern feminine subjectivity as necessarily split.

Mary E. Burton describes Fitzgerald as “perhaps the greatest American romantic idealist of them all” who then comes to critique “The Great American Dream” (459). For Fitzgerald, the American Dream was comprised of a questionable “love dance ... with money,” and at the centre, the paragon of American masculinity alongside “the elusive, seductive” American woman (459-460). Burton qualifies Fitzgerald’s understanding of the American Dream by explaining his personal conception of this moneyed “love dance” as an ultimately corrupt existence of gendered ideals. Burton posits that for Fitzgerald, ultimately, “the [ideal] male is

always destroyed” (460). Critics remain divided about Fitzgerald’s meaning in his solely surviving woman: did it signal his condemnation of new modes of femininity as a toxic threat to patriarchal stability? Or, perhaps, did Fitzgerald predict the survival of the New Woman before his time?

It is difficult to read *Tender Is the Night* without noticing the specter of “Scott and Zelda” in the background of the novel’s setting, action and characterization. There exists an ongoing debate in the academia of fiction about reading a novel in light of an author’s own experience. One position maintains that the work of fiction should be considered as a separate artistic entity and not too quickly judged in light of biographical details or historical impressions of the author. The opposing argument, of which Mary Verity McNicholas is only one proponent, strongly believes in the value of considering “a writer’s vision” as it is “inextricably interwoven with his experience” (40). Critics of *Tender Is the Night* agree on one thing: during the time Fitzgerald would write his characters’ lives in *Tender*, he would also be deeply consumed in a strikingly parallel situation in his personal life with his wife Zelda Fitzgerald (née Sayre). Sarah Beebe Fryer, Charles Scribner III, Rena Sanderson, and Milton R. Stern all chronicle Frances “Scott” Fitzgerald’s life on the French Riviera in the 1920s with his wife Zelda and their daughter Scottie (Fryer, 60; Scribner, xiv; Sanderson, 157; Stern, 97). Fryer emphasizes how Scott and Zelda grew increasingly “dissatisfied with their marriage” during this period (60), like Dick and Nicole. However the most obvious parallel between the Divers and the Fitzgeralds is the centrality of the wife’s mental “illness” in their lives. By 1930 Zelda had experienced her first mental break and was admitted to a clinic in Paris (Sanderson, 157). Like

Dick's claims that Nicole was impeding his psychiatric career, Scott would lament that his work on *Tender* was delayed and suffering "because of the necessity of keeping [his wife] in sanitariums (*Life in Letters*)" (157). Like Nicole's time admitted to the clinic on the "Zurichsee," Zelda would also be hospitalized in Switzerland on Lake Geneva (Scribner, xi). Fascinatingly the Fitzgeralds' time there would inspire Book Two of *Tender*, which details Dick and Nicole's life in Switzerland around the clinic. Scott graphed out "on a sheet of paper the parallel psychiatric 'histories' of Nicole and Zelda," highlighting his deep and invested fascination with his primary, compositely characterized, heroine (xi). Perhaps most telling of all was the question mark at the end of each graph "pointing to the future" (xi). Zelda, like Nicole, was eventually "pronounced 'cured'" by the end of the decade (xi), prompting her own "creative awakening" apart from her role as Mrs. Fitzgerald and mental patient (Sanderson, 156). Book Three of *Tender* could not be more closely derived from the Fitzgeralds' life, as Scott, like Dick, began drinking heavily and struggling to work professionally (156). Furthermore, Zelda began to gain her bearings on her own in the literary world, writing the critically acclaimed *Save Me the Waltz* (Fryer, 57). Scott, perhaps at a weaker moment, insisted to Zelda's psychiatrist that she make "an unconditional surrender" to him and his career (57) - mirroring Dick's last subtle grasps for the Nicole he once loved and controlled. Like Nicole, Zelda was criticized by her husband Scott for her brashly independent leanings. The two would come to write and publish, what Fryer names "a pair of perspectives on American womanhood in a decade of momentous change" (57).

Yet these perspectives on the potential of changing womanhood are not necessarily so opposite. Fryer mentions that twentieth century critics now tend to read

Save Me the Waltz in a feminist light and *Tender* as a “hostile” treatment of Nicole (58-59). However one must not make the mistake of reading Fitzgerald’s voice too far into the voice of his narrator. For it seems that Dick Diver, being an artistic creation of Fitzgerald, is employed toward a more satirical or critical purpose in the narrative. Dick’s downfall is at times too pathetic, his conduct too strongly misguided or disappointing for the argument to hold that Fitzgerald was using Dick to herald his own position in his marriage.³¹ It seems that in *Tender*, Fitzgerald is working more complexly with the flaws of his two protagonists – not favoring one over the other – to illuminate questions of womanhood and *imposed* Womanhood in the early modern Western context. For as McNicholas explains, Fitzgerald “presupposes first of all familiarity with his dual vision of himself” as an individual, “- a vision which he imputes to a significant degree to his alter ego, Dick Diver; *and* ... his dual vision of women - a vision obviously applicable to Zelda” (40). McNicholas asserts:

Far more complex than his dual vision of himself is [his] dual vision of women ... effectively demonstrated in his personal life in his attraction to, pursuit and conquest of, a ... relationship with Zelda; a vision for decades dramatized in fiction which ... romanticized ... both the trivial and the significant in the multifaceted experiences ... he shared with [her] (41).

Tender Is the Night details Fitzgerald’s deep investment with this “doubleness” contained in modern womanhood, perhaps all the more fervently as it spoke to his own romantic yet disturbing life with his maturing female partner. The imagined cocktail parties in the novel help dramatize the complicated relationship between the supposedly “trivial” and subtle “significant” moments in a woman’s lived experience

³¹ Indeed, at times it seems a great risk for a male writer to write an oppressive life for his heroine as he could easily be criticized for endorsing it (as Fitzgerald is so vehemently criticized by Fryer as a kind of misogynist).

straddling the public communal world and her private “home” and changing private mind.³²

Tender Is the Night is a novel about a doctor’s tragic demise on one level. In some ways the novel honors the theories (as espoused by past and current critics) that the novel is predominantly about Dick’s tragedy and his benevolent release of his “cured” Nicole. However Fitzgerald also seems to be supporting an alternative reading of the events in the text based on the changing form and tone of the work. While the turn toward Nicole’s strange, more complex perspective and abandonment of Dick’s visions of masculine grandeur in Book Three has been suggested by some as symptomatic of Fitzgerald’s increasing alcoholism and destruction by Zelda, it seems that this Book is more aptly described as the distinctly Modernist turn in the narrative and a feat of Fitzgerald’s art. Tiffany Joseph heralds Fitzgerald’s “nonlinear narrative and change of perspective,” his embrace of the new literary modes of Modernist “experimentation” (67). Pitcher emphasizes the power of Fitzgerald’s turn to “impressionistic” writing of Nicole’s complex internal thoughts and unique point of view of social experience, as it metaphorically implies that “her ‘leap’ in Book Three, Chapter VII is a breaking out of the straightjacket of an unnatural, imposed order” (74) (despite some contemporary critics of Fitzgerald, like Philip Rahv, who were confused by this change to “introspective wording ... tortuous style” that made “the

³² Aside from critique of composite characterization, critics also latched on to critique of Fitzgerald’s fascination with “decadence.” Like *Mrs. Dalloway*, “decadence” (as it pertains to organizing beauty for beauty’s sake and observing the uncanny strangeness of everyday experience, see note in Chapter 2 on the decadent tradition as it pertains to Woolf) was an important theme for Fitzgerald to handle when thinking about the woman in her public realm and also indicting “Dicole”’s “polished” impulses. However, “The left-wing reviewers hated, of course, the ... indulgence of the expatriate characters” (Scribner xiv). Critics immediately reacted to Fitzgerald’s “depraved boys and girls” of the elite who seemed only to care for “gin and kisses” (“Decadence: Fitzgerald...”, 71) – no doubt signaling the “decay” of Americans (72). Mary Colum considered the novel a tale of characters on “too shallow a level of experience” (283) – playing into Fitzgerald’s fear of his social stories being dismissed without closer reading of his subtler written turns within the carefully composed party scenes.

essential facts” less clear [316] - Fitzgerald’s intention, to be sure). For by the end of *Tender*, Fitzgerald has embraced his feminine voice and her New Womanist leanings, immediately explaining his contemporary conservative critics’ hasty “understanding” of Nicole as the villain of the text.

Before attending to the New Women’s topics in the text itself, it is important to articulate Fitzgerald’s own place in the rising feminist tradition in America in the early twentieth century. Fitzgerald coined a term that would soon become an ideal for women on the cusp of economic and public independence in the Jazz era: “the flapper” (Way, 10; Sanderson, 143). The flapper is a “public image of a modern young woman” who was either “spoiled, sexually liberated, self-centered, fun-loving” or “magnetic” (Sanderson, 143). Sanderson explains that Fitzgerald’s flapper “represented a new philosophy of romantic individualism, rebellion, and liberation, and his earliest writings enthusiastically present her as an embodiment of these new values” (143). Like the New Woman however, the flapper would be considered in both her negative incarnation – selfish, spoiled, negligent – and in her more positive, revolutionary one. As discussed in the previous chapters of this project, the Woman was firmly placed at the centre of the hallowed household and held the responsibility of maintaining her family and community. The significant changes in American post-war society meant that these gender-bending “flappers” would become “emblem[s] of American modernity” in all its threats to the status quo (143). Like the “Gibson Girl” before her, the flapper “shared a refusal to play the selfless angel whether of the house or of the nation ... defin[ing] themselves by rejecting the established ideal of women’s nurturing, maternal ‘nature.’” (146). Of course, Sanderson notes, “this shift from moral authority ... to the individual” has been dated by historians as appearing on a

less public level, “well before World War I” (146) – as this project observes of the late nineteenth century. Fitzgerald, “a keen observer of these changes in women’s mores,” would come to illustrate images and narratives of the flapper girl and her attitudes, which would be read by “thousands of women” (146). Yet despite spreading these narratives of modernized women (146), Fitzgerald also believed in the flapper as a symbol of new social disorder and possible conflict in old ideas of community and marriage (143). Nicole Diver exemplifies both elements of the modern flapper that Fitzgerald theorized.³³

Indeed, the looming “woman question” of the turn-of-the-century occupied Fitzgerald’s post-war male, often “puzzled,” mind (Sanderson, 147). Fitzgerald contemplated the New Woman’s efforts in “self-fashioning” or defining, which he observed to be an “alluring” but “theatrical” work, particularly as it appealed to old standards of “femininity” (147). In other words, the performative work of the publically self-conscious modern women seemed to *first* involve the attempt to compose a more pleasing public self and world.³⁴ Of course – as observed in the efforts of Edna Pontellier and Clarissa Dalloway after her – this self-conscious work of the New Woman composing her public world means enacting a subtle “duplicity” (Fitzgerald’s observation, 147); the act of hosting often highlighting a division

³³ There exists an attitude in contemporary criticism that suggests Fitzgerald was, ultimately, a critic of his flapper girl and her feminist threat. Milton R. Stern posits that though he never openly opposed suffrage, he “unhappily ... saw [these] change[s] taking place” which would yield “a world in disintegration ... blindly and mistakenly declaring itself free of everything in the past” (112). For Stern, this meant Fitzgerald saw fundamental problems in the liberation of the New Woman (112). McNicholas reads anxiety in Fitzgerald’s portrayals of modern women, having “an astonishing capacity for destruction ... forever capable of wreaking ruin in [men]” (42). However despite these apprehensions in Fitzgerald as a man of his era, Sanderson emphasizes that his fascination with “exceptional” women “allows his work to transcend its own historical contingency” and trepidation (162).

³⁴ (something observed in the conscious actions of Clarissa Dalloway meticulously organizing her environment).

between public and private actions and “selves” that disturb - and eventually enlighten - her sense of self as a modern woman. Still somewhat rooted in Victorian illusions of the incorruptible, stable and eternal gendered self, the twentieth century New Woman continues to struggle with this jarring realization of division in *Tender Is the Night*. The most modern of the three hostesses in this project, Nicole Diver demonstrates how conceptions of “womanhood” and the dividedness it signals in female public/private subjectivity remain a concern despite incremental moves forward in access to social services, education, and the arts in the twentieth century (145) – particularly in the realm of seemingly “trivial” social circles.

The text of *Tender Is the Night* illustrates the lives of various kinds of women. From the flighty Rosemary, obsessed with the spotlight and male approval, to the harsh, economic powerhouse of Baby Warren, *Tender* illuminates an elite class where women have *more* options, but remain implicated by the same Western ideals of proper womanhood. Nicole Diver, in contrast with Rosemary and Baby, is less simple to grasp in her attitudes toward womanhood in the opening moves of the novel. However as the story progresses, Nicole develops into an example of the awakening New Woman with clear parallels to the hostesses before her in this study. Sarah Beebe Fryer most clearly articulates Nicole as a member of the New Women’s movement in *Fitzgerald’s New Women: Harbingers of Change*.³⁵ Fryer identifies many occasions where Nicole voices her unhappiness with “traditional standards of feminine behavior” as she experiences them in lived oppressions (59). Milton R. Stern describes

³⁵ It should be noted that Fryer remains ambivalent about Fitzgerald’s intent to represent revolution for women in the positive sense. Fryer adamantly links Fitzgerald’s personal anxieties about Zelda with an opposition to womens’ agency (59) and potential social emancipation. Fryer makes the somewhat hasty decision to attribute the whole of Dick Diver’s imagined narration to Fitzgerald’s apparent biases.

the pre-war world that Nicole and her peers Lady Caroline and Mary North would have been raised into:

In the old pre-war world ... women who were comfortable in that world's comfortable values had identities comfortably prepared for them ... the past also had offered a world in which men were supposed to have had a role and an identity that women could rely on and in which women were supposed to have had a role and an identity that men could rely on ... But the war tore off the surface suppositions of the comfortably respectable world (110).

Indeed, Nicole feels incomplete in her young life until she finds Dick Diver whose composed identity she can rely on and build her *own* proper identity in line with. This wager meant that women were meant to maintain satisfaction and whole-hearted belief in their socially assumed roles as “wives and mothers”, but also that they were to rely on their husbands’ “self-importance” (Fryer, 61-62). Nicole initially assumes this proper sense of Womanhood and “traditional feminine criteria – housekeeping ... beauty, charm, and children” (62). The question of work was already answered for her, as men were rewarded the “occupation of work of their own choosing” (62), though it is only so long a period where Nicole is satisfied by her (patriarchally-considered) “minor accomplishments” (62). Fryer recalls a moment in the text where Nicole expresses her earlier ambitions to “study medicine” and notes by her psychiatrist detailing her “excellent mind and ... need for mental stimulation” (66). Nicole also voices her desires to be an interpreter for the war effort when she is an adolescent, before she makes the “right” decision to marry a stable, professional man. Certainly “despite ... efforts to live within the constraints their conservative husbands and upbringings impose ... Nicole [is] troubled by [her] sense of inadequacy and purposelessness” (66). Fryer sites a moment in one of Nicole’s more lucid internal monologues, of which there are many more than Dick would have the reader believe, where she comments: “I am tired of knowing nothing and being reminded of it all the

time” (Fitzgerald, 161). This no doubt signals not only her latent cognizance of Dick’s negative effects on her self-worth but also her dissatisfaction with being contained to limited roles in the thought-provoking world around her. At another moment in the novel, after she has been released from a sanitarium in Switzerland, Nicole tellingly reflects on her time there:

... this past year and a half on the Zugersee seemed wasted time ... She had come out her first illness alive with new hopes ... yet deprived of any subsistence except Dick, bringing up children she could only pretend gently to love ... The people she liked, rebels mostly, ... were bad for her – she sought in them the vitality that had made them independent or creative ... sought in vain – for their secrets were buried deep in childhood struggles they had forgotten. They were more interested in Nicole’s exterior harmony and charm, the other face of her illness (Fitzgerald, 180).

Here, Nicole clearly articulates the new hopes and desires she has gained in her maturity as a woman: to have a life apart from Dick and her children, to attain an independent “vitality” in life. However these thoughts are quickly qualified by distinctly Dick-like thinking that rationalizes her independent idols as “bad for her” new stability as a cured woman, and rather ironically employs Freudian theory to dismiss their natures (created by latent “childhood struggles”). Finally, Nicole voices the ingrained notion of her Womanhood as being solely valuable based on proper, pleasing appearances. Nicole’s appearance in the novel, however, as observed by Rosemary, gives signals that she will follow in the tradition of the emancipated hostess before her. Nicole is described, like Clarissa and Edna, as having a rougher, sharper, or harder appearance. Rosemary observes that though she is beautiful her skin is ruddy and tanned, her face: “hard and lovely and pitiful. Her eyes met Rosemary’s but did not see her” (6). Nicole’s face and eyes are emphasized again when Rosemary spots her coming out of a shop: “her lovely face [was] set, controlled, her eyes brave and watchful, looking straight ahead toward nothing” (14). Again, Nicole is described

as looking forward with a hard, controlled façade about her. Rosemary continues to observe Nicole's face throughout Book One, noting later that "her face *could* have been described in terms of conventional prettiness but the effect was that it had been made first on the heroic scale with strong structure and marking" (my emphasis, 16-17). Here, Fitzgerald employs the same technique of Woolf and Chopin: describing his heroine as having a visible but initially mysterious strength about her, foreshadowing her thoughts and behavior to come.

Dick Diver's characterisation helps build Fitzgerald's New Woman through a study of contrasts. Dick embodies and voices the opposition to New Womanhood of the era, as both a traditionally masculine husband and professional psychologist obsessed with the stable and the "normal."³⁶ Dick represents the "paternalistic trusteeship" of the age, marrying Nicole as soon as she is released from her father's domain and Dr. Dohmler's clinical care, a tradition which fails to offer Nicole "any opportunity for self-realization" (Fryer, 63). Dick becomes the central character of the novel as he continually pushes Nicole into the background, and from his perspective, sees the other female characters in the novel as either "sources of delight and

³⁶ It seems Fitzgerald's intent to place Dick as a kind of foil to Nicole's blossoming character, particularly as he stages the scene between Dr. Diver and "the Iron Maiden," an American artist who is a living metaphor of female suffering. The artist suffers what Dick calls a "nervous eczema" and laments her position as a woman, physically and emotionally scarred by battles with men (Fitzgerald, 183). Dick rationalizes her questions of womanhood as "hallucinations" (183), and offers her this explanation for her scarring: "'You've suffered, but many women suffered before they mistook themselves for men' (185), as if her mistake was assuming she was equal. The artist maintains: 'I am here as a symbol of something. I thought perhaps you would know what it was,' to which Dick responds almost too quickly, self-consciously even: 'You are sick' (185). Dick ironically surmises that she will never be a truly cured individual who can explore 'the frontiers of consciousness,' though she is undeniably doing so in her 'illness' (185). As if Fitzgerald was attempting to make this satirical portrayal of the all-knowing doctor/male more clear, he explains Dick's ultimate attraction to "the awful majesty of her pain," as that which initially attracted him to Nicole, "cherish[ing] her mistakes, so deeply were they a part of her" – wanting to "gather her up in his arms" and hold on to her fragility and ignorance to her own oppression. Of course Dick is most ignorant of all to the reality of their gendered situation, offering only his sage advice to the woman as a proponent of a vague but firm patriarchal system: "We must all try to be good" (185).

admiration, and/or forces of destruction in terms of the influence they have upon [him]” (McNicholas, 41). Furthermore, Dick seems to blame his own “failure” and sense of increasing “disorder” in his life of “unruly female power – in the form of either seductive child-women [like Rosemary and the young Nicole] or mannish women [like the affluent Baby Warren who controls the Divers’ stipend]” (Sanderson, 160). Dick’s dominant narrative portrayal explains why “there is a widespread tendency to overlook Nicole Warren Diver’s importance in the novel” (Fryer, 58). Reading past Dick’s authoritative voice yields the underlying destructive force of *Tender*: patriarchal violence (Joseph, 67-68), particularly as it presents itself in Nicole’s traumatic experience of masculine “care” – i.e. her father’s incestual abuse and Dick’s paternalistic control over her mind. Fryer posits that Nicole’s exploitation by father figures, chiefly Dick, “can be viewed symbolically as a reflection of the New Woman’s tenuous social position in the face of patriarch[y]” (71).

The character Rosemary Hoyt opens the novel as a childishly innocent observer of Nicole. Rosemary comes to express many ingrained notions about femininity, and importantly, becomes a kind of foil to Nicole’s harder, more discerning New Woman. Rosemary spends the majority of her time in the novel fawning over someone she sees to be the ideal of masculinity: Dick Diver.³⁷ Rosemary is in awe of Dick’s performance of masculinity, as he deftly controls conversations and inspires the admiration of his peers. Rosemary exclaims: “He seemed kind and charming – his voice promised that he would take care of her, and that a little later he

³⁷ Although there is a point in the text where Fitzgerald seems to suggest that Rosemary is trying to choose between reliance on the paternalistic Dick and a frightened but intense infatuation with the defiant woman in Nicole. Rosemary notes that: “Nicole was a force – not necessarily well disposed or predictable liker her mother – an incalculable force” (Fitzgerald, 60). She remains torn between admiring and loving them both in different ways: “ ‘I’m in love with you and Nicole ... Honestly – I love you and Nicole – I do.’ ” (Fitzgerald, 63). As the younger generation of women in the text, the symbolic “future,” it seems significant that Rosemary grapples with traditional and revolutionary ideals.

would open up new worlds for her, unroll ... magnificent possibilities” (Fitzgerald, 16). Here Rosemary reflects on Dick’s power to offer her her life and “take care of her” – recalling the paternalism that characterizes his impulses and work in the novel. On another occasion Rosemary remembers a lesson she learned in youth about womanhood and duty. Her mother forced her sister Baby to attend a court ball even though she was suffering from a burst appendix. For due to Baby having “three of the royal princes on her dance card” she must simply strap an ice-pack to her side and pull her corset tight. Rosemary maintains that “It was good to be hard, then; all nice people were hard on themselves” (55). Rosemary rationalizes the suffering she observes in “people” around her, more specifically, women who must always appeal to men.³⁸

If Rosemary acts as an initial vantage point for studying the growth of Nicole, the incident toward the end of the text with Mary North and Lady Caroline provides a final perspective on womanhood to bookend what gendered changes Nicole embodies in the novel. Lady Caroline and Mary are jailed for dressing up as French sailors and fooling two girls into going off with them. The horror hotelier Mr. Gausse expresses when hearing this story is mainly based on their cross-dressing and courting of other women. Gausse protests: “I have never seen women like this sort of women, I have known many of the great courtesans of the world, and for them I have much respect often, but women like these women I have never seen before” (Fitzgerald, 306). Gausse holds Lady Caroline and Mary up to the standards of the ideals of controlled womanhood, the courtesans, and cannot fathom a “kind of woman” that would put on pants and “mistake herself for a man” (recalling Dick’s concern over the Iron Maiden’s thinking, see footnote). Joseph explains that this scene “reveals a larger

³⁸ Rosemary’s job as a young actress, valued mostly for her innocent and feminine charms, has also re-enforced this lesson.

concern over the blurring of ... gender identity ... [their] actions are merely exaggerations of a more wide-spread type of cross-dressing during the era” including “masculine lines of some flapper styles as well as the uniforms of military women, factory workers, and nurses” which could easily aggravate men already fearing the slip of masculine power (75). This scene provides a vision of the new kinds of women who will follow Nicole after she is “cured” of her confusion and “illness” under the care of Dick Diver.

Fitzgerald’s many female characters help build his vision of the changing landscape for modern women, but perhaps the most pervasive tool he employs is his garden imagery as it relates to Nicole’s thoughts and lived experience. Nicole is commonly pictured musing in her garden. One chapter describes Nicole walking through it and observing her plants in their unkempt but attractive arrangement, here, an “intangible mist of bloom” (Fitzgerald, 25). Like her character, the garden is unconventional and occasionally tangled. It drops off at the end at a cliff overlooking the sea, a place where Nicole often goes to be alone and think (a cathartic space that will be recalled in the closing moves of this chapter). Nicole muses here that “in the world she was rather silent” because “she knew few words and believed in none,” emphasizing again her dissatisfaction in being kept from a world of knowledge (25). Nicole further acknowledges her unknowing, subservient position to Dick in one instance in her garden where Dick intrudes on her solitude by calling to her with a megaphone. Nicole can easily be heard calling back to him without his “light mechanical device” but she pretends to struggle, asking if he can hear her, so as not to “belittle his megaphone” (27). Dick can, but as if to assert his appendage, “stubbornly” raises his microphone to continue his conversation. In this way, like her

dual character as a woman, Nicole's garden is also subtly gathered together and anchored in her community and public world – Dick's blowhorn reminding her of this. The garden furniture, lanterns and umbrella have been arranged around "the biggest tree in the garden" for guests, emphasizing her composed (and composing) role as hostess, and even in a quiet moment she hears "the complaints and accusations of some nursery squabble in the house" on the summer air, emphasizing her role as wife and mother (25). The sound of her children reminds Nicole of the public role she plays and will play in the coming party, "contributing just her share of urbane humor" amongst her peers, "being adequate" in conversation like "an obedient retriever" (25-26).³⁹

The party that takes place at "the table in the garden" (31) will be a construct of the Divers *together*. A critical Doherty will call it "*Nicole's* table" when hedonistic magic starts to affect the guests and Dick is suddenly exempt as a simple "prop man" (149). However Rosemary's vision of the end of the party scene while the guests drive away is most telling for their mutual effort and its effects on Nicole:

Down in the garden lanterns still glowed over the table where they had dined, as the Divers stood side by side in the gate, Nicole blooming away ... and Dick bidding good-by to everyone by name ... it seemed very poignant to drive away and leave them in their house. Again she wondered what Mrs. McKisco had seen in the bathroom. (39)

³⁹ Critics who read Nicole as the reason for the hallowed Doctor's destruction imagine the garden as "the soundest model for corruption ... [where] everything grows quickly" and needs to be clipped back (Seiter, 103). William E. Doherty likens the garden to "Romantic deception," as if Nicole were the one planning a party within its manicured bounds and not her self-conscious husband (154). In fact, Doherty takes care to emphasize that the first Diver party that renders its guests "spirits sensitive and weak" takes place in "*Nicole's* garden" (154), though the event is most evidently planned by Dick. Dick is the one who comes up with the idea to "give a really *bad* party ... where there's a brawl and seductions and people going home with their feelings hurt" (27) and expects Nicole to help facilitate it. Dick makes a claim similar to Doherty when Rosemary's mother compliments the garden space. Dick emphasizes that the magical world and its potential for drama should be attributed to his wife as it is "*Nicole's* garden" (28). Dick claims that "She won't let it alone – she nags at it all the time, worries about its diseases" (28), which not only places the coming drama of the party scene on Nicole's plate, but also ironically emphasizes his ignorant denial of being so similar to Nicole – a person who won't let disorder alone, constantly prunes his vision of himself, worries about diseases.

In this moment, Nicole and Dick both assume their public roles as host and hostess. Nicole is “blooming away” like her perfect garden, standing alongside her masterful husband as he lets his guests go home. Indeed, it is “poignant” that the party ends with this vision, leaving the constructs of the perfect Divers in their carefully constructed – somewhat public, somewhat private environment. Of course the wager in making Nicole exist so *essentially* in this strange environment is clear as Rosemary calls to mind Nicole’s dark moment of mental fracture during the party, to be examined in more detail further on.

Dick Diver exists in a “broken universe” where his sense of self – consciously “anchored” in “older, stabilizing values ... knowledge ... of psychosis ... [of] vulnerability” – begins to dissipate (Pitcher, 84). The same can be said about Nicole as she grows to conceive of herself independent of “older, stabilizing values” and ideas about her “psychosis” and “vulnerability”. Indeed, the Divers’ initial understandings of self – existing essentially as a *couple* - begin to dissolve as early as the opening party in the novel. E.W. Pitcher notes: “Fitzgerald represents the self as its own worst enemy, one part turned toward another with ambivalent ... intent” (84). “Ambivalence” can be likened to the notion of being “of two minds.” In this way “The Divers” as a distinct unit in the novel, illustrate this dual opposition of selfhood in the component parts of Dick and Nicole. As the narrative progresses, Nicole recognizes and forcefully actualizes her personal subjectivity – prompted by the illuminating experience of the hosting act – and divides the façade of “The Divers” that contains her. Her position by the end of the novel, to be taken up in the closing moves of this

chapter, involves harnessing her public identity and private self to gain a stronger grasp of the fraught, dual nature of modern self and womanhood.

A preliminary reading of Dick and Nicole as a symbiotic unit in the opening moves of the novel helps inform a later reading of Nicole's work as hostess, as Dick's point of view depicts or authoritatively comments on the majority of the action and vivid party description. Fitzgerald is also quite clear on the symbolic value of "The Divers" as a singular unit composed of two gendered points of view on Nicole's development.⁴⁰ The couple rarely exists apart in public, and at their party Rosemary observes that when "Nicole disappeared" briefly, "Dick was no longer there" – a moment in the magical scene where belief is meaningfully suspended (Fitzgerald, 35). Later in the novel, it is revealed that the couple even signs their correspondence with the name "Dicole" (103). Fitzgerald frames Dick and Nicole as sometimes blissfully ignorant to the roles they play in society and in private, and at other times, disturbed by the realization that they are bound as they are. In one scene,

Dick asked for the check; the Divers relaxed, chewing tentatively on toothpicks. 'Well – ' they said together. He saw a flash of unhappiness on her mouth, so brief that only he would have noticed, and he could pretend not to have seen ... Now Dick hardened himself and let minutes pass without making any gesture ... any representation of constantly renewed surprise that they were one together (87).

Here, Dick and Nicole mirror each other's actions and demeanor, acknowledging that this is not an uncommon occurrence.⁴¹ Nicole appears (quietly) unhappy about this realization, and Dick simply tries to remain stable and controlled despite on some

⁴⁰ Sanderson explains that "Fitzgerald's exploration of the 'the New Woman'" is not divorced from his attempt to conceive of the male response (144). Fitzgerald was constructing a vision of oppressed and awakening modern womanhood while also "magnifying" the weaknesses of the modern man to adapt to these challenging "shifting definitions" (153). The Jazz age's American man, in other words, is also indicted in his role in *maintaining* old senses of womanhood (158).

⁴¹ Indeed, it is not uncommon. Dick eventually models Nicole's "mad" manner of speaking and thinking – candid, free-form prose – when he becomes depressed and takes to drink (225, for one instance).

level feeling that their bond is unusually tight.⁴² Rosemary observes the Divers' controlled decisions as "the exact furthestmost evolution of class," admiring their "expensive simplicity" and "simplicity of behavior," though an omniscient narrator enters to foreshadow that Rosemary is simply "unaware" of the discerning "selection" of identities and lifestyle that are required to attain this "simple" façade of ideal marriage (21). For it is the moments in *Tender* where Dick and Nicole's darker thoughts start to mirror one another, where the effort and strain of their magnificent splendor is revealed. There are several moments in the novel where Nicole describes Dick from afar, or vice versa, and could very well be describing herself. Nicole observes Dick's "characteristic moods ... that swept everyone up into it and was inevitably followed by ... melancholy" – something she sees strongly in his strange desire to hold parties that end in drama (27). However being just as much a hostess to these parties as Dick is host, Nicole also exhibits "a ... virtuosity with people ... the power of arousing a fascinated and uncritical love" that falters under a realization of "the waste and extravagance involved" in their parties, the sacrifice of the private self in these moments of calculated magic. Even when critics are speaking about one character, they could very well be speaking about the other. E.W. Pitcher describes Dick's hosting work as the work of "the high priest of mannered, social behavior [who] radiates charm, sophistication, control, but ... is highly vulnerable precisely because [this] life of pretense and form forces him to suppress desire, curb his ambition, and cater to others rather than self" (85). This could easily describe Nicole, particularly as her hostess work highlights her public identity as it sacrifices her

⁴² Nicole admits on another occasion that, "when I talk ... I am probably [speaking as] Dick" (Fitzgerald, 162). Dick also in a moment of reflection admits that he may have been wrong for Nicole, but that they needed someone like the other to "rely on" in their fragile identities based on gendered ideals (Fitzgerald, 215).

private desires and ambitions and eclipses more authentic knowledge of self. Dick muses that his life post-war, “the broken universe of the war’s ending,” has made him lean on other personalities: “only as complete as they were complete themselves” (245).⁴³ Nicole also lives in this manner before she resigns to a life where being “complete” is not only impossible, but unfitting for her conception of the dual-roles existing for her as a woman (Dick too is tormented by his increasing notion of having “many men inside him” after a string of dramatic parties and flings with Rosemary that leaves him unsatisfied with his public identity). Like Clarissa Dalloway before her, Nicole self-consciously asserts that her business as a woman is to “hold things together” (Fitzgerald, 82) until she realizes the weight of this assembling work.

Dick Diver’s double role as both Doctor and husband to Nicole, and her role as both mental patient and wife, further complicates “The Divers” in *Tender is the Night*. Furthermore, these unstable and increasingly blended roles are what inhibit Nicole’s self-actualization and future emancipation in the first place. Fitzgerald recalls his psychological research completed during Zelda’s time in Geneva to conceptualize Book Two of the novel. In this book, Doctor Diver chronicles his meeting, courting and eventual curing of Nicole Warren – though not without allowing some anxieties about his work to slip through his assertions. An analysis of this telling Book can be read in APPENDIX A.

There are several small party scenes depicted in *Tender Is the Night*, but one chief event that dramatizes the crumbling public personas of ‘The Divers’ and

⁴³ In a romantic turn, perhaps a weaker and more candid moment, Dick supposes that he is “thankful to have an existence at all, if only as a reflection in [Nicole’s] eyes” (Fitzgerald, 155).

precipitates the climactic shifts in Nicole's sense of her self and womanhood – her own “cure.”

The question of gender as it is involved in the hosting act is critical in *Tender*, as this final text uniquely frames a host *alongside* a principal hostess. Tracy McNulty highlights the point that any hospitable relation, like the cocktail party, “concerns the crisis of what is properly ‘mine,’ the limits of ... identity,” a “crisis” based on the notion of “hospitality” as inherently counter to Victorian notions of “the self-identical, the total, the integral” self, as we have observed hospitality constantly fracturing the stasis of the masterful host (xix-xx). The process of inviting guests into the stable, private home and sense of self is always a strange wager where the host offers his or her assembled selfhood in the name of inviting the uncanny, the foreign, the *new* into his or her environment – as if to *invite* a disruption of mastery, *as if* the host unconsciously knows there is something more, some sense of the “other,” within the composed self. As observed across the previous two chapters, the party as a literary trope is an inevitably jarring scene to the host's ipseity just as it is always so carefully planned. Modernist authors employ these scenes to dramatize the hostess' existential reflection within, or as a direct result of, their social experience and impulses – again speaking to the inevitability of the hospitable fracture. McNulty furthermore conceives of “the hostess” beyond the stereotype of “feminine ... generous or selfless mode of welcome or ‘way of being’” and focuses on femininity as a concept often relegated to “possession or property ‘internal’ to man” (xxvii). Clearly Dick is of this mind, Nicole being so deeply bound to his sense of masculine identity and composed community. McNulty concurs that “as a result” of this link to “man,” “[feminine] hospitality is always closely related to that of men ... commenting upon or

questioning it ... undercutting it in ambiguous ways” (xxvii). In *Tender*, Nicole serves as an important reflection of Dick’s hospitable acts while also “undercutting” its composition, prompting the reader to question the ordered magnificence of The Divers’ parties.

In his lecture “Hostipitality,” Jacques Derrida examines the “condition” of the gift of hospitality from host to guest. The host can never be truly, or ideally, universally hospitable to his⁴⁴ guests by virtue of being designated as host in *his own home*. He is not asking for nothing of his guests, as universal ideals of hospitality would dictate, as the guests must accept this state of being-host. In other words, “the law of identity” – the host being constitutively defined by his masterful self in his own space – creates *conditions* for the “welcome”⁴⁵ (Derrida, 4). The host “must be assured of his sovereignty over the space [which] ... he offers or opens to the other,” and ensures this by “reaffirming this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home ... but on the condition that you observe ... the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of *what I am*” as host (14). The host’s hospitable relations demand that his guests accept his role as host so that he truly is masterful. Hospitality in practice, however, never yields this result – the guest’s “being” within the private space debunking the host’s singular sovereignty; the host’s conditions are imminently compromised. It seems that The Divers are conscious of this imminent failure in the party scene, the imminent fracturing and drama a party can create (Dick hoping his party will result in fights and lasciviousness). But on another level they are constantly

⁴⁴ “His” will be used in this brief discussion of hospitality theory (certainly not to exclude the possibility of the female host which is this chapter’s subject), first, because this is the vocabulary used by Derrida in his speech and allows more fluid referencing, and second, because the prototypical host is “male in the first instance” and gathers more specific conditions when considered as feminine (something Derrida examines in this lecture, reading Klossowski’s discussion of a figured hostess) (14).

⁴⁵ “Welcome” in quotation marks because Derrida is unsure what the concept of the welcome truly means; how/if it exists in hospitable practice between men.

surprised by how the fracturing effect of hospitality occurs on such an essential level in their own minds. Dick is always left “melancholy” after his carnivals of affection, and both he and Nicole suffer breakdowns of their grasp on themselves. Derrida suggests that hospitality “appeals to an act” and, more so, the “intention beyond the thing”... the complicit engagement with an aftermath which “proceeds beyond knowledge toward the other ... unknown” (8). In other words, “hospitality gives itself ... to thought beyond knowledge” (8), which sheds light on the reason why the authors of these novels continually employ the party scene at the moment where their hostess is meant to reach beyond conventional “knowledge” of gendered selfhood (i.e. proper Womanhood).

As previously examined, the hostess’ work in composing her party is first deeply linked to her composition of an ideal social self. After the hospitable act compromises this sense of self, and so the practice of identifying with only a proper public façade, the hostess’ work involves gathering together a more authentic sense of self as a modern woman divided between public and private realms and roles.⁴⁶ *Tender Is the Night* is rife with moments where Nicole is depicted trying desperately to compose a sense of herself, as she is fittingly a mental patient/girl-on-the-loose that is constantly being told to control and “compose herself.” In her youth Nicole is consumed by the desire to compose herself as properly feminine to affect Dick’s attractions. Waiting for Dick one morning she implores herself: “Dress stay crisp for him, button stay put, bloom narcissus – air stay still and sweet” (Fitzgerald, 143). In a

⁴⁶ One reviewer commented bitterly on the new “trend” in literature of depicting people as unable “to impose a unity on himself and his actions” and observe the “distinguished principles” of “the old classic novel,” in modern texts lamentingly, the character is “unreliable” and “subject to fears” which yields a distinctly more fractured and surely “lonely” existence (Colum, 284). Of course this reeks of old Victorian sentiment on the necessity for people, especially women of the household, to be whole in their minds.

contemplative moment on her cliff by the sea Nicole recalls: “I can remember how I stood waiting for you in the garden – holding all of my self in my arms like a basket of flowers. It was that to me anyhow – I thought I was sweet – waiting to hand over that basket to you” (155). Nicole sees her “self” as a gathering that takes some concerted effort, and Dick remembers this work in her youth when he starts to slip in melancholy in his older age: “he thought about her with detachment, *loving her for her best self*. He remembered once when ... she came to him on hurried feet ... held up her face, showing it as a book open at a page” (my emphasis, 201). Dick’s “best” wife is one who can be read easily and willingly. Nicole carries this “gathering” impulse into her adulthood, as Rosemary observes her interest in collecting together items that “go together” (yellow pocket book, yellow notebook, yellow pencil [35]) or carefully compiling lists for packing suitcases. Like Clarissa Dalloway, Nicole “surrounds herself” with the occupations of life not for “poverty of spirit” but for the desire to be “curator” of her life and person (258). She exclaims to a jaded Abe North that as woman, it is “my business to hold things together” (81-82). Indeed, Nicole must hold her vision of her public self together most of all, constantly peering in the “quicksilver” of a mirror to confirm that she is still “all together” (137) (not unlike Clarissa’s compulsive use of mirrors before her). The party scene will come to complicate this vision and alleviate this anxious maintenance.

The party scene works against hospitable and Victorian ideals of completeness and stability, breaking Nicole down against her best efforts to compose herself publicly. As previously demonstrated, the party begins as a very premeditated notion by the hostess. In *Tender Is the Night*, Dick and Nicole meticulously plan their upper-

class lives – what they will wear, where they will live, whom they will associate with – and their parties are no exception. In fact, the Divers seem most concerned with these moments and their potential for great excitement and drama for themselves and their peers. Dick Diver most explicitly voices his desires to create a carnivalesque stage. Maria DiBattista describes “the carnivalesque” as: “The relaxation of moral and social norms ... the holiday of release that winks at promiscuous and indecorous behavior” (31). While Dick’s intentions are certainly to allow exciting and “promiscuous” behavior, the Divers’ party subtly continues to align with “social norms” as it demonstrates the role of the controlled male patriarch and his magically feminine, composed hostess. Furthermore, the kind of drama that ensues from Dick’s intentions and hospitable welcome cannot be predicted, transforming the enjoyable “holiday” into a stage for breakdowns. DiBattista explains how the literary carnival often “culminates with the destruction of a once intact personality” (31), alluding to Nicole’s psychological break at the end of the Divers’ first event where she “retreats into a private madness ... comment[ing] on the public surface of carefree life” (31). In this manner, the theory of the carnivalesque aligns well with the implication that hospitality is inherently flawed against the intent of the host or hostess. The action in the party scene in the garden dramatizes this relationship.

“At the heart of carnival pleasure is the pleasure of the moment” (DiBattista, 32). In *Tender*, Fitzgerald makes a great deal of conscious effort to properly describe the transcendent splendor of the Divers’ Jazz-era party. The party set at the Villa Diana is “intensely calculated perfection” with only “the change apparition of a maid

in the background” (Fitzgerald, 28).⁴⁷ The Villa is depicted through Rosemary’s eyes as “the centre of the world,” a “stage [where] some memorable thing was sure to happen” – foreshadowing the drama to come, planned and unplanned (29). Fitzgerald infuses his scene of riches with images of nature, not unlike Clarissa and Edna’s parties where flowers, soft light and natural ambience floating through windows are key elements to the party’s illusion. Rosemary as the fresh-eyed narrator observes the effects of the night air, wine and candlelight on the guests:

A gracious table light, emanating from a bowl of spicy pinks, fell upon Mrs. Abrams’ face, cooked ... in Veuve Cliquot, full of ... good will ... Then Violet McKisco, whose prettiness had been piped to the surface of her ... Then came Dick ... deeply merged in his own party ... Then Barban talking ... with urbane fluency ... Then Nicole. Rosemary suddenly saw her in a new way and found her one of the most beautiful people she had ever known. Her face, the face of a saint, a viking Madonna, shone through ... the candlelight, drew down its flush from the wine-colored lanterns ... She was still as still (33).

As at Mrs. Dalloway’s party, the Divers’ guests appear at “their best” within the bounds of the evening.⁴⁸ As at Edna’s dinner, expensive alcohol softens the demeanor of the guests, encouraging them to engage fully in the fantasy of the host’s making. This description also touches on the magical vision of the hostess, so composed at the head of her table in candlelight. Rosemary observes her as not only beautiful, but also possessing a kind of “Viking” strength, a natural majesty in her environment. Overall she is described as “still,” “together,” “whole.” The momentary security the Divers’ guests feel is depicted as brief transcendence from the mundane world. The table seems “to have risen a little toward the sky” and “as if ... such a detachment from the

⁴⁷ This recalls the seeming invisibility of Clarissa Dalloway’s servants that help her prepare her party, quietly rushing around her house, raising obvious issues of class-based ignorance that is a valid critique of the Divers.

⁴⁸ “They had been at the table half an hour and a perceptible change had set in – person by person had given up something, a preoccupation ... and now they were only their best selves and the Divers’ guests.” (Fitzgerald, 32).

world had been attained, the two Divers began suddenly to warm and glow and expand.” The hosts’ importance is magnified and almost deified as “... Just for a moment they seemed to speak to every one [sic] at the table, singly and together ... And for a moment the faces turned up toward them were like the faces of poor children at a Christmas tree” (34). For the moment, the Divers’ are at the peak of their social charm – like showmen (Way, 135).

The Divers’ “conscious technique” (135) is focused on captivating and drawing attention to their being-host, but mostly, to *Dick’s* “aristocratic style ... a game he has learnt to play” (136).⁴⁹ For on some unknown level, Nicole must be recognizing this false, farcical behavior of her *husband* – and so, a practice of anxious self-identification she has consistently participated in. As if to foreshadow her disenchanted split from Dick and his world to come, Rosemary observes in an early instance on the beach how Nicole seems to be the only one not entirely absorbed by Dick’s performance as alpha male: “ she realized that [Dick] was giving a ... performance for [the] group ... Even those, like herself, that were too far away to hear, sent out antennae of attention ... the only person at the beach not caught up in it was the young woman with the string of pearls” (6-7). However for the duration of the party, before the breaking point of private crisis, Nicole is the “foaming and frothing” creature at the head of the table, the head woman (32) floating about like the mermaid-like Clarissa Dalloway at her peak of assembled perfection. The Divers’ convince their guests that “as long as they subscribed to [the world of the party and home of the

⁴⁹ On a separate occasion in Paris, a lunch party held by the Divers, this charming and calculated behavior appears once more. Rosemary notes the hosts of the table acting before an “audience” and bringing the “scene” together by carefully selecting their guests and making their group into “so bright a unit that Rosemary felt an impatient disregard for all who were not at their table,” witnessing the Divers at their best. Rosemary muses that they seem to be “still under the beach umbrella” (Fitzgerald, 52) of the contained Riviera-world of the Diver universe (something Nicole will forcefully walk away from further on).

masters] completely” they could be witness to the Divers’ idealistic “all-inclusiveness” (28).⁵⁰

This isolated moment of success for the Divers, grasping their masterful identities in their “psychological Eden,” is fleeting (Doherty, 148). The party is, after all, only a “lush interval” between the “winters of reality,” as the hospitable act starts to fracture (149). William E. Doherty describes the reminiscently “Romantic” scene as a “time of enchantment” in the night where “the ugliness of reality that the day exposes” is eclipsed (153). Doherty posits Fitzgerald as critical of this “illusion” of balance and control, as the romantically inclined “anti-Romantic” (153). The narrator comments on “the fact of The Divers together” as a symbolic unit: “The Divers together [are] ... done[or composed] at a certain sacrifice – sometimes they seem just rather charming figures in a ballet, and worth just the attention you give a ballet, but it’s more than that – you’d have to know the story” (Fitzgerald, 43). “The story,” or deeper meaning and anxiety behind the Divers’ performance, has been suggested previously in accounts of their symbiotic, even parasitic past (see APPENDIX A). However the fracturedness of The Divers – the darker side of their composed charm – comes most clearly to light when their garden party momentarily cracks. Doherty identifies this early event in the first “Book” of the novel as the climactic “high point of the story” where afterward there will be a distinct “change of mood” when “the light romantic atmosphere is dispelled” (149). Doherty recalls “the familiar Romantic

⁵⁰ Here, the Divers’ act on the “condition” of their mastery. At one point Dick consciously allows his guests to “speak first” once they have entered the garden, *as if* offering them universal welcome, “*as if* to allow them the reassurance of their own voices in new surroundings” (my emphasis, 28). Of course this is only “as if”, because they must first engage in the notion of his mastery as host, his “hard, neat brightness [where] everything faded into the surety that he knew everything” (31).

formula of escape at the moment of emotional pitch” (150), which helpfully explains Nicole’s sudden disappearance and seclusion in the middle of the garden party.

Suddenly, Rosemary notes, Nicole has disappeared from the party and brought Dick – as his people see him - with her. Pitcher explains that the reason for Nicole’s retreat is her “repose” previously demonstrated in her garden scenes being forcefully “alienated” by Dick bringing his constructed gaiety and demands of proper femininity into her deeply symbolic space (74). Nicole is “obligated to enter the party world” as the perfect hostess, the composed Woman, which has given her such difficulty and confusion in her past (74). This moment of crisis involves the “rupturing” of her public self as she becomes dissolved in ranting in her private bathroom. Violet McKisco spies Nicole speaking in apparent nonsense, as Dick tries to calm her down. While the contents of her speech are left mysterious here, another very similar moment later in the novel suggests that she was not simply “ranting” and retreating back into “insanity” (as if she was ever truly insane). In the later scene Fitzgerald makes the reader privy to, Rosemary “discovers” the kind of scene that must have happened at the garden party by being witness to a similar one in the private bathroom of a hotel.

Just prior to this breakdown, Rosemary finds a dead man on her bed. She calls Dick to remove the body and Dick demands Nicole help him with this, as if she is not sensitive to trauma – particularly trauma in the bedroom. Dick strips the bloodied sheets from the bed and forces them into Nicole’s hands to take away and presumably deal with properly, though Nicole is clearly distraught and murmurs that she just wants the whole thing to stop. While Rosemary is busy fawning over Dick for “saving” (Fitzgerald, 111) her from such a traumatic situation, they hear Nicole

breaking down in the powder room. While Rosemary listens to her shouting and deems it nonsensical, “a verbal inhumanity,” a closer reading helps reveal what prompted Nicole’s breakdown and what it means. The scene in the bathroom is described as follows:

Nicole knelt beside the tub swaying sidewise ... ‘It’s you!’ she cried, ‘it’s you come to intrude on the only privacy I have in the world – with your spread with red blood on it. I’ll wear it for you – I’m not ashamed, though it was such a pity. On All Fools Day was had a party on the Zurichsee, and all the fools were there, and I wanted to come dressed in a spread but they wouldn’t let me –’

‘Control yourself!’[Dick]

‘- so I sat in the bathroom and they brought me a domino and said wear that. I did. What else could I do?’

‘Control yourself, Nicole!’

‘I never expected you to love me – it was too late – only don’t come in the bathroom, the only place I can go for privacy, dragging spreads with red blood on them and asking me to fix them.’

‘Control yourself. Get up-’

Rosemary ... stood trembling: now she knew what Violet McKisco had seen in the bathroom at Villa Diana (112)

Fryer considers this scene a moment of post-traumatic stress, where Nicole is baffled and upset at being asked to handle the bloody sheets as if to “fix” them and the events that caused them – just as she was expected to handle and accept her father’s rape years before (84). Indeed, Nicole is horrified by being asked to handle the disturbing scene as a calm wife. She laments that the bathroom is her only refuge from such controlling public demands. She remembers a time when she was institutionalized in Switzerland and had similarly retreated to a bathroom. Nicole explains, if histrionically, that she had asked her doctors if she could wear a bed sheet costume to an All Fools (or April Fools) day celebration and was told she had to wear one of their “dominoes” or masks instead. She laments that this is all she could do – accept their alternative to “mask” herself - when they burst in on her in the bathroom, upset that she was not given an opportunity to play as she liked. This memory can be directly

and logically related to Dick's handling of the present situation. Dick bursts in on Nicole, upset in her solitude and what she has been denied (safety from trauma), and demands that she compose herself, control herself, be the two-dimensional façade of womanhood he parades at his parties, be "good." At this moment Rosemary knows that the same thing had happened at the garden party: Nicole had felt alienated and forced to be her best public self, she retreated to an isolated room to be with her private self, was discovered by Dick, reacted with anger, and was eventually forced back to the party in time for The Divers' unified farewell to their guests. Pitcher concurs: "by the conclusion of the first book, Fitzgerald has gone below the surface [expressions] of ... his major characters and exposed the reader to their ... passionate inner selves (83). The party trope and its inevitable dramatic, fracturing turns help illustrate this exposure of the dividedness of The Divers, as Nicole exists on one level (thoughtfully, critically) apart from them."⁵¹

Ultimately in *Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald portrays the waning edifice of the masterful husband, as he declines into "illness" or misunderstanding of self in the world – just as Nicole is "cured" and finds herself increasingly conscious of her past limitations as a public subject and her future desires as a thoughtful, private subject. The Nicole depicted at the end of Book Three in the novel is aware of her dual realms

⁵¹ Later in *Tender* (273-274), Fitzgerald employs the party scene again to imply the self-fracturing of Dick. Nicole, now starting to awaken to her personal sense of self apart from Dick and proper femininity, watches as Dick's magnificently composed public façade breaks down. Dick runs away by himself during a party on a yacht. Nicole finds him in his own disturbed solitude, feeling "ruined" as he realizes the failure of his public persona (he has become increasingly unpopular and jaded as Nicole strays further from him and his consequent alcoholism develops). Dick gestures that he is going to pull Nicole off the side of the boat with him, dissolving The Divers. Nicole symbolically allows him to hold her wrists until Tommy Barban intrudes on them. It is significant that Nicole expresses no fear as she walks away with Tommy – a man who will later allow her to actualize her private sense of self and re-think her role as a woman (as Tommy finds this notion absurd and refuses to qualify her thoughts or control her). Nicole notes that she feels "unexpectedly free" when Dick, pathetically, releases her wrists.

as a woman turning-the-century, and open to new possibilities ahead of her. The novel's three parts read as a story of Nicole's developing voice: in Book One we read Nicole only as an accessory to Dick and her subsequent break, in Book Two we learn about her past "care" from Dick and limitations against her (APPENDIX A), and finally in Book Three the reader is fully privy to Nicole's thoughts and changed perspective post-party scenes.

In this Book, Nicole narrates Dick's final downfall and her own emancipation from their marriage and parasitic bond. Nicole observes Dick losing his charm with young women, turning to alcohol and loosening his grip on Nicole's mind as he perceives her battling him. Strengthened with resolve, Nicole allows herself an extramarital affair with Tommy Barban – an adventurer who relishes in the new and unknown in life. Fryer explains that women of Nicole's era sought to "relieve ... restlessness and dissatisfaction" in their station by physically defying their husbands through unfaithful romance as "one of the few options traditionally available for women" (69). Nicole does not see this affair as some critics have judged it: self-indulgence, moral degeneracy, or running back into the arms of a man.⁵² For Nicole, her affair marks the first instance where she physically and publicly defies Dick and believes this act to be much more than "a vague romance" and instead a "therapeutic" "experiment" of exercising her own will (in this case, Nicole takes the reins on her own "cure") (291). Her mental defiance has already been unraveling well before her final decision to step out with Tommy. Sparked by her breakdown at the garden party,

⁵² Milton R. Stern most problematically claims that the post-war New Woman designed in Nicole was "new as a baby," and only "liberated" to a world of broken or questionable values: "Women are new, like babies, and can become anything their men have become – but what is that?" – as if becoming their husbands was the loftiest goal of New Womanhood (112). Stern wondered if this changed access to "money and empowerment" (112) could yield more than "infantile irresponsibility" in the Jazz Age (113), the embrace of "selfish desires," regurgitating anxieties about New Womanhood in general signifying the irresponsible behavior of women shirking their roles of wife and mother.

Nicole grows increasingly contemplative and distanced from Dick and his control. In one particularly reflective moment in her symbolic cliff-top garden, musing over the sea and its unknown and boundless limits like Clarissa and Edna before her, Nicole harnesses and embraces her private self and desires:

Reaching the sea wall she fell into a communicative mood ... She was somewhat shocked at the idea of being interested in another man – but other women have lovers – why not me? ... the inhibitions of the male world disappeared and she reasoned ... while the wind blew her hair ... content ... with the logic of, Why shouldn't I? ... [She] looked down upon the sea. But from another sea, the wide swell of fantasy, she had fished out something tangible ... If she need not, in her spirit, be forever one with Dick ... she must be something in addition, not just an image on his mind, condemned to endless parades... (277)

Here Nicole acknowledges “the inhibitions of the male world” that would dictate her desires and actions as a proper woman, and looking out to the boundless unknown before her, resolves to free herself by any means from her role as an accessory. After Nicole sleeps with Tommy she “waited for reinterpretation or qualification” of her thoughts on the event, her motives, the meaning of her desires, “but none was forthcoming” (298). Indeed, Tommy is opposed to this kind of control over her as a woman, as is revealed in this conversation between them:

‘You know, you’re a little complicated after all.’
‘Oh no,’ she assured him ... ‘No, I’m not really – I’m just a whole lot of different simple people.’ ...
‘Why didn’t they leave you in your natural state?’ Tommy demanded presently
...
‘All this taming of women!’ he scoffed (292).

Nicole finds her match in Tommy, who does not subscribe to Dick’s reason about Nicole’s “natural state” being inherently corrupt because divided. Tommy sees no reason to question Nicole when she explains that she has different women within her, her public and private selves, because she now understands this position more simply. Nicole muses that: “in thinking of herself in a new way ... New vistas appeared ahead,

peopled with the faces of many men, none of whom she need obey or even love” (294).

Once Nicole has made her decision to go through with the affair, Fitzgerald portrays her final steps toward emancipation from Dick on the familiar territory of Gausse’s beach on the Riviera. Nicole and Dick return to their old kingdom years later with new minds. Dick is self conscious on the beach, stripped of his masterful ideal of self, and Nicole is markedly less concerned with her subservient appearance as Dick’s ideal wife. Dick Diver and Nicole Warren appear on the beach – not The Divers – and Nicole feels in Dick’s overwhelming insecurity (about his aging/the loss of young Rosemary, his general depression and unpopularity) that “his mind temporarily left her, ceasing to grip her” (Fitzgerald, 280). In this moment of freedom Nicole finally sees that Dick’s “old court” of the beach – where even passerby’s stopped to admire him – has disappeared from her vision (280). That world had been “for many years ... the only world open to her” and only now can she see past it. Thinking to herself, Nicole briefly fears the “leap” involved with physically leaving Dick. Nicole acknowledges the “old foothold” in her marriage but also envisions “The figures of Dick and herself,” a new man and a New Woman, “mutating, undefined” (279-280). Despite her trepidation, Nicole resolves to press forward, “suspect[ing] that there would be the lifting of a burden, an unblinding of eyes,” (remedying her previously ingrained notion of herself as a sick woman, blind, who “must be led”) (280). Nicole firmly recounts to herself that she has, in the past, “given over her thinking to him” and that even her “every action [had] seemed automatically governed by what he would like” and that “for her the greatest sin now and in the future was to delude herself” she resolves, “either you think – or else others have to think for you and take

power from you ... discipline your natural tastes, civilize and sterilize you” (289-290). Nicole commits herself to this new knowledge of herself and begins to actualize this independence in her public realm.

Nicole sits on the beach and watches Dick reminisce with Rosemary, a sad game where Rosemary quietly fawns over memories of Dick and Dick tries in vain to summon the young man she had admired and relied on so much. Nicole grows impatient with watching this display of ideal masculinity and sycophantic femininity and instead of complicity ignoring Dick as she did a few summers before, Nicole decides she “could stand no more. She stood up sharply, making no attempt to conceal her impatience” (288). But not before snapping at Rosemary for suggesting Topsy, Nicole’s daughter and the next generation of women, take up “acting” on the screen like her (her famous work being the ironically titled “Daddy’s Girl”). Nicole impatiently condemns this idea, saying she has bigger plans for her daughter and symbolically “left the umbrella” and the world she knew beneath it (289). Her narrative ends with an account of her walking defiantly down a road with pine trees on each side. Nicole notes that suddenly,

the atmosphere had changed ... the voices of the beach receded – Nicole relaxed and felt new and happy; her thoughts ... clear as good bells – she had a sense of being cured in a new way. Her ego began blooming like a great rich rose as she scrambled back along the labyrinths in which she had wandered for years. She hated the beach, resented the places where she had played planet to Dick’s sun (289).

Nicole re-claims the private worlds of her youthful womanhood, her thoughts, and, in retreating, control over her public self as well. Nicole leaves the place where she was only identified by her husband, his vision of his proper wife and “healthy” womanhood. McNicholas notes that “Fitzgerald’s woman,” his female heroine, is characterized by having an “unqualified right to be what she is” and though Fitzgerald

always “waited for the mask to drop off” he understood her having worn it (41-42). *Tender Is the Night* describes the awakening of Nicole Diver to the public realm that surrounds her and imposes on her, along with the public self it will always demand, and the private realm and sense of self she has been taught to stifle.

Philip Rahv suggested that Fitzgerald’s heroes were passionately portrayed but, ultimately, Fitzgerald critiqued his Jazz-era characters and “no longer entertains any illusions concerning their survival. Morally, spiritually, and even physically they are dying in hospitals for the mentally diseased, in swanky Paris hotels and on the Riviera beaches” (78). Of course what Rahv neglects to account for is why Fitzgerald chose for Nicole to escape the hospital, hotels and beaches and survive her husband; why when faced with her enlightenment at the sea Nicole is able to walk away and her husband and old sense of self and womanhood were left behind in the waves. Ultimately - and despite critics who desire to read *Tender* as a story of Dick’s male suffering and benevolent self-sacrifice for his desperately ill wife - Fitzgerald ends his novel by dramatically and forcefully freeing Nicole as a New Woman. Dick Diver (and the world and expectations he represents) is left to re-figure himself in light of this drastic change in his understanding of his wife and greater womanhood, and so his own fragile masculinity, and ends up being the only person sacrificed by Fitzgerald in the end:

‘Doctor Diver – one thing I want to say before you go. I’ve never forgotten that evening in your garden – how nice you and you wife were ... it’s one of the finest memories in my life ... I’ve always thought of it as the most *civilized* gathering of people that I have ever known.’
Dick continued a crab-like retreat toward the nearest door of the hotel (246).

CONCLUSION

In all three of the novels considered in this thesis, the hostess both enacts and is acted *upon* by the party scene. First, the hostess carefully assembles her community, material surroundings, and “best” public self. However the progression of the party scene dramatizes the imperfect, imminently fracturing nature of the hospitable act and forces her composed public self and world into question. Each hostess is left to face a uniquely private sense of self: a notion of her modern womanhood that differs from the social, patriarchal, and Victorian-influenced expectations her public self satisfies, a self that autonomously desires and questions. Though each hostess embraces her personal revelation to different degrees, she is commonly left with a divided understanding of her role as a woman in her world – her “world” encompassing both the public and private realms she exists in.

Indeed, it should be made clear that these novels do not frame outright rejections of the public realm, but realist social critiques of the public sphere as it is *conjoined* with the contemplative, private world of women. Kate Chopin, Virginia Woolf and F. Scott Fitzgerald all consciously contemplate both the hampering implications *and* the desirous impulses of the public work of women during the fin-de-siècle.⁵³ Certainly the party scene is, initially, a positive and celebratory effort of the hostess’ public life. Chopin describes Edna’s excited feeling as she fashions her dinner party, her great desire to be surrounded by a choice group of people and composed finery. Nicole Warren Diver basks in the glow of her paper lanterns set up

⁵³ Maria DiBattista aptly describes the hostess’ divided knowledge, referencing her understanding of the complicated social position of *Mrs. Dalloway*: “[Woolf] recognizes that the basis for personal and historical continuity resides in the illusion of community and social order, but it is plagued by the knowledge ... that the power of social illusion is closely allied to delusion” (53). In these three novels, the party scene demonstrates the hostess’ strong impetus for social and personal assembly *alongside* her eventual recognition that this assembly is only precariously composed in the public sphere.

in her garden, and finds real satisfaction in composing her material objects. Clarissa Dalloway emphasizes her desire to celebrate “life” by staging grand parties, something she explains as making an “offering” (Woolf, 107). Of course this notion of “offering,” of giving something out, references an underlying and *calculated* dimension of the party scene and the hostess. For in being an open “offering” in its conception – an ideal gesture of welcome in the hospitable sense that proposes to ask for nothing in return – the hosting act is also a strange act of faith. Ideally speaking, the party assembly voices a deep desire in the hostess for an event that will capture a world that is *ordered*. Jacob Littleton remarks, in relation to *Mrs. Dalloway*, that Clarissa’s “faith ... orders her world in a way that other outlooks available to her do not” (40-41), referencing the fall of certain forms of “Victorian certitude” after the First World War. In other words, the hostess employs the hospitable act in hopes of achieving control and stasis in the face of increasingly uncertain terms for the nation or empire, and stable (patriarchal) community. To use the terms of hospitality theory, the hostess is actually – if unconsciously – endeavoring to assemble a controlled and masterful, and therefore *closed*, event. The impossibility of such a premeditated hospitable act, as discussed by Derrida and McNulty, explains the common jarring moment in the party scene where the hostess’ sense of self as a solely public being is questioned. For consistently, due to the hospitable act’s inevitable fracture, the hostess is forced to see the public role she plays and acknowledge the private, insistent stirrings within her. Indeed, while the three novels considered previously do frame the hostess enacting her complicity to a patriarchal system due to real desires for stability and control, they also eventually allow her to indict this complicity and conceive of a sense of self beyond public allegiances. Each hostess is left with an understanding of

both the public impetus of women at the time period *and* newly awakening, private desires for autonomy.

In this way, the hostess figure highlights the critical importance of reading hospitable scenes in literature as *gendered* and possessing realist social and personal commentary. For without doubt these voices are critical contributors to the awakening New Woman movement of the era. In *The Awakening*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Tender is the Night*, the hostess' assembly provides a glance into the historically cloistered position of upper-class women of the time period and, furthermore, their awakening to a broader sense of self and "womanhood." A close reading of the hostess' assembly allows the reader to see the socially-influenced motives behind her work and, ultimately, envision the hostess' sense of dividedness as a woman straddling the public and private realm. In other words, an examination of material, interpersonal and public assembly – as it is composed and breaks down – evocatively speaks to the internal, private assembly of the hostess' sense of self and womanhood, particularly at such a changing historical juncture.

Along with hosting similarly composed events with select upper-class guests, each hostess in this study exists in very similar narrative conditions which suggests that Chopin, Woolf and Fitzgerald wrote in a notably significant tradition – if not in direct conversation. First, all three hostesses are depicted in unconventional terms of, somewhat masculine, beauty: Edna is "handsome" with rough hands, Clarissa has sharp and deliberate facial features, and Nicole has serious eyes and a rough complexion. Certainly these women are analogously characterized in their distinct appearance to reference their coming, unconventional awakenings. To be sure, the hostess in this study is characterized by her visible sharpness and strength. However,

this depiction is not without some realistic tempering by each author. For Chopin, Woolf and Fitzgerald all consider the threat the New Woman presented to polite society in her boldness, and similarly depict the common reaction to such rebellious manners of behavior and thought: each hostess is depicted as having been, at some point, stricken with “illness.” All three texts involve a psychiatrist figure: after some defiant comments, Edna is studied by Dr. Mandelet on the advice of her husband; Clarissa is described as having a very weak constitution and is commonly sent to her room on the advice of her doctor and husband; Nicole is institutionalized for bold behavior and dangerous rumination and is subsequently monitored by her doctor/husband. All three texts involve the doctor and husband figures to frame the patriarchal and institutional control the New Woman finds herself facing at the turn-of-the-century. Yet these “illnesses” of the mind – characterized most clearly as “divided personality” in *Tender is the Night* (Fitzgerald, 127) – also function as a metaphor for the dividedness each hostess will come to face within their person by the end of the narratives.⁵⁴ Also common to the three women’s “illnesses” are their “symptoms” which include an alienated feeling toward their powerful husband, and to different degrees, the demands of their children: Edna comments that she feels separated from her husband and will not sacrifice her “self” for her children, Clarissa observes a measured distance from Richard and Elizabeth, and Nicole is chiefly condemned for occasionally “denying her children” and her role as a mother— or so Dick observes in rationalizing her insanity (191) not unlike Léonce misguidedly observes of Edna. In all three narratives, the female protagonist is condemned for

⁵⁴ In the interest of space, a historical critique of psychiatric knowledge as it pertains to gendered expectations of women is not attended to in this project but certainly deserves attention in future studies of these novels (for example, more attention could be paid to the Dr. Mandelet-Edna relationship in comparison with the Dr. Diver-Nicole relationship).

rejecting conventional role of wife-and-mother and for her “departure from the feminine ideal”⁵⁵ which further unites these texts in a New Womanist dialogue and tradition.

Apart from the use of distinctly modern forms of narration including stream-of-consciousness and free indirect discourse, a couple stylistic observations unite these texts in a tradition most explicitly. First, each novel portrays the hostess looking into a mirror at some point in the narrative to compose a sense of self – reflecting the common desires for “assembly” in these novels. Edna carefully powders her body and face in a mirror after a nap, closely and deliberately observing her face and eyes (Chopin, 104). As previously mentioned, Clarissa thinks about gathering her “best self” together as she observes her pointed features in mirror (see 63-64). Finally, Nicole is characterized as commonly looking into mirrors: “so that the incorruptible quicksilver could give her back to herself” (Fitzgerald, 137). Though subtle, these three instances align to unite the texts in their efforts to depict an anxious assembler yearning for an observable and therefore authentically satisfactory sense of self. In addition, each novel in some manner fascinatingly incorporates sea imagery to indicate cathartic changes in self-consciousness for the hostess. As previously examined, Edna casts herself into the sea to immerse herself in her newly attained private sense of self. Christina Giorcelli calls this move, often read as suicide, “the ultimate statement of self-assertion” as she leaves behind her social world and literally “takes her own life” in her hands (109). Clarissa Dalloway, also as previously considered, hears the sounds of breaking waves and feels a cool, changing breeze as she contemplates her public and private worlds. Woolf also uses this imagery to

⁵⁵ (Nancy A. Walker referencing Chopin’s contemporaries’ criticism of Edna’s character, 120).

describe Lucrezia Smith's strange freedom after the suicide of her husband Septimus as she reminisces about their life together:

somewhere near the sea ... there were ships, gulls ... they sat on a cliff ... through the bedroom door, rain falling, whisperings, stirrings among dry corn, the caress of the sea, as it seemed to her, hollowing them in its arched shell and murmuring to her laid on shore ... like flying flowers over some tomb (Woolf, 133).

Lucrezia, like Nicole after her, contemplates the sea and her private "stirrings" as she remembers sitting on a cliff overlooking the water. Carved out by the tumult of the sea and public demands in her life, Lucrezia survives safely on the shore. Here, spared on the edge of the sea, Lucrezia feels like freely "flying" petals passing over "some tomb," or her confined life to Septimus and his doctors over the years. Like Edna, Clarissa, and Nicole, Lucrezia finds catharsis in contemplating the boundless sea and life before her that has "murmured" to her in her solitude. With this cathartic notion of the seashore in mind, the novels in this project align in progressive conversation to speak to the development of the New Woman. Edna begins the dialogue, enlightened but overwhelmed by her knowledge and eventually swept away by the sea. Clarissa responds by surviving her moment of division, embracing the crashing of waves and changing winds outside her bedroom window, but remains bound to her home. Nicole provides the last word in *Tender is the Night* when she is able to look out on her future without being wholly overwhelmed by it, able to conceive of herself as a New Woman, and finds that only her patriarchal handler Dick has been swept away by the sea.

APPENDIX A

Both Zelda and Nicole are deemed “schizophrenic” by 1930s understanding of the disease. At the time the disease was considered a “split personality” disorder, though this theory and knowledge of the illness had since been re-considered and expanded to include a myriad of mental effects.⁵⁶ It is then ironically more fitting, though Fitzgerald could not have anticipated the debunking of this science, that his Doctor’s professional behavior and “knowledge” should come under question so strongly. Fryer notes that in Nicole’s case her diagnosis of “schizophrenia” seems particularly unfitting (82). Nicole instead seems to exhibit simple dissatisfaction with her position in the world, and increasing confusion about her social identity as a woman (thinking commonly diagnosed as feminine “hysteria” at the turn of the century; Fryer, 72). This is further complicated by her history of sexual abuse by her father and the apparent post-traumatic stress this injects into her life (accounting for the “baffling” fear of men and sexual advances that her doctors observe⁵⁷). Tracy McNulty theorizes the plight of the hostess under historical psychoanalysis:

Psychoanalysis has contented itself with bemoaning ‘woman’s’ failure to articulate her desire, rather than drawing upon her experience to consider whether the notion of desire might itself be insufficient where the ethics of femininity is concerned, inadequate to account for the ‘strangeness’ she encounters within and the particular exile it imposes on her (208).

⁵⁶ Dick Diver describes the deeply gendered understanding of the disease employed in the novel: “A ‘schizophrène’ is well named as a split personality – Nicole was alternately a person to whom ... nothing could be explained. It was necessary to treat her with active and affirmative insistence, keeping the road to reality always open, making the road to *escape* harder going” (my emphasis, Fitzgerald, 191).

⁵⁷ Dr. Dohmler reverts to stereotypes about confused, “crazy” women before he learns of Nicole’s rape, regarding a chauffeur who advances on her: “‘And she got some crazy idea about him. She thought he was making up to her ... it was all nonsense’,” noting that furthermore, Nicole is “‘Almost always about men going to attack her, men she knew or men on the street...’” (127). Dohmler tragically and ignorantly reasons: “‘I’ve read about women getting lonesome and thinking there’s a man under the bed ... but why would Nicole get such an idea? She could have all the young men she wanted.’” (127) – as if desirable young men were the cure for women in fear and crisis.

Without doubt, Nicole suffers under this theory as Dr. Dohmler and Dr. Diver parse her abnormal, perverted thoughts and behavior without considering whether her identity as a woman might be changing naturally (if strangely). The “strangeness” Nicole encounters within her while she is in treatment is her ignorance of an “inner core” (Fryer, 85). Fryer posits that at first, Nicole is “vulnerable to being swept along by another person,” particularly a supportive figure, in reaction to this feeling (85). Fitzgerald depicts Nicole post-incestual trauma, and explains that she never wants to speak of it directly. Fryer maps this fear of confrontation alongside her impulse to “maintain control” (87) by engaging in the paternalistic relationship and template of “healthy” self-knowledge set out for her by her doctors. While in clinical care, Nicole is encouraged to dull her “keen faculties of perception” (Fryer, 67) that compose her free-formed and rebellious or “ill” thinking. Meanwhile, Dick exercises “a traditional American ideal[:] a dedication to the healing of moral wounds” (Trachtenberg, 180). This masculine ideal prompts Dick to convince himself that not only is Nicole’s introspection as symptom of a deep illness, but that he is responsible altruistically for her control and livelihood. He explains to Rosemary that “Nicole and I have got to go on together. In a way that’s more important than just wanting to go on ... She’s not very strong – she looks strong but she isn’t.” (Fitzgerald, 75-76). Dick repeats to himself that Nicole is not strong and needs him, but he also voices that he needs her in a more fundamental way to define his ideal identity. Nicole comes to internalize this thinking under Dr. Diver’s care, expressing that she “know[s] introspection I not good for a highly nervous state like mine,” and as a woman prone to diseased thinking, “The blind must be led” (122).⁵⁸ This logic was absorbed uncritically by many of

⁵⁸ Nicole’s position here references Edna Pontellier’s position in the first chapter of this thesis. Edna is

Fitzgerald's contemporary literary and scientific critics, who used "knowledge" of the disease and its implications to demonize Nicole and herald Dr. Diver as an aspirational hero.⁵⁹

This ruse of "care" and "cure" is soon de-mystified by the supposedly sick Nicole. Throughout the novel, and even when she is institutionalized, Nicole exhibits resilient stirrings of independent, lucid self-contemplation. These stirrings are first seen in excerpts from her letters to Dick, ones he brushes off as "mad" ranting. After being institutionalized for some time Nicole thinks that:

[my] mental trouble is all over and ... I am completely broken and humiliated ... Here I am in ... a semi-insane-asylum, all because nobody saw fit to tell me the truth ... If I had only known what was going on ... I could have stood it ... for I am pretty strong, but those who should have, did not see fit to enlighten me. And now, when I know and have paid such a price for knowing, they sit there ... and say I should believe what I did believe (123).

Nicole's letters are worded in a modern manner, stream-of-consciousness style, but still provide a great deal of concrete criticism of her situation. Here, Nicole expresses that her care has only been for the purposes of breaking her down and, ultimately, instructing her to go on as if nothing had happened. She refers to her father's rape as a repressed memory that should have been discussed with her earlier as the source of

similarly psychoanalyzed by a male psychiatrist on the advice of her husband who notices she is displaying rebellious behavior. Her husband explains to Dr. Mandelst: "she's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women," to which the doctor responds " 'Has she ... been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women ... ? ... Woman, my friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism ... It ... require[s] an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them.' " (Chopin, 63-64). Dr. Mandelst not only implies that "pseudo-intellectual women," the rising feminist movement, is toxic but also that women are fragile and need to the care of professional psychiatrists if they go astray.

⁵⁹ Here are a few excerpts of such reviews of the novel: "her personality [is split], and it is her husband who had brought her back" (Canby, 300); Nicole is mainly "a mental case" ("Decadence: Fitzgerald...", 72); "In a *rare moment of perception*, Nicole Diver observes..." (my emphasis, [DiBattista, 27]), as if being ill rendered observation obsolete; "Nicole, in her insane passages seems ... a case history from a textbook ... a study of the disease rather than the personality" (Colum, 284); "Nicole, can pass for long periods as a *normal wife and mother* and as an entertaining member of the social set. But she is a psychopath, afflicted with that baffling mental disease ... the disease destroys [this]" (my emphasis, Colum, 284); "an amazingly competent study of schizophrenia, the term applied by Bleuler to cases of split personality, 'Tender Is the Night' owes to the description and cure of this mental disease in the girl, Nicole." (Rogers, 309).

trauma before diagnosing her as mentally deficient (which she had been willing to accept when no other explanation was offered). In another letter, Nicole further criticizes her treatment in the clinic by diagnosing herself as simply a evolving young woman who “think[s] one thing today and another tomorrow. That is really all that’s the matter with me” and bitterly describes her therapy: “here they ... sing Play in Your Own Backyard as if I had my backyard to play in or any hope which I can find by looking either backward or forward” (124). Nicole laments her limitations as a woman, the bane of her past abuse and the negative future she lucidly perceives under patriarchal and “professional” control.⁶⁰

Once out of the clinic, Nicole further escapes from her forced concepts of healthy womanhood by challenging Dick’ authority and disrupting his social constructs of gendered identity (something illustrated at its height in the party scene, to come). In one scene, Nicole backs Dick into a corner by bringing a letter from a young mental patient to his attention. Implying that Dick had had inappropriate romantic relations with her, something not uncharacteristic of the doctor, Nicole demands an explanation: was he attracted to her only as a dependent patient? Dick scrambles by rationalizing to himself that the girl in question was “flirtatious” under his care and he only “idly kissed her”; clearly the letter was “the letter of a maniac” (187). He ends the conversation by arguing: “This is a letter from a mental patient,” and when met with the obvious contradiction of his wife being a mental patient, Dick shuts down this discussion by telling Nicole to stop with her “nonsense” and assume

⁶⁰ “In *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter detects important connections between feminism and manifestations of hysterical disorders, nothing that the ‘women’s movement’ of the 1920s ‘offered a potential potent alternative to the self-destructive and self-enclosed strategies of hysteria...’” (Fryer, 90), Fryer then implies that Nicole’s “illness” is actually “integrity” in voicing that oppression has made her sick.

her wifely duties by “round[ing] up the children” (187). This moment signifies Nicole’s beginning to refuse her inferior status (Fryer, 61), something not wholly actualized until Book Three of the novel. Nicole mutters to Dick, who claims her idea of him as a paternalistic opportunist is “a delusion,” that “It’s always a delusion when I see what you don’t want me to see” (190).⁶¹ In another instance, Fitzgerald’s ironic portrayal of Dick’s mastery and Nicole’s knowledge of this is clear, as Dick explains his vision of a “cured” Nicole: ““You’re all well ... Try to forget the past; don’t overdo things ... Go back to America and be a debutante and fall in love ... You can have a perfectly normal life with a household full of beautiful descendants ... Young woman, you’ll be pulling your weight long after your friends are carried off screaming”” (142-143). Fitzgerald notes that Dick speaks “brutally,” implying Nicole’s deep distaste with this simplistic view of her role in life as a simple carrier of attractive children, “pulling her weight” by staying positive to avoid the fate of weaker women overwhelmed by their given fate.

⁶¹ One contemporary review from *The New Yorker* stands out as it predicts the trap in the Nicole-as-schizophrenic argument that this chapter describes: “One does not believe in the destruction of Dick’s brilliant promise as a result of Nicole’s demands ... One knows that there was some ... more fundamental trouble at work – and at work on Nicole as well. One feels that by stressing the psychopathic he has evaded the real reason for their failure ... After all, his other characters, Rosemary, the Norths, Nicole’s sisters, are quite as thoroughly damned without the excuse of abnormality” (Fadiman, 304).

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