This paper shows how the concept of hospitality plays a vital role in female self-reliance in the twentieth century Britain. The case study is Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, which portrays Clarissa Dalloway, who is torn between her privileged public role as a society hostess and her inferior status as a wife. This conflict becomes vivid in heroine's manipulations of the spheres, the public and the private. Although the art of admitting guests, hostessship, takes place in the private sphere of the house, Clarissa Dalloway shows that the public sphere is much more involved in this space than the private one. This paper demonstrates how Woolf criticizes the suffrage movements, which dedicate most of their attention to the public sphere, while the real battlefield is the private realm of the home. This social critique is masked under divergent hospitality of Clarissa Dalloway, who is a professional hostess that represents the imperial and patriarchal society, but who is also a rebel. Divergent hospitality thus becomes a sign for a much more troublesome phenomenon in women's lives in twentieth century Britain, which is female subjugation masked under the notion of liberation.

**Keywords**: Hostessship, Hospitality, Female self-reliance, Private sphere, Public sphere.

**Introduction**

Although the practice of admitting and entertaining guests was a traditionally male role "the master of this house, thus the master of the woman" (Hospitality, 13), as Jacques Derrida claims, *Mrs. Dalloway* is inspired by female hosts that were famous and influential in twentieth century's Britain. The profession of the hostess underwent feminization along with the change in women's status in society. In Biblical stories, for example, claims Derrida, women, wives and daughters of the host, were treated as servants of the host and the guest, and sometimes even sacrificed (as it happened in Lot's story) for the wellbeing of the guest. But in *Mrs. Dalloway's* time female hospitality has prospered. Hostessship in this period of time brought great ramifications and rewards for women, the hostesses were actively taking part in public and social matters. They were also, however, subjected to public judgment and gossip due to their open demonstration of female independence and assertiveness, which were scolded in the previous century, the era of the "Angel if the House." Thus although the ideology of the Angel in the House was already out of fashion in the twentieth century, it still had a latent influence on the modern female image.

The success of female hostessship in the twentieth century's Britain corresponds to the accomplishments of the suffrage movements. When women started traveling freely in the borders of the city and have their own business, they could become professional hostesses. Brian Masters, who analyzes many of the twentieth century British hostesses, claims that some of the most famous and successful
hostesses were self-made. Brians differentiates between two types of professional hostesses, those who entertained guests as a requirement of their social status, and those who did it for their own social advancement. Interestingly enough, the second group, he claims, started to expand after the First World War, when women gained partial suffrage rights. Therefore, for these hostesses, the parties were a way to ascend up the social ranks, rather than a mere recreation activity. Masters also argues that "most of the husbands of really determined hostesses [were] quiescent, or absent, or dead"(2). This is an ambiguous remark, since it not only means that the professional hostesses were choosing husbands who will not interfere with their endeavors, but it also implies that only widowed women could become hostesses. Thus it seems that woman's fate, even if the husband is dead or missing, depends on his approval of the activity.

Woolf's novel proposes a slightly different situation, since the husband is not dead, absent or quiescent. Mr. Richard Dalloway although has a lot of influence over his wife, Clarissa, in almost any aspect of her life, has very little to say in what concerns her hostessship. It is indicated on numerous occasions that he asks her to stop having the parties, since it affects her health and, as he thinks, brings no contribution to her life. Yet, Clarissa insists upon having her parties, even though during the party itself she runs away from her guests. The opaqueness of Clarissa's character is an outcome of Woolf's unique technique, which she called the "tunneling process." The tunneling process is a literary method of telling a story through installments from past and present. The technique supports Woolf's aim to show the diversity of the human heart, and the tension between domesticity and society, "I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system and to show it at work, at its most intense (Diary II). In this way Mrs. Dalloway is a book about social critique on female subjugation in the domestic sphere of hostessship and not only a solitary story of one society hostess' way to self-reliance. This critique is masterfully masked by metaphors, motifs, and imagery of female hostessship and domesticity.

Text Analysis

A society hostess claims Leonard Woolf, "exists only in her relations to other people in an ambiguous position between public and private spheres" (qtd in Blair 173). That is the hostess brings the public sphere into her house and transforms her private sphere into a public one. Although in Mrs. Dalloway the entire house turns into a public sphere of the gathering, the "little room upstairs" stays a private sphere. In one of the entries to her diary Woolf indicates that she wanted to write the novel in a way that it would move slowly from downstairs to upstairs, "the party [is] to begin in the kitchen, & climb slowly upstairs" (Diary II, 312). Mrs. Dalloway's section of the party indeed starts with the description of the busyness in the kitchen and moves upstairs, where Clarissa receives her guests. Then the narrative focuses on the drawing room, where the party is in its peak, shifts to the little room upstairs, and finally goes back to the drawing room. In the end, when Clarissa leaves the solitary room, she stands at the top of the stairs and at this point the novel ends.

Woolf's spatial manipulations are metaphors for the conflict between the male patriarchy and militarism and female struggle for independence, since "public/private dichotomy [...] worked as a conceptual justification for various practices of patriarchal oppression" (Snaith 9). Therefore, claims Anna Snaith "for a woman living at the turn of the century, the division of public and private would have had immense significance even as it began to be challenged" (11). The drawing room, which becomes a public place during the gathering, is contrasted with the privacy of the little room upstairs, in which the heroine seeks refuge. But these spaces are not unequivocal, since the drawing room serves as a private sphere in several points of the narrative and the little room upstairs is used by some of the guests. The spheres are not rigid and they change according to the setting and occasion. Hospitality of the host is what makes the private sphere open up for the public. The attainment of female self-reliance is possible only during the party and not before that, because only then the boundaries between the spheres are blurred enough for the heroine to find her place.
In order to understand how the profession of a society hostess helps the heroine to achieve self-reliance and how Woolf criticizes the social system, the public and the private spheres of the novel must be analyzed. The chronicles of Clarissa's day, are synchronized with the preparations for the party. Moreover, heroine's attainment of control over her house and her identity happens gradually during the transformation of the spheres and reaches its peak during the party in the ambiguous place between public and private spheres. That is why I would like to divide the text analysis into two parts- before the party and during it.

1. Before the Party

The novel starts with the heroine going out to buy flowers for her party, while on her way to the store she remembers her youth and analyzes the present state of 1925's London. Although it might seem that Clarissa is leisurely walking through the streets of London having no purpose in mind (which could qualify her for a female flaneur), she has a concrete purpose- to buy flowers for the party. The heroine goes straight to the flower shop and back home. Thus, opposed to the view of Clarissa as a flaneur, she does not walk in the streets of London for the sake of the walk- she has a sense of purpose. At the same time she uses this opportunity to ponder over the things she sees (the reason why she can be confused with the city traveler), but this is due to the novelty of the solitary walk for women. Not long before World War I, women of Clarissa's social status could not walk alone in the streets and they had to be accompanied by a man. Anne McClintock claims that women of a lower social status, working class women for example, had more freedom in walking the streets on their own, as well as spending time at bars, and still they were not considered as dishonest women.

Although the outside scenario makes Clarissa feel her newly gained freedom it also reminds her of her female invisibility as a white middle classed married woman. Clarissa envies other women whom she sees as independent, "if she could have had her life over again[…] she would have been […] dark like Lady Bexborough […] interested in politics like a man; with a country house" (14) and Miss Pym, who owns a flower shop and thinks Clarissa is kind, "Miss Pym liking her, trusting her" (19). Clarissa also envies Miss Doris Kilman, her daughter's tutor, who has closer relations with her daughter than she does. She admits that she does not hate her alone, but the mere idea of her, and at the same time "had the black been uppermost and not the white, she would have loved Miss Kilman" (17).

These are all women, who are seen by Clarissa as different. Although these are all European women, Lady Bexborough, Miss Kilman and Miss Pym are perceived as interesting, due to their singleness and economic independence. Clarissa, on the contrary, is "very white"(4), has "nice hands and feet" (14) and married. Woolf mentions Clarissa's white gentle hands that need gloves to protect them in order to criticize the image of female's fragility. The women that Clarissa admires are the opposite of fragile, they have stately physique, red working hands and dark features. Clarissa, who in the beginning of the novel is portrayed as the Angel in the House, secretly wishes to e the exact opposite. Therefore she hates being "Mrs. Richard Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more"(14). This is a crucial point in the plot, since from this point and on Clarissa will seek individualism and separation from the name, attributed to her by marriage.

The outside scene is a trigger for Clarissa's feeling of failure as a woman and it also serves as the catalyzing point, when she starts to ponder over the meaning of her life. Then she goes back home and disrobes the performative female identity, "women must put off their rich apparel […] at midday they must disrobe […] she laid her feathered yellow hat on the bad"(45). The hat is an allusion to Lady Ottoline Morrell, who was known for her big hats, which ultimately became her sign of recognition and ridicule. But as opposed to Lady Ottoline Morrell, who wore those big hats in order to be unique, Clarissa has no recognizable signs, and thus she feels invisible, "she had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown" (14). Clarissa is an example of a woman, who performs femininity as a "necessary masquerade [and] mimic[s] femininity as a social mask" (McClintock 62). Thus after being invisible outside Clarissa must come back to the only place where she still feels visible- her house. Only in her
house Clarissa feels important, due to her profession of a hostess, "she began to go slowly upstairs [...] as if she had left a party" (45). Therefore, in order to feel herself visible and important she has to imagine herself as a hostess even at times when there is no party.

The attic room, which is Clarissa's bedroom and her most private room, is the next space in which she ponders on her female identity. She equates herself to a virgin nun, who has a narrow bed that will only get narrower with time. Many critics read this image as a metaphor for death and heroine's secret wish of suicide. I propose to see it as a metaphor for the disappearance of her selfhood, and her total blending with the house, which ultimately belongs to the husband. In this room, however, she remembers her only friend, Sally Seton, for whom she experienced true love. When Clarissa starts to ponder over her love for Sally, she suddenly realizes that this was a true love and that if she stayed with Sally they could change the world. This is Clarissa's next step for self-reliance, realizing that she married a man in order to run from her true desires- she conformed. The reason why Clarissa was so drawn to Sally is the same reason which eventually tore them apart, and it lies in Sally's adventurines and individuality.

While Clarissa is the Angel in the House figure, Sally Seton is the embodiment of a female suffragist. She reads male philosophy, smokes, talks like a man and advocates female right to vote. But while for Clarissa, Sally's wildness makes her more attractive, for the elders it makes her "untidy" (50) and for younger men dangerous. That is why the kiss with Hugh Whitbread, another friend of Clarissa's, is seen as a policing mechanism for the wild woman. That is, when woman tries to cross gender boundaries there is a need for male patriarchy to conform her, "kissing [Sally] in the smoking-room to punish her for saying that women should have votes" (276). Years later, Sally indeed becomes a conformist, marries and raises sons, who will continue the patriarchy. Clarissa does not talk to her friend anymore, and "could not even get an echo of her old emotion" (51).

The next space where Clarissa makes preparations for her party is the drawing room, for which she has to go downstairs, "down into the drawing-room, for she must also write, and see that things generally were more or less in order" (56). In the drawing room Clarissa not only writes letters to her guests, but she also mends her dress for the party. The drawing room, which will later become the public sphere of the party, transforms from a private sphere to a microcosm of British society. This space also catalyzes heroine's transformation. The drawing room is analogues to the hostess, who "knows the very moment, the very temper of her house" (56). It is the only room that undergoes heavy transformations, where doors are being taken from their hinges and tables are moved. As the hostess the room is private during the day and public during the night of the party, "as soon as there are a door and windows, it means someone has the key to them and consequently controls the conditions of hospitality" (Derrida, Hospitality, 14). The hostess thus becomes the master of the space during the party and not her husband, because she controls the conditions of hospitality.

The act of mending the dress is very important for Woolf's social critique on woman's situation in the period. McClintock argues that women's newly gained freedom was not an outcome of suffrage movements' achievements, but rather a method of the Empire to promote capitalism. Women were seen as main consumers of products and after the World War I, when the economy had to be restored, they were the wheels behind the progress. The fact that Clarissa mends her dress and does not buy a new one shows her unconformity to the new culture of consumerism. It is a very harsh critique on the society, which consumes people as products, and consequently throws them away, when damaged (instead of mending them). Such is the case with Septimus Warren Smith, a young shell-shocked veteran, who is intended by Woolf to be Clarissa's double. The chronicles of Septimus' last day coincide with Clarissa's. Furthermore, Septimus' suicide precedes Clarissa's party only by a few hours, and it is metaphorically what makes it possible.

Furthermore the mending of the dress suggests, claims Thakur, the divergent personality of Clarissa, "[h]er mending the dress, collecting the folds together, suggests her drawing her parts together and not showing the other side of her- faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions- the tear in her personality" (69).

Thus, the dress that shines in the artificial light but loses its glamour in the sun, as Woolf describes Clarissa's green dress, becomes a symbol of the perfect hostess. The perfect hostess is invisible in the public sphere, but in the ambiguous place of public and private spheres, in-between, she shines. The
following analysis of the party will show why the act of having the party is the only way for Clarissa to attain individuality.

2. During the Party

Septimus Warren Smith is intended by Woolf to be Clarissa's double. One of the entries in Woolf's diaries reveals that she wanted Clarissa to die or kill herself in the end of her party, but eventually decided to sacrifice Septimus instead. Naturally, when the double is dead there is no need for the major protagonist to die as well. Septimus' death has a symbolic meaning, since Septimus' liberation from life serves for Clarissa as release from her thoughts of death. Moreover, his death is the ultimate critique on society that used him but that has no place for him. The war is not over for Septimus, as it for the rest of the society, it continues in his mind. While Septimus continues to fight, now for his sanity, the society wants to bend him, so he could fit into a concrete pattern. Thus, he treats his doctors as enemies, whom he does not succeed to conquer and thus surrenders himself to death. Septimus prefers to die rather than to fall prey to his enemies- the doctors.

Doctors are seen as symbols of the nation, claims McClintock, because they spread the ideology of imperialism. The most vivid example of doctors being the servants and the symbols of the Imperial England is connected to the issue of cleanliness. Snaith argues that according to nineteenth-century discourses of female sexuality, "woman's body stands metonymically for the home, and [...] the private sphere itself, as it does in discourses of imperialism [...] the 'success' of the private sphere supports the 'success' of the Empire" (18). The home, according to Snaith, is analogues with the woman and also with imperialism, as McClintock claims, "the domestic is political, the political is gendered" (32). Thus the cleanliness and the maintenance of the home contribute, according to this ideology, to the commonwealth.

In the beginning of the book Woolf contradicts the cleanliness and whiteness of Clarissa, who always wears white, with the untidiness of her friend, Sally. Sally is adventurous and unconventional and thus she is symbolically represented as unsterile. N.C. Thakur argues that light and white clothing stand for the imperial and capitalist progress of the white man. Years later, when Clarissa is still very white (now due to an illness), her friend Sally, who comes uninvited to the party, is still treated as someone who is not "clean," due to her marriage, "Clarissa thought she had married beneath her" (290).

Thus, the doctors spread and advocated the theme of cleanliness and woman's importance in maintaining it, "Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw are symbols of [...] compensatory neatness, proportion, and order" (Thakur 58). Moreover, they were also distributors of another ideology- proportion and conversion, "proportion, divine proportion, Sir William's goddess [...] has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess- Conversion" (150-151). Septimus, who according to Sir William Bradshaw lost his sense of proportion, had to be readapted to society. The phase when Clarissa contemplates Septimus' death comes in the turning point of the plot, when she is told by the same doctor, Sir William, that one of his patient committed suicide. Immediately after hearing the news, Clarissa changes her attitude:

Sinking her voice [...] Lady Bradshaw [...] murmured how, "just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man [...] had killed himself [...]" Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death [...] She went on into the little room where the Prime Minister had gone with Lady Bruton.

The news of suicide reach Clarissa while she is in the drawing room, entertaining her guests. Her instant reaction is to run away from this room into a little room upstairs. There Clarissa seeks refuge from the public sphere of her drawing room.

The drawing room, which was before the party the private sphere of the home, during the party, is transformed into a public arena. Already in the beginning of the book the doors are being taken off their hinges in preparation for the party. This gesture has a metonymic significance, since through the door the guests come, and which the host can close if he does not want to admit them, claim Derrida. But Clarissa
cannot close the door in the face of the unwanted guests, due to her social status and the position of the Member of the Parliament's wife. Thus the only thing she can do is to run away. Then entering the room she feels loneliness of death and the fear from it, but at the same time she begins to realize something else:

[...] the poets and thinkers. Suppose he had had this passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage- forcing your soul, that was it- if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said [...] Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that? (281)

The passage is extremely important in Clarissa's journey to self-reliance. This segment describes Clarissa's realization that "the most destructive element in the factual world is the desire of one man to impose inflexible laws and boundaries oh others, to posses their individual souls and make them conform to his own" (van Buren Kelley 89). This passage suggests parallel between Sir William and Hugh Whitbread. Sir William is said to be extremely polite to women, as Hugh, and yet capable of using his male power to affect the soul. Hugh affected the soul of Sally, when he kissed her. He did not punish her body; he punished her soul, by answering her modern views of women's equality with male's sexuality and power. In the end the suffragist indeed has been conformed into a mother and a wife. Clarissa understands that Sally was conformed and she regrets it, she wanted Sally's life to end epically "in some awful tragedy [and] martyrdom" (277). Instead Sally has been adapted to the Imperial system of household and childbirth.

Sir William, as Hugh Whitbread, is a policing mechanism for Septimus, because he decides that he has lost his sense of proportion and thus must be converted to normality. Moreover, in Clarissa's eyes, he is seen as almost inhuman, "without sex or lust." Sir William is in fact a policing mechanism in the hands of the Imperial ideology that whishes to conform everybody to a certain set of values. Septimus' suicide is the ultimate social critique that Woolf wanted to administer Clarissa. The lives of Septimus and Clarissa did not overlap at all until that day in the midst of June, but in the end she realizes that "somehow it was her disaster- her disgrace" (282) and it was her punishment to "stand here in her evening dress."

The "little room upstairs," which serves as Clarissa's private sphere during the party, makes her contemplate on her life and Septimus' sacrifice, "to preserve not only his own vision, but that of Mrs. Dalloway, a woman whose activities in the limited world demand some sacrifice to purify her own sense of unity from insincerity or social lies"(Van Burren Kelly 100). This is the first time when Clarissa truly questions her hostessship. The character of Clarissa, unlike the hostesses it was inspired by, has no social or political agenda. The only thing that she seems to care for is the admiration of her guests. In the end, however, Clarissa understands that she was never "wholly admirable"(282), and her wish to be like Lady Bexborough did not come true. The turning point in the narrative of transformation is Clarissa's acceptance of her role as a wife and a house maker from choice, "[i]t was due to Richard; she had never been so happy [...] no pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf" (282).

At the precise moment when Clarissa realizes what makes her feel wholesome, she parts the curtains and sees in the window opposite to her- the old lady. This is the second time when Clarissa sees the old lady in the window. Before the party Clarissa saw the old lady climbing the stairs to her room and she tried to catch a glimpse of her. The old lady, often seen as a mirror image of Clarissa, appears at times of heroine's contemplation on her identity. During the party, while away from her guests, Clarissa sees as the old lady stares straight at her. Metaphorically, when the heroine was in pursuit of her identity she needed to follow the old lady, but at the moment of recognition she sees her in front of her- standing still, as in the mirror. Clarissa watches the old lady in the window going to bed, and then when the old lady puts out her light, she feels excitement and reconciliation with death, "she felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away [...] he made her feel the beauty; he made her feel the fun" (283). Thus the little room serves as a place of empowerment for her, "a room of one's own does not mean withdrawal or exile [...] it is a
liberating private space, an active choice, and importantly, it is from the room that the woman will gain access to the public sphere" (Snaith 3).

When Clarissa finally comes out of the little room she is voiceless, because the reader has no access to her thoughts anymore. In the end of the book Clarissa becomes nameless as well, since she is referred only as "she" (296). This is contrasted with the beginning when Clarissa has a concrete name. Since naming belongs to the public sphere, as claims Snaith, Clarissa rebels against it with anonymity. Furthermore, I read the last pages of the novel as the regaining of control over Clarissa's privacy. During the entire novel the heroine was struggling with the idea of being named after her husband, Mrs. Richard Dalloway, and the reader had a complete access to her thoughts and feelings. In the end, however, when Clarissa accepts her role as a housewife, she draws strength from it and rebels the public sphere. From this point on, Woolf does not allow access to her heroine's thoughts and she becomes nameless. These are her first steps of taking control over her home and body that is considered as a common property of the Empire. Instead of deserting the realms of the home, she embraces it and goes back to the public sphere of the drawing room to conquer it. The outcome is that she becomes truly admired, as she always desired, "what is this terror? what is this ecstasy [...] what is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa [...] for there she was" (296).

Conclusions

In conclusion, Clarissa goes through several stages of self realization until she reaches resolution. The first step is taken in the public sphere of the street, where she realizes her inferiority as a married middle classed woman, and the next steps are made within the ambiguous sphere of hostessship. The venture point is Clarissa understanding of her invisibility and inferiority due to her social and marital status.

This understanding pushed suffragists of the twentieth century to fight for vote and independence. Although the Empire gave up to some of the demands, it still used women as the chief consumers of goods, which profited the Empire more than the women. What is more, at the same time of women's accomplishments in the public sphere, the private sphere became a theme for discussion in society. Thus, hospitality prospered in the twentieth century and women that were hostesses prospered with it. It is not clear whether the demand for hospitality is what created successful hostesses, or is it that these specific hostesses made the profession prosper. It is certain thought that women in this position had social power to influence their countrymen and women, and they were sometimes ridiculed and at other times admired.

Clarissa, who understands her inferiority as a married woman, and her superiority as a hostess, finds a way to balance them both in her life, because "somehow Septimus by his death has purged the corruption from Clarissa's life [and] offered her communication" (Van Burren Kelly 111). So although the "domestic sphere [was reinvented as] the realm of natural subjugation" (McCIntock 178) in the twentieth century England, the society hostesses were fighting to claim back their space and reinvent themselves in this sphere as individuals. Therefore, when Clarissa resists society's cruelty portrayed in the character of Sir William, she goes back to the party and by this takes control over her own home. In the end she starts acting as a "master in his house [who] defines the conditions of hospitality [since] there can be no unconditional welcome, no unconditional passage through the door" (Derrida, Hospitality 4). Only when in peace with her identity can Clarissa become truly admired for her individuality.

References


