

James A. W. Heffernan, *Hospitality and Treachery in Western Literature*

(Yale University Press, April 15, 2014).

DESCRIPTIVE TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Crossing the Threshold

1. Classical Hospitality

Examining Homer's *Odyssey*, Euripides' *Alcestis*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Petronius' *Satyricon*, this chapter shows that classical hospitality entails three kinds of peril. First, whenever hosts or guests mistreat or offend one another, the system of benign reciprocity that governs hospitality can all too readily give way to its dark double, retaliation. Secondly, whenever hospitality turns seductive, it threatens to detain a traveler indefinitely, to make him (he is always male) forget his home, his mission, or both. Third, the very act of eating together, which might seem to epitomize the communal spirit of hospitality, can be riven by violence, debased by cannibalism, or otherwise haunted by the specter of mortality.

2. Biblical Hospitality

After scrutinizing Abraham's reception of the angels at Mamre and the highly problematic stories of Lot and Jael as (respectively) host and treacherous hostess, this chapter highlights the Last Supper, where Christ is both host and *hostia*, a victim betrayed by one of his guests. Showing how the murderous xenophobia of the post-Abrahamic Old Testament gives way to the almost unconditional but also perilous hospitality of the new, this chapter also juxtaposes scripture with the history of Roman hospitality, and—in a coda—with the treacherous hosts and guests of Dante's *Inferno*.

3. Beowulf and Gawain: Monstrosity, Reciprocity, Seduction

In *Beowulf*, a pagan warrior makes his name by fighting a series of monsters and dies of wounds suffered in the act of fighting and killing a dragon; in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a Christian knight proves his virtue chiefly by resisting sexual temptation, then shows his frailty by scheming to save his neck from the ax of a giant. Different as they are, each of these two men not only cuts off a head and proves himself a hero by the code of his time but also discovers how treacherous hospitality can be—especially when the reciprocal exchange of hospitable comforts gives way to the deadly game of assault and retaliation.

4. Staging Hospitality: Shakespeare

To show how Shakespeare's plays reflect a fundamental shift in the meaning of the word *hospitality*—from Christian charity to power-proclaiming *entertainment*—this chapter contrasts the genuine hospitality of characters such as the banished duke of *As You Like It* with the treacherous hospitality displayed in *Macbeth*, where Macbeth's murder of a royal guest cripples his capacity to entertain—much less rule—anyone else, and in *King Lear*, where the king gives up his power to entertain, to play the host, and becomes instead a homeless mendicant forced to depend on the charitable hospitality of his merciless daughters. This chapter also examines the self-destructively extravagant hospitality of Timon, the cannibalistic hospitality of Titus, and the plight of an unwittingly seductive hostess in *The Winter's Tale*.

5. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Spirit of Place

Like Wordsworth's *Prelude* and his play *The Borderers*, Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* reveals a re-awakened sensitivity to the *genius loci*, the genius or spirit of place that might hospitably welcome a visitor but was also capable—like Homer's gods—of avenging crimes against that hospitality. While Wordsworth links hospitality to monasteries violated by the French Revolution and Coleridge links it to the spirit animating a bird, each poet highlights the word “cross” to mark the intersection of habitational hospitality with the all-too-vulnerable spirit of place.

6. Rousseau to Stendhal: the Eroticized Hostess

This chapter examines a succession of hostesses who are either willfully erotic or—like Virgil's Dido—uncontrollably aroused by their guests: Rousseau's Madame de Warens, Coleridge's Christabel, Keats's Belle Dame and Lamia, Byron's Haidee, and Stendhal's Madame de Rênal. Different as they are, all of these hostesses are gripped by desires that make them vulnerable to guests whom they can never fully control.

7. Fielding to James: Domesticity, Mating, Power

After explaining how Fielding's *Tom Jones* domesticates heroism, this chapter inspects the link between heroism and hospitality in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*; probes three English novels—Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*—to show how the power of hospitality can be used and abused in the process of mating;

treats Pushkin's Eugene Onegin as a treacherous guest; and shows how Henry James's Isabel Archer is first betrayed as a guest and then disempowered as a hostess. While fully recognizing the violence done by figures such as the creature of *Frankenstein*, this chapter also shows how the guests and hosts of nineteenth century fiction learn to strike without drawing blood.

8. Proust's Hostesses

Proust's novel repeatedly exposes the hostility lurking within what he calls "the heart of our friendly or purely social relations." While moments of genuine communion sometimes pass between host and guest, they soon fade into the light of common day, or rather into the haze of suspicion, jealousy, resentment, possessiveness, exploitation, and anti-Semitism that virally invade and infect the social worlds of this novel. Written, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, during the first of the two greatest wars ever seen in the world, it represents a society in which hospitality is always and everywhere threatened by treachery.

9. Joyce, Woolf, Camus

This chapter considers how three hosts in modernist fiction receive guests whom they do not expect, or want, or understand. After first considering Gabriel's deeply conflicted hospitality to an unexpected guest/ghost in Joyce's "The Dead," it examines Leopold Bloom's response to an adulterous guest as well as to the Polyphemic citizen (his would-be host) in a cave-like pub, and to a young writer whose aspirations he unwittingly seeks to betray by making him a permanent house guest; the titular hostess of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, who struggles to achieve a social communion in the face of another unexpected guest/ghost; and Camus' "The Guest," the story of a French teacher in Algeria whose inscrutable guest is also an Arab prisoner and—politically--his host. A coda on a post 9/11 play called *Omnium Gatherum* explains what happens when an Arab terrorist becomes a guest at a New York dinner party.

This chapter ends with a few paragraphs that encapsulate its chief argument. While the absolute, unconditional hospitality that Derrida posits is a noble ideal, every literary encounter we have examined between a host and a guest is bound by conditions, charged with risk, and menaced by treachery.

INTRODUCTION: CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

[SINCE THE FOLLOWING TEXT HAS NOT BEEN COPYEDITED, IT IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY AND MAY NOT BE QUOTED.]

This book considers what hosts, hostesses, and guests do for and to each other in works of literature ranging from Homer's *Odyssey* to Albert Camus' short story, "The Guest."

At their best, as most of us know from our own experience, the pleasures of hospitality approximate the pleasures of love. Few other stimuli can match—let alone surpass-- the taste of a good meal in the house of old friends or convivial new ones. Ancient literature pays tribute to such pleasures. In Homer's *Odyssey*, hospitality and love quite literally converge when the shipwrecked hero is lavishly entertained by the king and queen of Phaeacia just as their lovely daughter Nausicaa is falling in love with him. Even without an erotic charge, hospitality in the *Odyssey* can poignantly signify devotion. When Odysseus finally reaches his native Ithaka after ten years of fighting in Troy and ten more of voyaging, he has changed so much that he cannot be recognized by even the most loyal of his servants, the swineherd Eumaeus. But since Eumaeus believes that "every stranger and beggar comes from Zeus" (14. 57-58 / F 14.66), he feeds and shelters this would-be stranger without hesitation, partly as an act of loving homage to the master he has never forgotten, the man he believes to be still voyaging home.

Yet if hospitality can occasionally furnish something like the pleasures of love, it also resembles love in exposing all of its parties to the perils of intimacy. To fall in love is to give someone the power to break your heart. To ask one or more people into your home—whether to dine at your table, sleep under your roof, or simply converse—is to give them the power to complicate your life right up to the act of taking it. Bizarre as the latter may sound, it is precisely what happened not long ago to a couple of Dartmouth professors at their home in Etna, New Hampshire, just a few miles from my own. About noon on the final Saturday of January 2001, two preppy-looking teenage boys knocked on their door, gained admission by pretending to be conducting a survey, and then—for the sake of their ATM cards--fatally stabbed their host and hostess.¹ Half and Suzanne Zantop thus paid the ultimate price for their hospitality. If they had not been instinctively welcoming, if they had refused -- like others before them-- to let two complete strangers into their house, they would almost certainly be alive and well today. What they experienced was something wholly unexpected and yet disturbingly common in the history of literature: hospitality ambushed by treachery.

By this I do not mean that literature offers only a series of cautionary tales on the perils of hospitality. In the *Odyssey* alone, the stories of encounters between hosts and guests range all the way from the cannibalism of Polyphemos to the graciousness of the Phaeacians. Since literature thrives on conflict, since it cannot long endure or sustain the spectacle of perfect contentment, it tends to favor the darker end of this spectrum. But we will also find that it ranges from

one end to the other. In doing so, it shows how delicate is the line between loving communion and social friction, how subtly hosts and guests may betray each other without ever drawing a drop of blood.

As a theme in literature, hospitality is at once ancient, modern, and ubiquitous. In the book of Genesis, Abraham runs from the doorway of his tent to offer food and water to three strange men who suddenly appear before him and then turn out to be angels (Gen. 18:1-8). In the *Odyssey*, Eumaios offers wine, food, and shelter to a man he does not recognize. In the penultimate chapter of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom ushers Stephen Dedalus into his home, gives him a cup of cocoa, and invites him to become a more or less permanent house guest. Strange as these episodes may seem, they involve something as quotidian and familiar as our very own doorways: the giving and taking of hospitality.

In spite of its pervasiveness in literature, hospitality has long been slighted by literary theorists and critics. But in his final years, Jacques Derrida began to talk and write about it. He reminded us not only that hospitality is “culture itself,”² but also that the very words *host* and *hospitality* drag behind them a tangled etymology and radiate a bewildering complex of meanings.³ The English word *host* looks as if it came from the Latin word *hostis*, but *hostis* means first of all “stranger” and then “enemy”--whence the English word *hostile*. The word *host* springs not from *hostis* but rather from its cousin *hospes*, which means first “stranger” and then “guest.” From *hospitis*, the genitive of *hospes*, comes the word *hospitality* and also the word *host*, which Derrida nonetheless traces to the Indo-European *hosti-pet-s*, meaning one who has power in the household (*OH* p.

5).⁴ So the Latin roots of *host* and *hospitality* are at least partly entangled with words meaning “stranger” and “enemy.” Still more tangled in its meanings is the Greek word *xenos*. It can mean either “guest” or “host”; it can designate a friend with whom you have a hereditary treaty of hospitality, such as the child of someone whom you once entertained or who once entertained you; it can mean anyone who is entitled to the rights of hospitality simply because he or she is a stranger; or it can denote a complete stranger, a *barbaros*, a foreigner.⁵ But in the English language, the word *xenos* seems to leave but a single trace: xenophobia, fear of strangers, which can all too easily turn into virulent hatred of them.

Derrida’s theory of “absolute hospitality” would banish this hatred by a kind of decree, by what he calls simply “*the law of hospitality*” (*OH 77*, emphasis mine). While conventional hospitality is conditional, based on laws of reciprocity and mutual obligation between individuals or groups, absolute hospitality is unconditional. It requires, says Derrida, “that I open up my home . . . to the absolute, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names.”⁶ Something close to this kind of hospitality turns up in the Gospel of Luke, where Christ tells the Pharisee who asked him to dine one Sabbath day not to invite anyone who could invite him in return, but only “the poor, maimed, lame, and blind. Then you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the upright” (Luke 14:12).⁷

Possibly even this formulation would have failed to meet Derrida's standards, since Christ assures the host that his generosity will be ultimately repaid. But whether or not hospitality can ever be absolute, whether or not it can ever banish the expectation of repayment, it cannot forestall the possibility of fraud, violence, or both. Derrida frankly admits that anyone who offers unconditional hospitality takes a gigantic risk. "Unconditional hospitality," he says, requires "that you give up the mastery of your space, your home, your nation. It is unbearable. . . . For unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone" ("HJR," 71). Spoken in 1999, Derrida's last two words chillingly adumbrate what happened to the Dartmouth couple in January of 2001. Yet their last act of hospitality was not unconditional. The boys who killed them entered their house only after identifying themselves and posing as dutiful students working on a class project--their pretext for admission. Conditional or unconditional, hospitality can never be purged of risk.

This point was brutally confirmed on September 11, 2001. Less than nine months after the Zantops were killed in their house by unexpected guests, nineteen Middle Eastern men who had legally entered the United States and who had legally boarded four planes at three different airports hijacked the planes, flew two of them into New York's World Trade Towers, one of them into the Pentagon, and a fourth into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, killing altogether nearly three thousand people. Time has given us the means to see this episode in

something like its proper scale. Vicious as the 9/11 hijackers were, they stopped far short of doing everything that the beneficiaries of Derrida's "unconditional hospitality" might have done: destroy the place (our space, our home, our nation), initiate a revolution, steal everything, or kill everyone. While many people felt that "everything changed" on September 11, and while the attacks of that day most certainly led to the long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and a great deal of suffering elsewhere, America did not suddenly lock its doors to all foreign visitors. Not even the wave of xenophobia loosed by the attacks (which prompted immigration officials to seize hundreds of foreign-born residents for trivial infractions) could drown this nation's hospitality. In an article on suicide bombers that appeared soon after 9/11, Joseph Lelyveld wondered "how you could smash terrorist networks in conditions of an open society, which allow them to operate on our ground far more confidently than they ever could on their own" (Lelyveld 79). Whatever happens, our bureaucratic machinery seems inalterably set to extend a welcoming hand. "On Monday, March 11," it was reported, "precisely six months after the WTC disaster, Huffman Aviation International, a flight school in Venice, Florida, received notice from the Immigration and Nationalization Service that the two Saudi Arabians who had hijacked and then piloted jetliners into the World Trade Towers of New York-- Mohammed Atta and Marwan Alshehhi--had been awarded student visas that had been approved the previous summer" (Eggen and Thompson A13).⁸

We can now see clearly, then, that the attacks of 9/11 fell far short of exemplifying the price to be paid for taking the risk of absolute, unconditional

hospitality. Shattering as they were, the attacks took place within the framework of conditions then prevailing for what might be called official hospitality: legal entry to the United States, provision of student visas, authorized access to flight schools, and the right to board commercial airplanes. These conditions could not and did not prevent the treachery that may undermine any act of hospitality, regardless of the law or laws that govern it. Nevertheless, Derrida broached his theory of hospitality--and never disavowed it even after 9/11-- to combat what he saw as the greatest threat to humanity in our time: not terrorism but xenophobia. Nation-States, he wrote, have been treating foreigners, immigrants (documented and undocumented), refugees, the homeless, and stateless persons of all kinds “with unprecedented cruelty” (*Adieu* 64). Deploring “the crimes against hospitality endured by the guests and hostages of our time, incarcerated or expelled day after day, from concentration camp to detention camp, from border to border, close to us or far away from us” (*Adieu* 71), Derrida proposed a radical alternative. Founded on what Emmanuel Levinas has called the “ethics of hospitality,”⁹ his law of absolute hospitality defies xenophobia by overturning the laws and conventions that govern the admission of strangers to our nation and our homes.

The law of absolute hospitality and the laws of conditional hospitality need each other, Derrida says, because they define each other by opposition and are “thus both contradictory, antinomic, *and* inseparable” (*OH*, p. 81). Absolute hospitality, which is unprompted by any sense of duty and which neither expects nor asks anything of the stranger, not even his name, defines itself precisely by

transgressing the laws of conditional hospitality. But I believe the two regimes-- the law and the laws-- are bound by more than dialectical polarity. In practice, they are bound by exposure to risk--as well as by the virtual impossibility of banishing all conditions from the act of crossing a threshold.

Consider first a law of hospitality that makes room for terrorists. Shortly after the attacks of 9/11, President Bush told the nations of the world that “if you harbor a terrorist, you’re just as guilty as a terrorist” (qtd. Safire 34). This shortly became known as the Bush doctrine. But Taliban leaders defied this doctrine to honor a much older one:

In refusing to surrender Osama bin Laden to American hands, the Taliban leaders of Afghanistan were following the laws of their Pashtun tribe, which anthropologists consider one of the oldest on earth. Pashtuns live by the Pashtu Wali, or Code of Life. According to this code, the law of *badal* obligates members of a tribe to exact revenge for wrongdoing--like the American attack on other members of the tribe. And the law of *milmasthia* requires tribal members to serve a guest and to give sanctuary to anyone who requests it, even an enemy. Though the host can evict a guest if he creates trouble for the family while he is in the house, the Taliban evidently decided not to do so. (Bragg B5).

Among the Taliban, the law of hospitality trumps all other obligations-- even the demand to give up someone who had murderously exploited the official hospitality of the United States.¹⁰ Their law has classical as well as tribal

precedent. Near the end of Homer's *Iliad*, when Achilles receives as a guest his mortal enemy Priam, the old king is likened to a murderer seeking refuge in a foreign land (*Iliad* 24. 480-84). Though the murderer here is Achilles, who has just killed Priam's son Hector, these two dare to behave as host and guest, breaking bread together, sleeping under the same protective roof, and thus suspending their enmity for the sake of hospitality. That Osama bin Laden remained alive for nearly ten years after plotting the attacks of 9/11 testifies--among other things--to the power of an ancient law that might almost be construed as absolute in its unrestrictiveness, its openness to "anyone who requests [hospitality], even an enemy." Yet the law that protected bin Laden is not "the law" of hospitality but *a* law--one of many--of the Pashtu Wali. And in obeying this Pashtun law, the Taliban leaders risked arousing the wrath of the most powerful nation on earth.¹¹

Like the attacks of 9/11, then, the Taliban's treatment of bin Laden suggests that grave risk and transgression--two of the most distinguishing features of "absolute" hospitality--also vex the workings of conditional hospitality. Treachery, which is always transgressive, presupposes a set of conditions. Consider what is perhaps the founding instance of treacherous hospitality in Western literature: the murder of Agamemnon. Just after returning to his Mycenaean kingdom after ten years of fighting in Troy, he and his men were butchered while feasting as guests at the house of Aegisthos, who had become the lover of Agamemnon's queen and who conspired with her to kill him. Rending the fabric of trust woven by the laws of hospitality as well as by marriage, the

murder of the homecoming Agamemnon is so often recalled throughout the *Odyssey* ---in steadily more graphic terms--that it burns its way into our minds.¹² The final version of the story--the most graphic of all-- is told by the shade of Agamemnon himself to Odysseus, who meets him in Hades while enroute to his kingdom in Ithaca and who thereby learns just how dangerous homecoming can be. By Agamemnon's account, its perils rival the worst ordeals of voyaging.

The murder of Agamemnon not only exemplifies the perils of homecoming but also takes its place in a sequence of injury and retaliation that radically re-shapes the bedrock condition of hospitality in Homer's world: reciprocity. On one hand, when Eumaios tells the returning Odysseus that "every stranger and beggar comes from Zeus," he breathes something like the spirit of absolute hospitality. But if Zeus avenges any wrong toward strangers and suppliants, as Odysseus elsewhere tells the monster Polyphemos (9.271), we may infer that Zeus punishes those who treat strangers and suppliants badly and rewards those who treat them well, just as Christ promises to repay us in heaven for entertaining those who cannot repay us on earth. Either way, hospitality prompted by divine authority cannot be absolute in Derrida's sense, for it is conditioned by fear of divine retaliation or desire for ultimate reward. In Odysseus' appeal to Polyphemos, it is precisely the threat of divine retaliation that enforces the law of hospitality and makes it conditional.

Retaliation is the dark double of reciprocal giving. In the giant's cave, the spirit of benign reciprocity that animates prior scenes of hospitality--such as Telemachos' reception of Mentos/ Athene-- instantly gives way to the malign

reciprocity of injury and revenge, as we will see again in *Beowulf*. More than anything else, this malign revision of hospitable exchange turns the whole story of Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemos into what was been called a grotesque "parody of a hospitality scene" (Reece 126).

Between the hosts and guests of literature, in fact, benign reciprocity repeatedly gives way to the quest for retaliation. This collapse of one into the other exacerbates the problem of formulating--let alone enforcing--any law of hospitality itself, whether absolute or conditional. On the one hand, hospitality presupposes law. Odysseus can imagine no hospitality without justice, which is why he wants to know if the Cyclopes are "violent, savage, [and] lawless" or "friendly to strangers, god-fearing men" (9. 175-76 / F 9.194-95). Likewise, when Aeneas and his men are blown off course by ferocious winds in the first book of the *Aeneid*, they are dumbfounded to be denied "hospitio . . . harenae," the right to land on the beach.¹³ This is essentially the right that Kant envisioned when he proposed the law of universal hospitality, meaning "the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another" (Kant, *Perpetual Peace* 320). On the other hand, justice may transcend any particular body of laws.¹⁴ Hospitality itself breeds conflicting laws, as we have already seen in the conflict between absolute and conditional versions of it. If Pashtun law requires a tribe "to serve a guest and to give sanctuary to anyone who requests it, even an enemy," must tribal members risk their lives to do so, or would such a risk make the guest troublesome enough to justify eviction? If Lot--in the Book of Genesis--is willing to sacrifice the virginity of his daughters in

order to forestall an attack on his guests, does the law of hospitable protection trump all other obligations--even within the family? In the story of Lot, which we will examine in detail, the relation between a host and his guests becomes not just familial in its intimacy, but usurpative, pre-empting the bonds between a father and his daughters. It also illustrates a problem inherent in Derrida's concept of absolute hospitality, which seems to require that we hold nothing back from anyone who comes to us for help.

What happens when the state comes calling in the form of surveillance, when the uninvited guest is a spy eavesdropping on telephone calls or mining data from emails? Derrida answers as follows:

Wherever the "home" is violated, wherever at any rate a violation is felt as such, you can foresee a privatizing and even familialist reaction, by widening the ethnocentric and nationalist, and thus xenophobic, circle: not directed against the foreigner as such, but, paradoxically against the anonymous technological power (foreign to the language or the religion, as much as to the family and the nation), which threatens, with the "home," the traditional conditions of hospitality. (Derrida, OH, 53).

Thus Derrida finds himself compelled to qualify the absoluteness of his absolute hospitality. Having sought to vanquish xenophobia by positing a hospitality of total, undemanding, unquestioning openness to all strangers, he nevertheless sanctions the individual's right to protect his or her private domain from the estranging inquisitiveness of the state. So far from urging us to open ourselves

unreservedly to the state, or to anyone else, he attacks Kant for demanding that we tell the truth to anyone who asks for it, even to a murderer seeking his would-be victim in our house.¹⁵ In Derrida's opinion, Kant's imperative destroys, along with the right to lie, any right of keeping something to oneself, of

dissimulating, of resisting the demand for truth, confessions, or public openness. . . In the name of pure morality, from the point where it becomes law, he introduces the police everywhere, so much and so well that the absolutely internalized police has its eyes and its ears everywhere . . . And there is also nothing fortuitous, it seems to me, if in [Kant's essay] the privileged example . . . refers to a situation of *hospitality*: should I lie to murderers who come to ask me if the one they want to assassinate is in my house? Kant's response . . . is "yes" [i.e., no], one should speak the truth, even in this case, and thus risk delivering the guest to death, rather than lie. It is better to break with the duty of hospitality rather than break with the absolute duty of veracity . . ." (Derrida, *OH* 71)

Unlike Kant, Derrida believes that the "absolute duty of veracity" must bow to "the duty of hospitality." He therefore commends Lot for putting "the laws of hospitality above all, in particular the ethical obligations that link him to his relatives and family, first of all his daughters" (Derrida, *OH* 151). But two things complicate Derrida's argument. One is that Lot does *not* lie to save his guests; he offers his daughters to a gang of rapists. The other problem--a deeper

one--is that Derrida's concept of absolute hospitality is just as hard to sustain as Kant's concept of absolute veracity, or "pure morality." If Lot's action exemplifies absolute hospitality, or the triumph of hospitality over veracity, it nonetheless entails acceptance of rape. And if absolute hospitality requires unconditional openness to all visitors, it cannot remain absolute without authorizing state surveillance, the political invasion of the private domain. In short, as Derrida himself seems to recognize, there is no hospitality that cannot be undermined by treachery, no law or laws of hospitality that can preclude every form of subversion or perversion.¹⁶ Here is the truth--though I stop short of calling it absolute--that western literature repeatedly affirms.

This literature of course includes the Old and New Testaments, especially the latter, where Christ makes the eternal fate of everyone wholly dependent --and I mean *wholly* dependent -- on our hospitality to strangers. At the Last Judgment, he says, when all nations are divided into the saved and the damned, the saved will be those who housed, fed, and slaked the thirst of strangers, no matter how humble, and thereby accommodated God himself, who will tell them, "in so far as you did it to one of the humblest of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Conversely, Christ says, God will tell the others that "in so far as you failed to do it for one of these people who are humblest, you failed to do it for me" and will condemn them to everlasting punishment (Matt 25: 34-46). In light of this statement, it is scarcely possible to overstate the moral importance of hospitality in the New Testament. In making our response to needy strangers on earth the *sole determinant* of our eternal life, Christ places hospitality at the very

center of his teachings. As the pivot point for the starkest of choices, it also plays a crucial role at the Last Supper, when he himself plays host to his apostles and foresees that one of his guests will betray him, turning host into *hostia*, sacrificial victim.

Literature has never tired of re-enacting the ways in which hosts and guests betray each other. In Dante's *Inferno*, the circle of treachery at the bottom of hell is occupied not only by Judas but by men who have arranged the murder of their guests, as Fra Alberigo did in 1285 when he invited two of his relatives to a banquet at which they were butchered by his servants. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the heinousness of regicide is amplified by its fusion with something equally outrageous: the murder of a guest by his host. In thus recasting the historical facts about King Duncan, who (according to Holinshed's *Chronicles*) was actually killed in an ambush near Inverness, Shakespeare makes the violation of hospitality central to his play, which repeatedly invokes the rites and pleasures of conventional hospitality even as it undermines them. Viewed through the lens of hospitality, even the shooting of a bird can be a heinous crime. In Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the mariner and his shipmates welcome an albatross "with great joy and hospitality" when it first appears as the only living thing in an Antarctic world of fog and ice. But after they hail it "as if it had been a Christian soul, / . . . in God's name" and feed it daily for a time, the mariner suddenly and "inhospitably" shoots the bird with his cross-bow (*Rime* 63-82), leading all of them into a hell of desolation and thirst that only the mariner survives.

In the fiction of the last two centuries, the treachery of hosts and guests grows less violent, more subtle, but also--if anything--more disturbing. Just as heroism becomes demilitarized and domesticated, treachery learns how to strike without drawing blood. While visiting Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Will Ladislaw annihilates her husband—his absent host—by simply casting doubts on his scholarship. In Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer is betrayed by those who know just how to manipulate a guest and disempower a hostess. In the final volume of Proust's *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, the Baron Charlus and his hostess fight a duel of betrayal that ends with the titanically arrogant Baron psychically shattered. And in Joyce's radical re-imagining of Homer's epic voyager, an urban wanderer survives both Dublin's anti-semitism and the perils of an Odyssean homecoming without ever resorting to violence. In the "Cyclops" chapter of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom fights the bigotry of the citizen with the weapons of language alone. Even when threatened with crucifixion as well as a cracker box, he never actually comes to blows with the citizen or anyone else, and he decisively rejects the idea of taking violent revenge on Blazes Boylan for adulterously bedding Molly.¹⁷ Yet while pacifism is one of the many things he shares with his would-be son, Stephen Dedalus, his hospitality to Stephen will turn out to be motivated by treacherous designs. In spite of his best intentions, Bloom will unwittingly try to betray his guest in the name of domesticity.

Hospitality, we shall see, reverses the uncanny. In the words of Friedrich Schelling, the uncanny, or *unheimlich*, "is the name for everything that ought to

have remained . . . hidden and secret and has become visible.”¹⁸ Amplifying this definition, Freud argued that the uncanny springs from the return of the repressed: “nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (“The Uncanny” 394). While the uncanny thus exposes the threatening strangeness of what has been hidden by custom, familiarization, and domestication, hospitality yearns to domesticate the stranger, to take him in as if he were part of the family, to vanquish and absorb his otherness. Even Derrida’s “unconditional” hospitality depends on the stranger’s acquiescence to domestic containment, familiarity, and familial cohabitation--however temporary they may be. And it is of course precisely this prospect that estranges Stephen Dedalus from Bloom, who for Stephen is at once the most gracious and most threatening of hosts.

In works ranging from *Ulysses* and Camus’ “The Guest” to the contemporary play called *Omnium Gatherum*, the literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries continues to stage the seemingly insoluble problem of domesticating the stranger, absorbing the “other” in one’s home, or one’s town, or one’s homeland. But in the United States at least, the word *homeland* has been bolted to *security*, and in the wake of 9/11, public debate about immigration has been largely hijacked by xenophobia. Those who clamor for greater enforcement of the borders, especially of the Mexican border, see illegal immigrants not just as low-wage workers bent on stealing American jobs and overloading public services but also as potential terrorists threatening our lives. Could we allay these fears by admitting Latin-American laborers as “guest

workers” here only for a limited time--long enough to do the work that most American citizens will not do (such as picking grapes) but not for good? Unfortunately, this formula crumbles as soon as we apply it. Even if it somehow vanquished the fear of being terrorized, it could not ensure that these new “guests” would not join the estimated eleven million-plus immigrants who have come to this country with no invitation and are at all costs determined to stay.¹⁹ At best, the phrase “guest worker” is a euphemism for the exploitation of unskilled laborers so desperate to work for a living wage that they will forgo everything else--above all the hope of staying permanently-- in order to get it.²⁰ However benign the intentions behind them, guest worker programs betray the very meaning of the word “guest.”²¹

I do not treat such programs in this book because my subject is literature, more precisely the practice of hospitality in western literature. At times I invoke the independent history of hospitality, as when I link the New Testament to the Roman law of *hospitium* or Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* to the Glencoe massacre of 1692. I also occasionally refer to what has been called the “hospitality industry”: the business of furnishing food, lodging, or both to paying visitors that are typically called “guests.”²² But this book is not a history of hospitality, and certainly not of the process by which it became a commercial transaction. The hosts and guests who meet one another in the literature I examine are typically bound by ties of reciprocity, as I have already explained, but not by any obligation that could be discharged by the payment of a bill.

The sense of obligation bred by traditional hospitality runs too deep for accounting but not for literature, which thrives on peril and paradox, on threats both overt and subtle, on the juxtaposition of extremes. On the one hand, literature offers us moments of hospitality at its most generous, gracious, and selfless, as when Abraham entertains the anonymous angels or Eumaios receives the would-be beggar Odysseus. But literature also shows us how rare and precarious these moments can be: how often and easily the fabric of trust that hospitality weaves can be rent by suspicion, resentment, misunderstanding, or treachery. When globalism promises to flatten the world and leap national boundaries even as terrorism fans the flames of xenophobia, we more than ever need to understand what literature teaches us about the delicate process of receiving a guest or crossing another's threshold. If there is no hospitality without risk, as literature shows us again and again, the same could be said of life itself, which for most of us would be inconceivable without hospitality. That is the main reason why it permeates literature and why I have taken the risk of writing about it.

This book examines the literature of hospitality from Homer to Camus, with a final *coda* on a play written in our own time. Given the ubiquity of my theme, I can hardly exhaust it, and those looking out for lacunae will find them readily enough. A whole book could be written about hospitality in nineteenth century English fiction, which I have treated in parts of just one chapter.²³ As for the staging of hospitality, which likewise deserves a book, I have largely confined myself to what Shakespeare does with it. Within the past ninety years

alone, hospitality and its discontents have been dramatized in plays ranging from George S. Kauffman and Edna Ferber's *Dinner at Eight* (1932) to Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), **John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* (1990), Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage* (2006-09), and—most recently-- Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Disgraced* (2012).** Hosts and guests have also menaced each other in films ranging from Buster Keaton's *Our Hospitality* (1923) to Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003).²⁴ Besides dealing with works such as these, a comprehensive treatment of hospitality in modern literature—broadly considered--would also have to reckon with its place in the modern library of etiquette manuals, which begin at least as early as Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood's *Etiquette, The American Code of Manners* (1884) and extend—through the works of such *arbitri morum* as Emily Post and Amy Vanderbilt-- to the books (and columns) of Judith Martin, the superlatively wise and witty Miss Manners of our time.

I say all this in part to justify the length of this book. Though its topic is far too big for a single volume, I have tried to show how deeply and widely the theme of hospitality permeates the history of western literature, how each new work of literature reconceives and re-stages the conflict between hospitality and treachery, and—finally—how inexhaustible the topic is.

Let me end with a word about the audience addressed by this book. Given the range of literary works I consider, I could not write for specialists in any one of them or in the period it exemplifies, and while I cite a number of critics, I can

hardly claim to have grappled with all available criticism on each of the works I treat. Nevertheless, since my topic has been largely neglected by literary critics and scholars, I hope that even specialists may be drawn by the light it sheds on their respective fields. Also, since I cannot presume specialized knowledge of any text, I have tried to make each of them as accessible as is the concept of hospitality itself. During the years I have spent on this book, I have been pleasantly surprised by the quickened reaction of many people—in and out of the academy—to whom I have mentioned its topic. Since nearly everyone has firsthand experience of hospitality and—let us be honest -- its discontents, they tell me that they would like to know more. Very well, then, here is my answer.

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¹ For the full story of these murders see Zuckoff and Lehr.

² Derrida, “H,” p. 361. Over thirty years ago, J. Hillis Miller proposed that the critic could be considered a host: not the literal accommodator of guests but the metaphorical accomodator of texts that may thereby become parasites within the body of a critical essay (“The Critic as Host”). More recently, Miller has considered Joyce’s treatment of hospitality in the literal sense (“Irish Hospitality”).

³ For a thoroughgoing account of Derrida’s writings on hospitality, especially in relation to contemporary problems of immigration, see Still.

⁴ I will have more to say below about the power of the host.

Alternatively, “host” and “guest” may both derive from the Indo-European *ghostis*, “stranger.” In Old French, *hoste* could mean either “host” or “guest,” as the modern word *hôte* does now (Visser 91). But this line of etymology fails to explain the origin of *hospitality*.

⁵ Altogether, ancient Greek has fifteen words rooted in *xen-*. They include *xenodiaktes* (murderer of a guest) and *xenodaites* (devourer of guests or strangers).

⁶ *OH*, p. 25. By contrast, Emile Benveniste treats all hospitality in terms of a pact that imposes “precise obligations” (Benveniste, p. 94), and Margaret Visser writes: “Reciprocation is an essential part of the social system. Accepting a dinner invitation usually means

promising to ask your hosts to a meal sometime later; eating together with members of a group proves loyalty to that group, and signifies a willingness to serve its interests in the future. Every society pressures guests to become hosts in their turn. Resistance may result in unpopularity, ostracism, even withdrawal of aid when time become hard” (Visser, p. 84).

⁷“The sweetest Christian duty,” writes Louis Massignon, is “welcoming the other, the stranger, the neighbor who is closer than all our close ones, without reserve or calculation, whatever it costs and at any price.” (Letter of 8 September, 1948, qtd. Derrida, “Hospitality” 371.)

⁸ “As a Jew,” Saul Bellow once observed, “. . . I have long been aware . . . of the unparalleled hospitality of [America] to all the branches of humanity” (“A Jewish Writer in America”).

⁹Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 156. According to Colin Davis, Levinas’ “thought revolves around a primordial encounter between the self and other in which the self recognizes the absolute otherness of the other and, rather than responding to it with violence, conceives an infinite responsibility toward it” (Davis, “Cost” 242). In making his case for a radically new kind of hospitality, Derrida also recalls Hannah Arendt’s analysis of the plight of stateless Europeans in the years before the second World War. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, writes Derrida, “Arendt shows that one was witnessing the massive displacement not of exiles but of populations

with no status and no state guarantees, which constituted a kind of call for pure hospitality. . .” (*Manifeste pour l’hospitalité* [Grigny: Editions Paroles d’Aube, 1999] 100, qtd. Carroll, “Remains” 814n).

¹⁰The same law prevails among the Arabs of Iraq. On April 11, 2003, shortly after the U.S. invasion began, Saddam Hussein and his two sons found shelter with a wealthy businessman named Mudher al-Kharbit in his palatial compound west of Baghdad. Though Hussein had repeatedly tried to kill al-Kharbit, who had been working with the CIA to overthrow him, Arab tradition required al-Kharbit to receive his enemy--and thus risk the lives of his family. On the night he received the dictator and his two sons, American bombs meant for Hussein missed him and killed instead al-Kharbit’s brother Malik and 21 others, including children (Worth A6).

¹¹In December 2001, the Pentagon released a videotape of Osama bin Laden conversing with a Saudi sheik and several members of al-Qaeda at a dinner party that had been held the previous month in the southern Afghanistan city of Kandahar. While the guests around him eat and drink, bin Laden explains (in a printed translation of his recorded remarks) how the destruction wrought by the attacks of 9/11 exceeded his expectations. See <http://www.september11news.com/OsamaEvidence.htm>.

¹²Many years ago, I made this point to a class of about sixty students by asking them first, “What happened to Elpenor?” and then, “What happened to Agamemnon?” The first question stumped nearly every

student in the room, but the second raised at once a forest of arms.
So far as I can recall, every student knew the answer.

¹³In a lecture given at Salamanca in 1539 (published 1557), a professor of theology named Francisco de Victoria used this passage as “one ‘proof’ of the universal principle that obliges everyone to welcome harmless visitors.” (Waswo 745)

¹⁴According to Derrida, justice differs from law because it cannot be codified, calculated, enforced, or universally applied (“Force of Law” [233-45]). To buttress the point that “law is always an authorized force” (“Force” 233), Derrida cites Kant, who argues that law “depends . . . on the possibility of an external coercion which can coexist with the freedom of everyone in accordance with universal laws” (“Introduction” 134). Elsewhere, however, as I have already noted, Derrida equates “the law of hospitality” with “absolute hospitality,” and he disdistinguishes this singular *law* from the plural *laws* of reciprocity and mutual obligation that constitute conventional hospitality (*OH* 77). By the word “justice” in “Force of Law,” I take it, he means something like what he calls “the law of hospitality” in *Of Hospitality*.

¹⁵In “On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives” (1797), Kant defends himself against Benjamin Constant’s claim that “a duty to speak the truth, if taken unconditionally, and in isolation,

would make all society impossible.” Schwarz, who quotes Constant, argues that “Kant’s justification of his position against Constant is conclusive, if some key points of his argument are not overlooked” (Schwarz 62).

¹⁶Kant’s concept of hospitality, for instance, is highly conditional: one may not mistreat the stranger, he writes, “so long as he peacefully occupies his place” (*Perpetual Peace* 320). In Kant’s world of “peace,” as Peter Melville aptly observes, “the other who approaches the border of the state presents itself in the eyes of the nation as a risk” (Melville 90).

¹⁷In the words of the catechist of “Eumaeus,” Bloom concludes that adultery is “less reprehensible” than a great many other offenses rising in gravity to “criminal assault, manslaughter, wilful and premeditated murder” (*Ulysses* 17. 2189-90; I cite the novel by chapter and line number.) Bloom is also restrained by his awareness that since he and/or Molly first met Boylan in the shop of Bloom’s tailor, George Mesias, they have each played host and guest to the other: “hospitality extended and received in kind, reciprocated and reappropriated in person” (17.2170-72).

¹⁸Qtd. Freud, “The Uncanny,” p. 375. Freud quotes Schelling from Daniel Sanders’ *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprach* (1860).

¹⁹The Center for Immigration Studies estimates that in 2010-11 there were approximately 11 million illegal aliens in the U.S. (<http://cis.org/node/3877#36>).

²⁰A particularly gruesome case of such exploitation, however, entailed the false promise of a prolonged stay. “In 2006,” reports *The New York Times*, “a company called Signal International hired 500 skilled metalworkers from India, under the H-2B temporary guest worker program, to repair oil rigs after Hurricane Katrina.” Though the workers were promised green cards and paid as much as \$20,000 to travel to Mississippi, they soon learned that they would get no green cards, could not work for anyone else, and were trapped in their labor camps (“Editorial: A Bitter Guest Worker Story”).

²¹On the concept of the immigrant as guest, which I treat only occasionally in this book, see Still, 191-92, and Rosello.

²²Not surprisingly, the title of Conrad Hilton’s story of how he built his hotel empire is *Be My Guest* (1984).

²³Too late for consideration here, a study of the ethics of hospitality in late Victorian fiction has just appeared (Hollander).

²⁴In what follows I occasionally allude to the games of treacherous hospitality played in Albee’s *Virginia Woolf*: Get the Guest, Hump the Hostess, and Humiliate the Host. As for Keaton’s film, the title proves deliciously ironic when a young woman invites Willie (Keaton’s character) to dine at the house of her father and brothers. Though they detest him because they have long feuded with his family, the father decrees that by the rules of “our hospitality,” he must not die in the house. To the sons, this means they can kill him anywhere else.