



HOSPITALITY, OR WHY WE STILL NEED UTOPIAS

An Introduction

While we may intuitively grasp the idea of hospitality within social, political, and moral contexts, our understandings of who qualifies as a guest—and who does not—as well as of enmity and friendship, are far from universally shared. Hospitality resists easy definition; yet its semantic indeterminacy need not result in intellectual helplessness. On the contrary, the difficulty of defining it points to a more fundamental issue: its inherently utopian character. Like all utopias, hospitality names an ideal toward which we feel compelled to strive, even as it proves difficult—perhaps impossible—to realize in its original form. In this introduction, we briefly outline a series of paradoxes, contradictions, and even aporias that emerge when a stranger appears at our door.

The art of hospitality—because it is indeed an art—is marked by an inherent duality. We wish to be hospitable because it feels like the “right” thing to do; yet we also expect the guest to abide by the rules that govern our space. A boundary persists insofar as we do not consent to the violation of our integrity. This is a decisive moment: the point at which we must ask whether opening ourselves to the Other truly entails a willingness to bear certain costs. And this is a question each of us must answer individually. It is easy to welcome someone we have invited; confronting an unannounced stranger, however, introduces fear and uncertainty. Hospitality, understood as an art, thus becomes a conscious engagement with difficulty. It is, fundamentally, a risk.

The risk of hospitality should be taken seriously as a distinct philosophical category. In *In Praise of Risk* (2011), Anne Dufourmantelle (whose dialogue with Jacques Derrida on the subject of hospitality is one of the most penetrating inquiries into this concept) argues

Jacek Partyka
University of Białystok

Marcelina Wieczorek
University of Białystok



<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1041-7295>
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0734-6138>

that this risk is not calculated deliberation or prudence, but is a *kairos*, that is, a “decisive instant” which “opens an unknown space” and thereby inaugurates “another time” (2). The relationship between risk understood in this way and the internal structure of hospitality is, for her, fundamental: “Our birth constitutes the first act of hospitality, not psychological, but ontological: we come from an other, we are carried, carried in our very constitution by a mother” (165). To offer hospitality to a stranger means nothing more and nothing less than to repeat and affirm the very structure of our existence. This is what makes the utopian demand of unconditional hospitality so tenacious: it is not about a moral ideal imposed from outside, but about some irreducible dimension of who we are.

In Western culture, we can identify several thinkers who have engaged with hospitality philosophically. Looking back to ancient tradition, we find the concept understood as a form of civic regulation in Plato’s *Laws* (V [729e–730a], VIII [842b]). In creating the ideal state of Magnesia, Plato introduces strict laws of hospitality, with Zeus Xenios as their divine sanction. Citizens are obliged to protect and welcome newcomers. Hospitality also surfaces frequently as a motif in classical literature, such as Homer’s *Odyssey* or Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (e.g., the myth of Philemon and Baucis). Many centuries later, the philosopher who spent most of his life in one place, Immanuel Kant, wrote in his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace* that “The rights of men, as citizens of the world, shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality” (137). His assertion is meant to serve as a foundation for a world legal order, rather than a comprehensive ethics of welcome. In the twentieth century, philosophical discussions of hospitality as a moral imperative were developed by Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, both of Jewish origin and writing after the Holocaust. Both are known for their resolute rejection of dogmatic thinking and for resisting the confinement of language to unambiguity. All the more significant, then, is their emphasis on the unconditional nature of openness to, and acceptance of, the Other. In the Preface to his magisterial *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas proposes to think of human “subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality” (27). It is, indeed, one of the most powerful ethical statements ever made. I exist as a human being only insofar as I open myself to the Other, claims the French-Jewish philosopher. Or, to put it another way, it is my hospitality and generosity toward the Other that make me human. In both perspectives, it is the Other who surpasses me; the Other who is my superior. Is this utopian thinking? Of course it is. And Levinas himself would not see such a judgment as disqualifying criticism.

Among contemporary theoretical discussions of hospitality, special attention should be given to *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action* (2011) by Richard Kearney and Melissa Fitzpatrick, who argue that “a new hermeneutics of hospitality is needed in our age of mounting hostility” (3). In the North American context, Lindsay Anne Balfour examines what it means to be a native in the United States in *Hospitality in a Time of Terror: Strangers at the Gate* (2018). The rather bleak picture of the Western world that emerges from both books only underscores how little the Greek and Judeo-Christian heritage has succeeded in instilling, within our collective mentality, an understanding of opening one’s door to a stranger as a gesture fundamental to being human. The art of hospitality is not highly valued today. We need masters. We need apprentices of this art. We need a new language—and the ability to translate it into action.

When writing about hospitality in the political sense today—that is, in 2026—we cannot overlook three concurrent processes that are inextricably linked to it. We are witnessing large-scale migration, a trend that continues to intensify. At the same time, in the Western world—though not exclusively there—there is a renewed interest in locality and so-called “little homelands,” accompanied by nationalist movements gaining significant support. These phenomena are mutually influential. Ultimately, however, in the “Age of Migration,” as Michel Agier calls it (58), people are divided into those who migrate and those who grant—or refuse—asylum. The question of asylum has two dimensions: on the one hand, it depends on authorities that provide administrative and logistical frameworks; on the other, it rests on the willingness of local communities—ordinary people who offer hospitality in the course of everyday life. Without this local dimension, hospitality does not exist. It cannot be imposed, much less grafted into anyone’s mind, by institutions alone.

This tension between institutional politics and the lived experience of coexistence is discussed by Zygmunt Bauman in *Strangers at Our Door* (2016). Written as a direct response to the migration crisis in Europe, this book points to two opposing impulses that characterize the attitudes of city dwellers toward migrants: “mixophilia,” that is, a fascination with otherness and a desire for encounter, and “mixophobia,” which is the fear of what cannot be controlled, what is different and unknown (9). The latter impulse is notoriously played out and reinforced by the media and politicians, ultimately creating what Bauman calls a “moral panic”: a collective anxiety that provides a pretext for manifesting hostility toward newcomers (2). The only remedy for such a state that Bauman proposes is solidarity: “there is no exit from that crisis other than solidarity of humans” (19).

Without solidarity, there is no counterbalance to mixophobia—only a “culture of comfort” remains, which makes societies insensitive to the fate of those who knock at the doors of their homes (21).

Rafał Włodarczyk, a Polish scholar of hospitality, rightly points out that, in the context of granting asylum, we cannot ignore its consequences and effects (2). Accordingly, we may distinguish three models: (1) assimilation, or the disappearance of the otherness of the Other; (2) the melting pot, a situation in which the arrival of others affects and transforms, to varying degrees, both host communities and other migrant groups in a given area; and (3) cultural pluralism, understood as the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of host and migrant groups. Significantly, none of these models suggests a stable, long-term condition. The defining features of hospitality—its resistance to clear definition, its incompleteness, its perpetual unfulfillment, its instability—thus lead us to recognize it as a fundamentally utopian concept.

Kearney and Fitzpatrick approach hospitality within a broad conceptual framework, making their remarkable book not only an academic monograph but also a narrative exploring ways of understanding the human condition in the contemporary world. Here, theory takes the form of anthropological reflection: “Hospitality is built into the very fabric of who we are. Beginning with birth, we are hosted, nurtured, cared for, guested” (10). Let us now consider several ways proposed by Kearney and Fitzpatrick for understanding how we might welcome the Other. The examples discussed below are relatively underexplored, especially in comparison with the more obvious political contexts (migration, exile). This shift in perspective is particularly useful, as many of these approaches are further developed in the articles featured in this thematic issue of *RIAS*.

To begin with, there is *linguistic hospitality*, which manifests itself as translation—as a form of mediation between the host language (for example, the reader) and the guest/outsider language (for example, the author of the text) (Kearney and Fitzpatrick 17). This understanding of hospitality was proposed by Paul Ricoeur at the beginning of the twenty-first century in his essay *On Translation*. The act of translation is a moment of compromise or betrayal—we adapt the foreign text according to the rules of the given language, often teetering on the edge of betraying the foreign idiom of the author’s language (Ricoeur 23–24). Whose right, whose language matters more? Are we really dealing with a situation in which one side must be more important? George Steiner offers a more radical view of translation. For him, everyone has their own individual language, their own distinct idiom of thinking: “translation is formally and pragmatically implicit

in every act of communication [...]. To understand is to decipher. To hear significance is to translate" (XII, emphasis in the original).

Linguistic hospitality affects the lives of authors who arrive in a new language, which becomes their means of expression and a new form of self-identification. In American literature, there are numerous examples to illustrate this. Let us mention one narrative that, notably, represents a Jewish-American experience—the readiness to inhabit a foreign language, to embrace the world of hosts within one's mother tongue, and, simultaneously, to cope with the tension between the two without resolving it into either assimilation or untranslatability. Published in 1934, the novel *Call It Sleep* by Henry Roth documents the lives of Jewish immigrants in New York and their simultaneous existence in two linguistic spheres. Roth explores this "schizophrenia" through stylistic, rhetorical, and spelling choices. The Yiddish spoken by the protagonist at home is rendered in a hieratic, nearly biblical English. Street language is captured as phonetically mangled and orthographically distorted: for example, "I godduh waid hea till duh wissle blows" (22). The phonetic rendering of street English—Italian, Irish, and Jewish immigrant accents colliding in the Lower East Side—shows a genuine sociolinguistic environment. The garbled orthography slows our reading, mirroring the protagonist's overwhelmed perception. English is something to be endured and deciphered, not inhabited.

Secondly, there is *narrative hospitality*, which refers to the host's openness to the story and narrative of the newcomer, who may turn out to be either a friend or an enemy. Here again, we draw inspiration from Ricœur, who notes: "It is necessary for us to have gone through the ethical requirements of translation—what I call linguistic hospitality—and through the requirements of the exchange of memories—narrative hospitality" ("Reflections" 8). It may happen that the victor's narrative collides with the defeated's. In such a case, we must remember that both are references to a shared experience. Hospitality then amounts to embarking together on a journey toward truth, which, in turn, carries "a hermeneutic risk" (Kearney and Fitzpatrick 25). The interpretation of history is a constant discussion revolving around wrongs, guilt, and punishment. It also entails awareness that the ability to introduce one's narrative into wider circulation stems from power. Let us illustrate this with three examples from American literature written using the erasure technique.

The political aspect of literary erasure is not solely attributable to the subject matter selected by the author (the eraser), which more often than not pertains to politics or, more broadly, history. It also results from formal solutions at the level of text construction. Analyzing

contemporary definitions of literary erasure reveals a dominance of connotation in the choice of key terms, synonyms, associations, and metaphors. Primarily, and for clear reasons, erasure is regarded as an act of destroying or violating the original text. Kate Millar, for example, references concepts such as “awakened ruins” and “disappear,” the second of which, as a verb, signifies not only the act of rendering something nonexistent but also implies abduction and killing or imprisonment, and the withholding of information about the individual’s fate (“Mary Rueffle”). For poet Jennifer S. Cheng, during the process of erasure, “the old paths of meaning must be destabilized” (“Refraction”).

Zong! (2008) by Canadian poet and prose writer M. NourbeSe Philip is a long poem recounting the 1781 massacre of approximately 130 African slaves thrown overboard by their owners in order to claim insurance. The text draws on documentation from the *Gregson v. Gilbert* case, but Philip conceals most of the testimony in order to evoke the victims’ hidden, previously unexpressed cries. Tracy K. Smith’s short erasure “Declaration” (2017) removes a large portion of the foundational document of the United States, exposing the hypocrisy of its authors, who, while proclaiming the importance of freedom, participated in the consolidation of slavery. In *Whereas* (2017), Oglala Lakota poet Layli Long Soldier dismantles the governmental language of the “Apology to the Native Peoples of the United States,” signed in 2009, revealing the document’s lack of accountability. In these three texts, composed by non-white women, we encounter the clash of narratives of which Ricoeur speaks. The hermeneutic undertaking consists in delving into the text of power and showing how, from the very beginning, it was imbued with a counter-narrative. Hospitality, if it can be spoken of at all in this context, is less a condition than a postulate. It is a sober recognition—or rather acknowledgment—that the narrative of the outsider developed from the very outset within the framework of the dominant narrative. Hospitality thus becomes the imperative to apprehend the duality of the text, and thereby the truth of experience. It simply needed to be brought to light.

The third dimension of hospitality discussed by Kearney and Fitzpatrick is carnal contact (49). The most recognizable, most immediate, and perhaps most common gesture of welcome is the handshake. In a face-to-face encounter, we become acutely aware of how our bodies are, in essence, defenseless when exposed to the presence of the Other. The importance of this dimension of hospitality cannot be overstated. “We need [both] linguistic and carnal hosting,” write Kearney and Fitzpatrick, “for wounds to be healed and peace

to take place” (57, emphasis in the original). To stand face to face with a stranger—to smell, to touch—is to recognize that another’s presence is not a fiction, not an abstraction; it cannot be dismissed, as in video communication, by simply swiping a finger across a screen.

The radical physicality of hospitality finds a striking literary articulation in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, in a chapter titled “The Spouter-Inn.” While waiting for passage to Nantucket, the narrator, who asks the reader to call him Ishmael, spends the night in New Bedford. The innkeeper informs him that no beds are available. There is, however, a solution: to share a bed with one of the guests—a harpooner. Ishmael is not thrilled by this prospect, but given the circumstances, he agrees, with two provisos:

I told him that I never liked to sleep two in a bed; that if I should ever do so, it would depend upon who the harpooner might be, and that if he (the landlord) really had no other place for me, and the harpooneer was decidedly not objectionable, why rather than wander further about a strange town on so bitter a night, I would put up with the half of any decent man’s blanket. (28)

Knowing the realities of New England in the mid-nineteenth century, we recognize that sharing a bed in inns and taverns—even among several people—was nothing unusual at the time, especially for travelers and sailors. Ishmael agrees, while prudently setting conditions: the roommate must be “decent” and “decidedly not objectionable.” Melville’s narrative handling of hospitality is particularly revealing. As it happens, when the door is opened, the room turns out to be empty; the roommate is absent. Ishmael lies down and waits. He is not the host of this space, yet he will be the one to receive another. This act of reception unfolds in several phases.

“I am no coward,” reveals Ishmael, “but what to make of this head-peddling purple rascal altogether passed my comprehension” (34). The guest begins “the business of undressing,” and then, half-naked, performs a ritual of homage to an idol, singing “some pagan psalmody” (34–35). The exposure of his body to another’s gaze, although unconscious, intensifies the sense of otherness. Ishmael is “nonplussed and confounded” (35). The realization of another’s presence in the bed occurs only after the candles are extinguished, in darkness. Physical proximity and touch now become decisive. “[...] this wild cannibal, tomahawk between his teeth, sprang into bed with me. I sang out, I could not help it now; and giving a sudden grunt of astonishment he began feeling me” (35). Touch replaces sight; physicality becomes a mode of perception. In both cases, the body becomes a “dialogic” body (Przymuszała 19).

Dufourmantelle's insight that hospitality is "all about the threshold," meaning that it draws a line between the inside and the outside and invites reflection on what occurs at this boundary, finds a precise illustration in this scene: two bodies that, at a certain moment, register the presence of the other—a presence that cannot be denied (*In Praise* 165), a presence that one must take the risk of encountering. The fleeting violence of both men's reactions quickly dissipates. Melville, we may suggest, emphasizes touch as a decisive turning point toward the other human being. This is clearly demonstrated in the opening lines of the following chapter: "Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife" (36).

The fourth dimension of hospitality concerns, as Kearney and Fitzpatrick put it, *a new frontier: the nonhuman Other* (108). We live in an era of ecological crisis—species extinction, global warming, pollution, and the disintegration of natural ecosystems. In this context, the concept of hospitality has become a paradigm for ecocritical thinking, grounded in a biocentric model that rejects Enlightenment anthropocentrism. The distinction between guest and host is thereby destabilized, constantly shifting. Is the world foreign to us, or are we the strangers to the world? Who is opening their doors to whom? Moreover, the crisis is, in fact, twofold: in this paradoxical moment of declining trust in science, the very existence of the ecological crisis is being questioned with increasing fervor.

Eco-hospitality has its dimensions and scales. In the poem "A New Year Greeting," the aging W. H. Auden writes:

On this day tradition allots
to taking stock of our lives,
my greetings to all of you, Yeasts,
Bacteria, Viruses,
Aerobics and Anaerobics:
A Very Happy New Year
to all for whom my ectoderm
is as Middle-Earth to me.

For creatures your size I offer
a free choice of habitat,
so settle yourselves in the zone
that suits you best, in the pools
of my pores or the tropical
forests of arm-pit and crotch,
in the deserts of my fore-arms,
or the cool woods of my scalp. (838)

The lines paint a picture of the human body as a space inhabited by microorganisms—yeasts, bacteria, and other organisms—that form a complex ecosystem. The inspiration for the poem came from an article by Mary J. Marples published in the January 1969 issue of *Scientific American*, in which the microbiologist describes human skin as having “ecological niches: the desert of the forearm, the cool words of the scalp,” etc. (108). In Auden’s text, the idea assumes a form of “offering” one’s skin as a space, as a zone for beings commonly regarded as lower than humans on the evolutionary ladder. They are absolutely essential to our existence, both those on our skin and those inside us. It is estimated that over 50% of the human body is not human (Gallagher). The greeting expressed by the speaker in this poem is an example of hospitality *à rebours*, because in reality, we have no choice—we must accept these strangers in order to exist. It is worth adding that Auden dedicated this poem to Vassily Yanovsky, a writer and physician who fled Soviet Russia during the first wave of emigration in the 1920s, first to France and then to the USA, where he was welcomed and, from 1942 onwards, lived permanently.

What connects the above-mentioned examples is not so much a common theme as precisely the same gesture. Literature achieves something that philosophical argument cannot: it enacts hospitality rather than defining it. Ishmael is initially apprehensive about the body of the Other, but in the end simply shares a bed with him. Philip, Smith, and Long Soldier do not call for the inclusion and recognition of suppressed narratives; they perform the act of inclusion, in a material sense, within the space of another narrative. Auden does not elaborate on the concept of eco-hospitality; he simply welcomes. This enactment—that is, the readiness to situate oneself in a position of openness, to let the Other in without imposing preconditions or controlling the encounter—is, we would argue, the literary mode of hospitality *par excellence*. Perhaps this is the most appropriate way of approaching the matter: for hospitality, as it emerges from these texts, is not a proposition to be considered but a threshold to be crossed.

Returning to the utopian quality of hospitality that Włodarczyk writes about, let us recall an important statement by the Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski: “All utopias are self-contradictory” (131). From this perspective, hospitality appears as an ideal state that is, however, impossible to achieve. It is unattainable both as “a way of thinking,” “a mentality,” “a philosophical attitude,” or, we may add, as a form of behavior (131). We may strive toward its fulfillment, but this effort can never fully succeed. At most, we can speak of an asymptotic movement. For Kołakowski, utopia is not merely

a project—let us say, a sociopolitical one—aimed at improving life or some aspect of it. Rather, it expresses a human faith that “a definite and unsurpassable condition is attainable, one where there is nothing to correct any more” (132). History and reason would suggest that we think rationally and realistically in this regard, without illusions. Yet it seems unlikely that the utopia of hospitality will disappear from our dreams—and even if it did, it would bring us no good.

We cannot view what Kant, Levinas, and Dufourmontelle tell us about welcoming the Other solely in terms of wishful thinking. Hospitality, as an imperative, only makes sense in the context of individual transformation. On a macro scale, it is impossible to implement. Discussing the development of the idea of perfect brotherhood over the centuries and the disappointment that efforts to achieve it have brought, Kołakowski observes: “This is the common and permanent core of utopian thinking, and it has been criticised on various grounds ... any attempt to implement it is bound to produce a highly despotic society which, to simulate the impossible perfection, will stifle the expression of conflict and thus destroy the life and culture by a totalitarian coercion” (138). And yet he does not end here. Instead of condemning, he transforms the function of utopian thinking. The anti-utopian stance, he warns, can itself become a tool for sanctioning oppression: “it is too easy to use all the well-founded antiutopian arguments as a device whereby we may accept or even sanctify any kind of oppression and blatant injustice” (143). The conclusion he reaches is therefore dialectical in nature: “the idea of human fraternity is a disastrous as a political program but is indispensable as a guiding sign. We need it, to use the same Kantian idiom again, as a regulative, rather than constitutive, idea” (144). A regulative idea, in the Kantian sense, cannot be realized but must always be kept in mind—not as a blueprint but as a direction. Kołakowski is not so much a skeptic as one who points to a certain necessary tension: “Ultimately we have to live between two irreconcilable claims, each of them having its cultural justification” (145). It is precisely within this tension that the utopia of hospitality resides.

The tension between the danger of utopia and its necessity finds a powerful expression in *Of Hospitality*, a now-classic book co-authored by Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, to which we have already alluded. Performing what it theorizes, it consists of two voices: Dufourmantelle wrote the “Invitation”—a poetic-philosophical commentary in the left margin of each page—while Derrida provided his “responses,” drawn from the transcription of two seminars he led in Paris in January 1996, which occupy the right margin. The very

form of this publication is an act of hospitality: she invites, he responds, and neither voice subsumes the other. Reflecting on the question that the stranger poses to us, Dufourmantelle suggests that it should be understood as a “utopia,” but in the Greek sense of the word, as *topos*, a place. Utopia is “out of place,” and it is from this placelessness that the question comes to us (*Of Hospitality* 70). This is a utopia not of fixity, but of displacement. It is precisely at this point that her analysis turns to the ambiguity surrounding the concept. Twentieth-century political utopias failed, she argues, the moment they sought to take root in “the reality of a place, a country, a power,” when their “nostalgia for a timeless fixity” congealed into ideology (72). They became dangerous not because they were utopian, but because they ceased to be utopian. Dufourmantelle, however, does not abandon the utopian horizon, asking instead whether we should not hear in political utopia “a ‘placelessness’ which opens the possibility of the human ‘city’” (74). In this perspective, hospitality belongs to the logic of the not-yet-located, to the logic of arrival without warning. It is a utopia that “nowadays can only be audible because it breaks its way in from the other, from that unexpected and always disturbing guest” (74). The aporia of hospitality identified by Derrida—the irreducible tension between the “unconditional Law” and the “conditional laws”—confirms this: hospitality as such cannot be fully realized within existing legal and political orders (75–77). It perpetually eludes the institutions and structures that attempt to contain it. Thus, we are speaking not of impossibility, but of the conditions of possibility.

This aporetic horizon is taken up in a different register in Paweł Jędrzejko’s opening essay, “The Professor *Is* Your Friend,” which frames hospitality not so much as a thematic concern as an ethical and epistemic condition of academic life—one that both enables and unsettles the very possibility of knowledge, relation, and institutional responsibility. It is from within this perspective that the essays collected in the “Features” section of this issue of *RIAS* may be read as explorations of the paradoxes of hospitality in a variety of forms. Across these contributions, we encounter echoes of its internal yet necessary contradiction, as described by Kołakowski, alongside a persistent warning against the comfort of indifference of the kind that Zygmunt Bauman cautions us about. Taken together, they return us to the question once posed by Dufourmantelle: is it not the case that, in the arrival

of the stranger, we encounter the fundamental structure of our own existence, and that the hospitality we offer to others is always preceded by the hospitality we ourselves have received? The subject of American hospitality thus emerges through perspectives that, at first glance, appear widely divergent—Latina fiction, dystopian speculative literature, war memoirs, the graphic novel, neo-gothic, fragmentary prose, and the development of the sonnet. What ultimately connects these approaches is not so much a shared keyword as a common conviction: that hospitality is not merely a convenient topic for academic inquiry, but, above all, a structure that shapes both our sense of belonging—to places and communities—and our ways of narrating experience.

The question that arises at the outset of the “Features” section is a socio-political one: what does it mean to arrive—and to be accepted or rejected—in the United States? John T. Matteson reads the prose of Julia Alvarez, Quiara Alegría Hudes, and Sandra Cisneros, revealing the erosion of Latina communities that accompanies the immigrant experience. At the same time, he expands the concept of hospitality, recognizing it in the very fabric of Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*. Magdalena Dziurzyńska’s essay on Sabrina Vourvoulias’s *Ink* speculates about a future in which the hostility latent in today’s immigration policy materializes as a biopolitical machine: migrants are tattooed, marked, and confined in what the novel calls the “inkatorium.” Katarzyna Macedulska, in her reading of Sandra Uwiringiyimana’s *How Dare the Sun Rise*, focuses on testimony, showing how a memoir can become a space in which a stateless person, through storytelling, creates a sense of belonging denied to her by the state.

We then turn to genres more typically associated with popular culture. The essay by Polina Golovátina-Mora and Anna Maria Karczewska shifts the geographical frame to Colombia, reading the graphic novel *En el ombligo* as a meditation on the hospitality extended to—or withheld from—former FARC combatants returning to civilian life. The authors juxtapose the ideas of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, raising a question that resonates quietly throughout the entire volume: what does hospitality require of a community asked to receive not the defenseless stranger, but one who was once a threat? Magdalena Łapińska’s reading of T. Kingfisher’s *What Moves the Dead* carries the volume into the register of the nonhuman. A parasitic fungus that transforms its hosts into hostages, a manor house in which it is no longer safe to dwell—Łapińska’s eco-gothic analysis of Kingfisher’s reimagining of Poe shows how the host–guest relation, once extended to the nonhuman, loses its reassuring asymmetry.

The “Features” section closes with two essays that approach hospitality not as a thematic category, but as a formal one. Dominika Ferens’s analysis of Sigrid Nunez’s fragmentary prose proposes narrative hospitality as a poetics: Nunez’s discontinuous, interrupted mode of narration is read as structurally egalitarian, opening the text to voices and presences—of animals, the elderly, the excluded—that conventional novelistic form would marginalize or silence. Marcelina Kalinowska’s analysis of the African American sonnet tradition draws on Derrida’s concept of unconditional hospitality—which, as she notes, requires relinquishing control over one’s own space to a degree that threatens its transformation—to read the history of Black poets’ entry into the sonnet as a history of coerced, refused, and, finally, insurgent hospitality.

The “Varia” section presents three additional papers that do not constitute a thematically unified group. Rachmat Nurcahyo offers an intertextual analysis of two closely related narratives: Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970) and its adaptation, *Saga of the Sioux* (2011), demonstrating how the central themes of the original—namely, spirituality and cultural identity—have been subject to editorial and, more significantly, ideological modification. Ernesto Domínguez López and Susana Hernández Plá examine the rhetoric of American political discourse in the 1930s, centered on the notion of “progress,” showing how the ostensibly egalitarian language employed by Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt reinforced prevailing racial hierarchies in the United States. Justyna Fruzińska turns to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s renowned short story “Young Goodman Brown,” a text that has been extensively analyzed and interpreted for nearly two centuries. Her reading is grounded in American pragmatism, specifically the variant developed by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Throughout her analysis, Hawthorne emerges as a precursor to this philosophical movement.

The issue comes to a close with the “Book Reviews” section, where Ritvik Singh Sabharwal discusses the memoir of Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives (2007–2011; 2019–2023), published in 2024. The reviewer reads this narrative as a valuable ethnographic document and a strong—at times even authoritative—feminist voice, resonating against the backdrop of a deeply polarized American democracy. In this way, the volume concludes by returning to the question of voice, authority, and political belonging that has, in different forms, informed the contributions gathered throughout this issue.

If hospitality remains, as we have suggested, both necessary and impossible, it is not because it fails to realize itself, but because

it resists closure. It endures as an ethical demand precisely to the extent that it cannot be fully secured—neither in law, nor in institution, nor even in intention. To think hospitality, then, is not to define it once and for all, but to remain exposed to its call: to the arrival of the other who unsettles what we take to be our place, our knowledge, and our right to speak. In this sense, the essays gathered in this volume do not offer solutions so much as they sustain a space in which this exposure may be practiced—across languages, forms, histories, and disciplines. It is here, perhaps, that the work of American studies, as envisioned by the International American Studies Association, finds one of its most urgent tasks: not to stabilize meaning, but to host it in motion; not to resolve difference, but to remain answerable to it.

Jacek Partyka and Marcelina Wieczorek
Guest Editors

Abstract: This introduction to the *RIAS* thematic issue argues that hospitality is, by its very nature, a utopian concept: an ideal recognized as both necessary and real, yet one that, in its fullest form, remains forever out of reach. Rather than treating this as a failure, the essay suggests that the irreducible tension between conditional and unconditional hospitality is precisely what sustains it as an ethical imperative. Drawing on a range of theoretical frameworks—from Immanuel Kant’s cosmopolitanism and Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of the Other, through Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle’s aporia of hospitality and ontology of risk, to Leszek Kołakowski’s dialectic of the regulative idea and Zygmunt Bauman’s diagnosis of *mixophobia*—it maps the diverse dimensions of hospitality. These frameworks—linguistic, narrative, carnal, and ecological—are further illuminated through brief readings of American literary texts by Henry Roth, Herman Melville, and W. H. Auden, alongside references to erasure poetry by M. NourbeSe Philip, Tracy K. Smith, and Layli Long Soldier. The essay ultimately argues that literature enacts hospitality rather than merely defining it, performing at the level of form what philosophy can only propose at the level of argument. The individual contributions gathered in the “Features” section of the issue extend this inquiry across a range of genres and traditions, including Latina fiction, dystopian speculative literature, war memoirs, the graphic novel, neo-gothic writing, and the African American sonnet tradition.

Keywords: hospitality, utopia, American literature, translation, risk, erasure

Bios: Jacek Partyka, PhD, D.Litt., is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Philology at the University of Białystok, Poland, where he teaches courses on the history of American literature and comparative studies, and supervises postgraduate seminars at the MA and PhD levels. In 2017, he was awarded a Fulbright Senior Award and conducted research at Fordham University in New York. His research focuses on American late modernist and postmodernist poetry (including Charles Reznikoff, Louise Bogan, Elizabeth Bishop, and Susan Howe), literary representations of genocide (Edward Lewis Wal-

lant, Cynthia Ozick, Charles Reznikoff), W. H. Auden's reinvention of himself as a poet in the United States, and the literature of the Jewish diaspora in New York City. He is the author of *Disarchiving Anguish: Charles Reznikoff and the Modalities of Witnessing* (2021), which, drawing on archival material, analyzes the use of authentic testimonies (including the *National Reporter* and the Eichmann trial records) in the creation of the so-called poetic recitatives by Charles Reznikoff, one of the leading American Objectivist poets.

Marcelina Wieczorek earned her master's degree in Foreign Language Teaching from the University of Białystok, Poland, in 2023. Alongside her work in language education, she has developed a strong interest in American literature, particularly contemporary African American poetry. She is currently a PhD student at the Doctoral School of the University of Białystok, where her dissertation examines the formal and thematic evolution, as well as the socio-political significance, of African American sonneteering.

WORKS CITED

- Agier, Michel. *Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition*. Translated by David Fernbach. Polity Press, 2016.
- Auden, W. H. *Collected Poems*, edited by Edward Mendelson, Vintage International, 1991.
- Balfour, Lindsay Anne. *Hospitality in a Time of Terror: Strangers at the Gate*. Bucknell UP, 2017.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Strangers at Our Door*. Polity Press, 2016.
- Cheng, Jennifer S. "Refraction as Rapture." *Jacket2*, July 12, 2016. Accessed March 18, 2026. <https://jacket2.org/commentary/refraction-rapture-0>.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Anne Dufourmantelle. *Of Hospitality*. Translated by Rachel Bowlby, Stanford UP, 2000.
- Dufourmantelle, Anne. *In Praise of Risk*. Translated by Steven Miller, Fordham UP, 2019.
- Gallagher, James. "More than Half Your Body Is Not Human." *BBC*. Accessed March 18, 2026. <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-43674270>.
- Gregson v. Gilbert* (1783) 3 Doug. 232 (K.B.) (the "Zong case").
- Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*. Translated with introduction and notes by M. Campbell Smith, George Allen & Unwin, 1917.
- Kearney, Richard, and Mark Fitzpatrick. *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action*. Fordham UP, 2011.
- Kolakowski, Leszek. *Modernity on Endless Trial*. U of Chicago P, 1990.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff, 1979.

- Long Soldier, Layli. *Whereas*. Picador, 2019.
- Marples, Mary J. "Life on the Human Skin." *Scientific American*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1969, pp. 108–115.
- Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick*, edited by Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, W. W. Norton, 2002.
- Millar, Kate. "Mary Ruefle: An Interview by Correspondence." *Poets House*. Accessed March 18, 2026. <https://poetshouse.org/mary-ruefle-on-erasure-an-interview-by-correspondence/>.
- Philip, M. NourbeSe. *Zong! As Told to the Author by Setaey Adamu Boateng*. The Mercury Press, 2008.
- Przymuszała, Beata. *Szukanie dotyku: Problematyka ciała w polskiej poezji współczesnej*. Universitas, 2006.
- Ricœur, Paul. *On Translation*. Translated by Eileen Brennan, with an introduction by Richard Kearney, Routledge, 2006.
- . "Reflections on a New Ethics for Europe." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 21, nos. 5–6, 1995, pp. 3–13.
- Roth, Henry. *Call It Sleep*. Penguin Books, 2006.
- Smith, Tracy K. "Declaration." In *Wade in the Water*, 19. Graywolf Press, 2018.
- Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford UP, 1998.
- Włodarczyk, Rafał. "The Pedagogy of Asylum as a Utopia of Hospitality: A Review of Basic Assumptions." *Filozoficzne Problemy Edukacji*, no. 4, 2021, pp. 1–9.