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# At the Crossroads of Ethics

## An Introduction

**Abstract:** Hospitality, a seemingly benevolent human practice, exists within a paradoxical framework of inclusion and exclusion. As Jacques Derrida suggests in his concept of *hostipitality*, hospitality is never entirely pure but is instead bound by conditions, power structures, and social hierarchies that determine its limits. This issue of *Crossroads* critically engages with these complexities, particularly within American cultural, historical, and literary contexts. The featured articles examine the intersections of hospitality and exclusion, addressing issues such as racialized hospitality under Jim Crow laws, identity fraud within Indigenous communities, the spatial regulation of hospitality in elite leisure spaces, and the selective inclusion of immigrants in the United States. Through literature, history, and cultural analysis, these contributions reveal how hospitality, rather than being an unconditional welcome, often operates as a mechanism of control, reinforcing existing social and political inequalities. By exploring the ethical and political stakes of hospitality across diverse disciplines, this collection fosters a deeper understanding of how hospitality functions as both a gesture of openness and an instrument of exclusion. In doing so, it aligns with *Crossroads*' mission to promote interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and contrastive research in the humanities, urging scholars to reconsider the role of hospitality in shaping contemporary global identities and power structures.

**Keywords:** Hospitality, hostipitality, Jacques Derrida, exclusion, American studies, racialized hospitality, identity politics, interdisciplinary research

Hospitality is a fundamental yet paradoxical human practice. Emerging at the crossroads of ethics, politics, and social relations, it is often portrayed as a gesture of openness, an act of kindness extended toward the stranger, the foreigner, or the guest. However, as Jacques Derrida has argued, hospitality is never *pure*; rather, it is bound by conditions, obligations, and power structures that determine who is welcomed and under what terms.<sup>2</sup> At its core, hospitality is marked by an inherent tension: while it promises *inclusion*, it frequently operates as a mechanism of *exclusion*,

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2 See Derrida and Dufourmantelle (25); for more thorough analyses, see, for instance, Kakoliris (144–155), or Westmoreland (1–10).

reinforcing social, racial, and political hierarchies. In contrast to the utopian vision of an unconditional welcome, hospitality often emerges as a regulated and constrained process, where those who extend it wield authority over those who receive it. Derrida captures this contradiction in his notion of *hostipitality*, a term that fuses *hospitality* with *hostility*, reflecting the way in which the act of welcoming can also conceal forms of violence, surveillance, and control (“Hostipitality” 3–18).

This issue of *Crossroads* engages with this intricate interplay between hospitality and hostipitality, particularly within the American cultural, historical, and literary landscape. The collected articles explore how hospitality, as both a concept and a practice, functions as a site of negotiation—between self and other, citizen and foreigner, privilege and marginalization. By examining different modes of hospitality across time, space, and genre, these contributions illuminate how acts of welcome can be entangled with exclusionary policies, racial discrimination, and contested identities. Through literature, history, and cultural analysis, this issue attempts to map out the boundaries of hospitality and the consequences of the trespass.

The exploration opens with Julia Rogińska’s article, “Separate and Unequal—The Traumatic Consequences of American Hostipitality Based on Colson Whitehead’s *The Nickel Boys*.” This study exposes the insidious ways in which racialized hospitality under Jim Crow laws functioned as a mechanism of dehumanization. By applying postcolonial and trauma theories, Rogińska dissects the systemic oppression of Black Americans, revealing how the illusion of equal treatment masked the reality of institutionalized violence. Her analysis of *The Nickel Boys* sheds light on the long-lasting scars of historical trauma and the ways in which racism continues to shape contemporary narratives of inclusion and exclusion. By foregrounding the lived experiences of those subjected to racialized hostipitality, this article sets the stage for a broader discussion of power, marginalization, and resistance.

Extending Rogińska’s ethical inquiry into the limits of welcome, S. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş approaches the question of hospitality through the intimate terrain of autobiographical memory. Her essay juxtaposes the warmth of her 1976–77 American host family with the deeply unsettled racial and historical narratives she encountered in texts such as Alex Haley’s *Roots*, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*. The result is a textured, at times unsettling meditation on what Derrida calls “hostipitality”: the ineradicable entanglement of welcome and violence that shapes the lives of those positioned as strangers. Çetintaş shows how the rituals of *philoxenia* that sustained her exchange-year experience stood in stark contrast to the structural inhospitalities encoded in U.S. histories of enslavement, settler colonialism, and linguistic exclusion. Her reflection on the symbolic threshold of Ellis Island, with its bureaucratic scrutiny and the painful “Island of Tears” epithet, becomes a wider meditation on the asymmetrical obligations embedded in the host–guest relation. By moving between Greek *xenia*, Civil Rights–era resonances of “We Shall Overcome,” and the fraught multilingual negotiations of Kingston’s narrator, Çetintaş reminds us that hospitality is never a single gesture but a shifting constellation of power, vulnerability, memory, and desire—always shadowed by its hostile double.

From questions of historical trauma and lived experience, the issue moves toward the contested terrain of cultural authenticity in Elżbieta Wilczyńska's "Hostipitality—Pretendians in the Host and Guest Matrix." Wilczyńska examines one of the most fraught ethical dilemmas in contemporary identity politics: the deliberate adoption of false Indigenous identities by non-Native individuals seeking social, cultural, or institutional capital. Drawing on Derrida's notion of hostipitality and on Gayatri Spivak's idea of the "host from below," she exposes the complex power dynamics that govern who is permitted to enter Indigenous communities, who has the authority to speak on behalf of those communities, and who benefits from the symbolic currency of Indigeneity. In this analysis, Pretendianism emerges not as a benign error of self-identification but as a profound ethical breach—an act of occupation that violates the fragile protocols of welcome, recognition, and reciprocity on which hospitality depends. By interrogating the legal, cultural, and emotional consequences of race-shifting, Wilczyńska reframes hospitality in settler-colonial contexts as a field of contested permissions and asymmetrical obligations.

This focus prepares the conceptual ground for Jerzy Kamionowski's exploration of the visual taxonomies that have long structured racial belonging and exclusion in the American cultural imagination. Following Wilczyńska's examination of the politics of identity and belonging, Jerzy Kamionowski turns our attention to the visual grammars through which race has been imagined, codified, and enforced. His reading of Natasha Trethewey's *Thrall* uncovers the poem-sequence's sustained engagement with *casta* paintings, Enlightenment portraiture, and Christian iconography—visual regimes that do not merely depict racial difference but actively produce it. As Kamionowski argues, Trethewey's ekphrastic method exposes the mechanisms by which art stabilizes the fiction of race by "naturalizing its taxonomies," rendering hierarchical relations between bodies both legible and morally justified. Poems such as "Miracle of the Black Leg," "Taxonomy," and "Enlightenment" reveal how familial intimacy, scientific curiosity, and aesthetic convention can all participate in the disciplining of the mixed-race subject. In Kamionowski's analysis, hospitality appears less as a social practice than as an epistemic order: a system of seeing that determines who may be recognized, who must be classified, and who remains spectral within the cultural imagination. Positioned here, the essay forms a conceptual hinge within the issue — bridging Wilczyńska's ethics of identity and Wood's spatial politics—by insisting that before hospitality can be practiced, it is first visualized, and all acts of welcome unfold within these inherited structures of looking.

Shifting our focus from identity politics to spatial hierarchies, Karl Wood's "Hospitality and Exclusion in the Transnational Spa in the Long Nineteenth Century" investigates how spaces of leisure—Saratoga Springs in the United States and Baden-Baden in Germany—served as arenas where hospitality was performed, regulated, and withheld. Despite their ostensible openness, these elite spa resorts functioned as sites of exclusion, reinforcing racial, gender, and class-based distinctions. Wood's comparative approach reveals the paradoxical nature of hospitality in transnational spaces, where ideals of cosmopolitanism and welcome were systematically undermined by rigid social barriers. This article thus extends the discussion of

hospitality beyond the realm of interpersonal interactions and into the very architecture of social institutions.

Continuing this interrogation of hospitality's role in shaping national and cultural identities, Natalia Vysotska's "US Hospitality through the Lens of Chinese American Drama" explores how playwrights such as Genny Lim, David Henry Hwang, and Lloyd Suh have engaged with the contradictions of American hospitality. By situating her analysis within the historical context of anti-Chinese immigration policies, particularly the Chinese Exclusion Act, Vysotska demonstrates how hospitality in the United States has often functioned as a selective and conditional privilege rather than an unqualified right. Through dramatic narratives, she reveals how Chinese American playwrights critique the mechanisms of exclusion, challenge racial stereotypes, and resist the framing of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. Her article highlights the vital role of literature and performance in exposing the camouflaged hostilities embedded within national frameworks of belonging.

While the thematic section of this issue foregrounds hospitality as an explicitly ethical and political problem, the two contributions gathered in the *Varia* section approach questions of inclusion, hierarchy, and access from oblique yet no less revealing angles. In her study of American food television, Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis traces the genre's transformation from postwar pedagogical instruction to contemporary spectacle and prestige streaming. Read through the prism of hospitality, food television emerges as a mediated threshold space: a site where viewers are invited to participate vicariously in practices of consumption, taste, and belonging, while remaining structurally excluded from the labor, material conditions, and inequalities that underwrite them. The shift from instruction to spectacle thus mirrors a broader cultural movement from shared domestic practices toward curated forms of access—where welcome is extended visually and affectively, yet carefully managed and monetized. Food television, in this sense, stages a paradoxical hospitality: one that promises intimacy and inclusion while reinforcing new forms of distance, hierarchy, and gatekeeping.

A different but complementary inversion of hierarchy is explored in Julia Helena Wilde's analysis of Martyn Beardsley's *Sir Gadabout*, where the carnivalesque logic of children's literature allows a nonhuman sidekick—a talking cat—to assume narrative and ethical authority. Wilde's reading situates the text at a playful crossroads between medieval hierarchy and modern subversion, where the rigid structures of feudal order are temporarily suspended through Bakhtinian reversal. Here, hospitality operates not as a social contract between host and guest, but as a narrative openness to the unexpected agent: the figure who does not properly "belong" within the system yet proves indispensable to its functioning. By granting agency to the marginal, the foolish, or the nonhuman, *Sir Gadabout* reveals how spaces of apparent frivolity—children's literature, humor, the carnivalesque—can become discreet laboratories for reimagining power relations. At this crossroads of play and critique, hierarchy is not abolished, but momentarily reconfigured, allowing readers to glimpse alternative orders of value and authority.

The issue concludes with a review by Magdalena Łapińska of Nicole Carr's *Black Feminist Mothering in 21st Century Literature: I Am Not Your Mammy*, which returns the reader to hospitality's

most intimate and ethically charged register: care, refusal, and the politics of relational labor. Łapińska's engagement with Carr's study foregrounds Black feminist mothering as a practice that both offers shelter and draws firm boundaries—an ethics of care that resists exploitation, sentimentalization, and coerced welcome. Positioned at the end of the issue, the review functions as a reflective coda, reminding us that hospitality is never merely about opening doors, but also about deciding when refusal is necessary for survival and dignity. In this sense, the *Review* section itself becomes a crossroads: a space where critical evaluation, ethical responsibility, and scholarly dialogue meet, reinforcing the journal's commitment to attentive, rigorous, and accountable forms of intellectual exchange.

Taken together, these contributions demonstrate the diverse ways in which hospitality and hostipitality manifest across historical, cultural, literary, and media contexts. By weaving together complementary perspectives, this issue of *Crossroads* not only interrogates the ethical and political stakes of hospitality but also reaffirms the journal's long-standing commitment to interdisciplinary and cross-cultural inquiry. Indeed, the thematic focus of the issue resonates deeply with the philosophy of *Crossroads*, whose mission is to foster contrastive, cross-linguistic, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary research across the broad fields of English language studies, linguistics, and Anglophone literatures. Through its multifaceted engagement with hospitality—approached from literary, cultural, historical, and theoretical vantage points—this issue embodies the journal's dedication to expanding scholarly conversations across disciplines, traditions, and borders. The transhistorical and cross-cultural reach of the contributions further reflects *Crossroads*' role as a forum for dialogue between diverse methodologies and academic perspectives, particularly in relation to enduring questions of race, power, identity, and exclusion.

Ultimately, owing to the critical rigor of the contributors' perspectives, this issue—including its *Varia* section and concluding review—invites readers to rethink the role of hospitality in shaping national, cultural, and social identities not only in the American context, but also on a global scale. By bringing together voices from different fields and scholarly traditions, the volume encourages renewed reflection on the ethical imperatives that govern inclusion and exclusion, welcome and refusal, belonging and displacement. In doing so, it affirms *Crossroads* as a space for sustained critical engagement, intellectual exchange, and the ongoing interrogation of the structures that shape our shared human experience—an endeavor whose urgency is difficult to overstate in the present moment.

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Guest Editor

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