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GUESTS, HOSTS, GHOSTS

Towards an ethics of gothic writing

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> I suppose that every big hotel has got its ghosts.
> ~ *Jack Torrance, in Stephen King,* The Shining *(King 2007, 290)*

> There would be no hospitality without the chance of spectrality.
> ~ *Jacques Derrida,* Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas *(Derrida 1999a, 111–12)*

Like many a ghostly fiction before it, Sarah Waters's acclaimed Gothic novel, *The Little Stranger* (2009), turns upon the difference between two competing yet compatible conceptualisations of hospitality. Early in the narrative, the siblings Caroline and Roderick Ayres and their mother, Mrs Ayres, plan to throw a 'little gathering' at Hundreds Hall, their once grand but now somewhat run-down Georgian mansion (Waters 2010, 77), so as to welcome their new neighbours, Peter and Diana Baker-Hyde, to the district of rural Warwickshire. Their intentions are nothing if not hospitable. Caroline and her mother, having meticulously prepared the dilapidated interiors of the old Hall for the reception of the invited guests, anxiously welcome a group that comprises, among a number of other locals, the Baker-Hydes, their young daughter Gillian, Mrs Baker-Hyde's brother Mr Morley, and Dr Faraday, the novel's narrator. Roderick Ayres, however, the son who has served as the 'master of Hundreds' (84) ever since the death of his father several years earlier, has curiously absented himself from the evening's proceedings. Apparently refusing to play the role of gracious host, he has morosely holed himself up in his bedroom, occasioning a conspicuous absence at the heart of the scene that his mother implausibly attempts to explain away to her guests as the consequence of an old war injury. Nonetheless, the music-playing, drinking and conversation in the Saloon at Hundreds proceed until the convivial hum is abruptly ruptured by a 'tearing yelp', a shriek, and 'a single piercing note that sank at once to a thin,

low, liquid wail' (97); while playing quietly in the corner of the room, Gillian, the Baker-Hyde's young daughter, has been savaged by Gyp, the Ayres's hitherto good-natured Labrador. Punctured by so sudden and unforeseen an act of violence, the scene of hospitality rapidly dissipates in a confusion of embarrassed apology, terse exchange and hasty departure.

As subsequent developments in the plot reveal, Roderick has not, in fact, absented himself from the party on the grounds of his anti-social nature alone. Rather, he has been detained by the 'little stranger' of the novel's title, the host and master locked into a ghostly scene of hospitality that is far more challenging, more dangerous and altogether more 'radical' than that at work in the party that Mrs Ayres throws to welcome the newcomers. A law unto itself, the strange and uninvited guest holds Roderick hostage while throwing all 'ordinary' laws of hospitality into utter disarray: '"Most days it doesn't come at all"', he explains, '"But it likes to surprise me, to catch me out. It's just like a sly, spiteful child. It sets traps for me"' (165). Understandably, he is ineradicably altered by this, the first of many encounters with the strange and malevolent spectral energy in Hundreds Hall. Though once 'Lord of the Manor' (193) and the 'master of the estate and its servants' (198), Roderick sees out the remainder of his life in a mental asylum in Birmingham, a pale, unrecognisable spectre of the man that he once was, a veritable stranger to himself. Not insignificantly, however, the initial actions of this 'malevolent thing' (164) or 'vicious presence' (165) temporally coincide with the party in the Saloon. Though Roderick's room is separated from the rest of the house by a number of interior walls, he comes to realise with a mounting sense of horror that Gillian Baker-Hyde 'must have been bitten at just about the time he had been calling out at that vicious presence in his room to leave him alone' (165). Although, from this moment onwards, he keeps to his room in an attempt at localising the 'infection' (165), these precautions prove futile in the face of a violent and disturbing energy that will not be spatially contained, and which, shortly afterwards, begins to wreak destruction throughout the rest of the house. The two conceptualisations of hospitality offered in Waters's novel – the welcome party in the Saloon and the ghostly visitation in Roderick's room, the former ordinary and commonplace, the latter spectral and disruptive – seem to be intimately linked, even inseparable; the dog-attack that ends the dinner-party, it is clear, is a manifestation of the same spectral force or energy that comes to terrorise the household at large.

As I wish to argue in this chapter, Waters's pointed contrasting of two scenes of hospitality in *The Little Stranger* invites consideration through the perspectives on hospitality presented in the later work of Jacques Derrida, a preoccupation that, while implicit in his negotiation of an ethics of spectrality in *Specters of Marx* (1993; trans. 1994), is explicitly addressed in such publications of the late 1990s and early 2000s as *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1995; trans. 1999), *Of Hospitality* (1997; trans. 2000), *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (1997; trans. 2001) and a number of anthologised essays and published interviews. Well beyond *The Little Stranger*, I argue, the Gothic literary aesthetic is a mode that is fundamentally preoccupied

with notions of hospitality, a consideration that situates Waters's novel in a liter-
ary tradition going at least as far back as the late eighteenth century, when writers
habitually appropriated the two 'versions' or 'orders' of hospitality offered up in
Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as the source for their narratives: the rules of 'ordinary' hos-
pitality that are notoriously subject to bloody, murderous violation at Macbeth's
castle, and the Law of absolute hospitality that is figured in the play with the
arrival of the ghost of Banquo at Macbeth's banqueting table in Act III, scene iv.
Behind its characteristic concerns with uninvited guests, murderous hosts and the
manifold haunted spaces of hospitality, I claim, we might identify in the Gothic
an ethics of hospitality that is consonant with Derrida's own, one situated, as it is
for Derrida, in the aporia between two equally impossible possibilities: 'ordinary',
'commonplace' or 'conditional' hospitality, on the one hand, and 'radical', 'abso-
lute', 'unconditional' or 'hyperbolical' hospitality on the other.[1]

Between violence and impossibility

Derrida's approach to the 'problem' of hospitality proceeds by way of a tenta-
tive sketching out of the difference between two ~~different~~ orders, distinguishing
'ordinary' hospitality from 'radical' hospitality, the 'conditional' from the 'uncon-
ditional', the 'commonplace' from the 'hyperbolical' as he proceeds. According to
'traditional' or 'ordinary' understandings of the term, the host invites a stranger
across a threshold so as to extend to him/her the offer of hospitality, in the fashion
of the Ayres family inviting the Baker-Hydes to the welcome party at Hundreds
Hall in *The Little Stranger*, or, to take Derrida's more political example from *Of
Hospitality*, in the manner in which a nation or state extends the 'right' of hos-
pitality to a stranger or foreigner (such as an immigrant or refugee from another
country), offering him or her there the promise of protection, asylum, succour,
safety and comfort. Indeed, that this form of hospitality answers to notions of the
political and its attendant laws (in the plural) is emphasised by Derrida in *Adieu
to Emmanuel Levinas*, a work in which he locates this particular conceptualisa-
tion of 'ordinary' hospitality in Immanuel Kant's discussion of the grounds of the
political peace of the nation-state in his Third Definitive Article, 'Cosmopolitan
Right Shall be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality,' from *To Perpetual
Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795). In contrast with his appropriation of *Hamlet* in
Specters of Marx, Derrida's work on hospitality does not make creative, illustrative
recourse to Shakespearean example or precedent. Nonetheless, it is difficult not to
be reminded of *Macbeth*, particularly those gestures in which Macbeth and his Lady
invite their guest Duncan across the threshold of their castle in an act of apparent
hospitality. Graciously accepting their invitation, Duncan duly regards Macbeth as
'mine host' (I.vi.29) and Lady Macbeth as the 'fair and noble hostess' (I.vi.23), roles
that both parties self-consciously perform for much of the action. To invite strang-
ers or foreigners across a threshold so as to welcome them into a home or nation is
to engage in an act of hospitality in the political, ordinary or commonplace sense
of the term.

From the moment of this initiating gesture, however, this mode of 'ordinary' hospitality, Derrida contends, is compromised by an inescapable violence that is bound up in the problems inherent in language itself. For, ~~to be~~ invited, welcomed and addressed in a tongue that, by definition, is not his own, the foreigner becomes subject to a language that is 'imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc.' (Derrida 2000b, 15). Violence inheres in traditional notions of hospitality in other respects, too, for in choosing, selecting and discriminating between those to whom hospitality may or may not be extended – in logistical terms alone, it is never possible simply to admit everyone – the host enacts a form of sovereignty that is, at its heart, exclusionary (ibid.: 55). Again, the hospitality extended to the unsuspecting Duncan in *Macbeth* is revealing: though he expects to pass the night in Macbeth's castle in peace, he is brutally murdered in his sleep, falling victim at this moment, we might say, to the inescapable violence that lurks beneath the surface of any hospitable act. In Shakespeare's play as in Derrida, 'ordinary' hospitality is a gesture that is founded in hostility as if by a certain tragic inevitability. Derrida foregrounds these more unsettling aspects of hospitality through a characteristic turn towards etymology: the Latin noun *hostis*, from which the English term 'host' derives, means both 'foreigner' or 'stranger' and 'enemy' simultaneously. The act of hospitality is thus troubled by the hostility of a stranger-as-enemy at its heart, a preoccupation that Derrida sums up through his coining of the neologism 'hostipitality': the scene of hospitality has always already been infiltrated by the hostility of the enemy.[2]

If both parties are to commit to it at all, ordinary hospitality and the laws that govern it require that both the host and the guest, the welcoming country and the stranger, be identifiable through, and answerable to, the workings of a proper name. But it is in this very dependence on names that hospitality excludes as a possible guest that which Derrida (following the work of Emmanuel Levinas) terms the absolute other. Under these conditions, hospitality is not, nor ever can be, 'offered to an anonymous new arrival and someone who has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor social status, and who is therefore treated not as a foreigner but as another barbarian' (Derrida 2000b, 25). In the face of the absolute other, these problems of language are only exacerbated; as Derrida argues, the proper name, its use and attribution may only ever misrepresent, silence and violently obscure the singularity and anonymity of the other. Consequently, where the absolute other is concerned, the question of hospitality ('What is your name?') becomes tantamount to a torturous interrogation.

Yet it is precisely towards the field of the absolute other that Derrida's ethical system is oriented. If, in the earlier *Spectres of Marx*, the ethical gesture resides in offering to the ghostly messiah 'without messianism' or 'content' that which Derrida terms a 'hospitality without reserve' (Derrida 1994, 65), ethics in his work more explicitly devoted to hospitality consists in offering to the absolute other an 'absolute or unconditional hospitality' in a form that in all senses 'breaks with hospitality in the ordinary sense, with conditional hospitality, with the right to or

pact of hospitality' (Derrida 2000b, 25). The Shakespearean point of reference, of course, is the unexpected arrival of the ghost of Banquo during the banqueting scene, the point at which the drama opens onto a scene of hospitality that is far more disturbing, radical and extraordinary than that figured in the Macbeths' hosting of Duncan: ['*The GHOST of BANQUO enters, and sits in MACBETH's place*']. If hospitality in the ordinary sense is a political gesture epitomised by Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, so hospitality in this second, more challenging sense is for Derrida to be found in Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, a text that, even if it does not always make use of the term, 'bequeaths to us an immense treatise *of hospitality*' (Derrida 1999a, 21). While ordinary hospitality consists of so many laws (in the plural), radical hospitality directed towards the absolute other answers only to one singular Law: the absolute Law that is an ethical obligation towards, and responsibility for, the other.[3] Thus, if ordinary hospitality is founded upon the violence of the question, absolute hospitality ought to be characterised by a 'double effacement': the 'effacement of the question' ('What is your name?') and of the name itself (Derrida 2000b, 28). Silence would seem to be the inescapable consequence, for to question and to name, Derrida contends, presupposes a subjective 'who' that might respond as such. Radical hospitality, by contrast, extends the offer of hospitality towards an absolute other that is neither capable of being, nor is ever likely to be, the subject of language, law and the proper name.

Unable to name his guest or even to ask a question, the host within this scheme of radical hospitality foregoes the sense of mastery – the mastery of both his self and his domicile – that is crucial to the functioning of hospitality in the ordinary sense of the word, that is, the mastery and self-possession that Derrida sums up in the word 'ipseity' (Derrida 2000b, 53–55). Macbeth's reactions to the arrival of the uninvited guest illustrate this particularly well: slipping into his seat and taking his place at the table, Banquo's ghost, so Lady Macbeth observes, leaves the host 'quite unmann'd in folly' with a pale visage that is 'blanch'd with fear' (III.iv.115). As is also the case with Roderick Ayres in *The Little Stranger*, the host within the field of radical hospitality forfeits the 'sovereignty of oneself over one's home' that is crucial to hospitality in the 'classic sense' (Derrida 2000b, 59). He becomes a mere guest, a ghost, a veritable 'stranger' to himself. With the host becoming hostage, so the guest become a parasite, the correlative of the word 'host'' in another, more disturbing sense, a 'little stranger' or spectral guest who, in Derrida's phrasing, 'is wrong, illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest' (Derrida 2000b, 61).[4]

Indeed, it is in his determination to unsettle the 'ipseity' or 'mastery' of the 'host' that Derrida most distinguishes his account of radical hospitality from the idealism of Kant: according to a certain 'implacable law of hospitality', the mastery of the host is never more than an illusion, for he, too, only ever occupies his home as if he were 'already a *guest* in his own home' (Derrida 1999a, 42). In part, Derrida's argument here is based upon the radical undecidability at play in the modern French word '*hôte*' itself: deriving ultimately from the Old French 'oste'/'hoste', 'hôte' can mean either 'host' (in the masculine) or 'guest' (in the feminine). Signifying both

meanings simultaneously, *hôte* can be translated as *either* 'guest' *or* 'host' only through an act of violence. This equivocation is by no means restricted to the French. In English, too, the words 'guest' and 'host' are etymologically linked, stemming, as they do, from the same Indo-European root, ★*ghosti-s* (guest, stranger), a manifestation of Derridean *différance* that J. Hillis Miller has exploited to ingenious effect in 'The Critic as Host' (Miller 1979).

At first glance, hospitality in this hypothetical or radical sense seems to be as far removed from hospitality in the ordinary or commonplace sense as conceivably possible. While ordinary hospitality its bound up in rights, limits and conditions, absolute or 'pure' hospitality for Derrida is wholly unconditional: emphatically 'without conditions,' this is a hospitality that, contra Kant, is offered to the newcomer 'even if he is not a citizen' (Derrida 1999b, 70). While ordinary hospitality requires that the guest make some return either directly or through a payment in kind, radical hospitality forfeits all relations of reciprocity, for, as Derrida cautions, '[i]f I inscribe the gesture of hospitality within a circle in which the guest should give back to the host, then it is not hospitality but conditional hospitality' (Derrida 1999b, 69). While the one is conditional and reciprocal, the other imposes no bounds. And yet, upon closer consideration, the two orders seem more alike than utterly distinct from one another. Disarming the host's ability to 'host', his mastery, his power to name, to question and to select who – or even what – is admitted to his home, radical hospitality is as fraught with difficulty as the 'ordinary' hospitality with which it is rhetorically juxtaposed. Unravelling the 'ipseity' that is central to any act of 'ordinary' hospitality, the absolute other turns hosts into hostages and guests into parasites, repeating the violence of 'hostipitality' on the figure of the one who receives and welcomes him. Thus, as ethical as this stance might be in principle, an undiscriminating, non-violent 'openness' to the absolute other remains, for Derrida, ultimately unachievable; in a move that is cognate with this theorist's work on mourning and forgiveness elsewhere, Derrida consistently figures radical, absolute hospitality under the sign of 'impossibility'.

Certainly, the emphasis that Derrida, following Levinas, places upon infinity seems to suggest as much, for however ethical our intentions, infinite hospitality, a hospitality without reserve or limits in time, space and numerical calculation, can never be practically achieved as such. Consequently, while it encapsulates Derrida's ethical position, the claim that absolute hospitality 'is granted upon the welcoming of the idea of infinity, and thus of the unconditional', only serves to underscore its unachievability (Derrida 1999a, 48). However, as *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* reminds us, it is precisely the impossibility of sustaining a silent, non-conditional and limitless opening towards the other that grounds the ethical relation. To render it in any sense possible, realisable or achievable would simultaneously be to risk the chance of perverting the field of ethics into a confined, limited and circumscribed system, one that, in the end, turns out to be as violent and threatening towards the absolute other as hospitality in its ordinary sense (Derrida 1999a, 35). The field of pure ethics must always exceed its actualisation if it is to remain ethical at all.

Gothic hospitalities

As Colin Davis has noted, Derrida consistently approaches Levinas's figure of absolute alterity through the figure of the ghost (Davis 2007). The links between an ethics of hospitality, spectrality and absolute alterity become particularly clear in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, in which Derrida argues that, like the host who, as a guest in his own home, has been 'stripped of every ontological predicate', the absolute other is never 'reducible to its actual predicate, to what one might define or thematise about it' (Derrida 1999a, 111). Rather, the Levinasian other, in Derrida's reading, is 'naked, bared of every property', this 'nudity' its 'infinitely exposed vulnerability: its skin' (ibid.). In turn, it is this 'absence of determinable properties, of concrete predicates, of empirical visibility' in and of the other that gives its face what Derrida describes as 'a spectral aura' (ibid.): according to 'a profound necessity', he suggests, the other bears 'at least the face or figure of a spirit of phantom (*Geist*, *ghost*)' (ibid.). Though lacking in ontological presence, the ghost is never simply 'absent'; rather, as Derrida insists throughout his *oeuvre*, the ghost exceeds and calls into question some of the most cherished ontological oppositions of Western metaphysics, including those between absence and presence, being and nothingness, life and death. Capable of giving pardon and orders in the fashion of the ghost of old Hamlet in Shakespeare's play, the spectre, in this sense, is 'God without being, God uncontaminated by being', thus fulfilling Levinas's definition of the Face of the Wholly Other (Derrida 1999a, 112). Recalling the pose advocated in relation to the *arrivant* in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida claims in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* that hospitality in part consists of adopting an attitude of welcome towards the guest as ghost – an attitude of receptiveness that never pauses to reflect on the form that she/he/it might assume. Conceived as a Levinasian other, the guest becomes a ghost; consequently, Derrida in an evocative turn of phrase asserts that '[t]here would be no hospitality without the chance of spectrality' (Derrida 1999a, 111–12). Although the word 'ghost' derives not from *★ghosti-s* but from a different Indo–European root, *★gheiz-d* (shocked, aghast, confused), Derrida exploits the aural and orthographic proximities between *Gast* and *Gastgeber*, the modern German words for 'guest' and 'host' respectively, as well as notions of the ghostly: '*Host* or *guest* [in English], *Gastgeber* or *Gast*, the *hôte* would be not only a hostage. It would have, according to a profound necessity, at least the face or figure of a spirit or phantom (*Geist*, *ghost*)' (Derrida 1999a, 111).

To wait without waiting, to await without a 'horizon of anticipation' the arrival of a ghostly visitor that, in a moment of absolute surprise, unsettles the host to the point of 'madness' (Derrida 2000a, 362): there is, indeed, something inherently Gothic about Derrida's programme of radical hospitality. Well beyond the metaphors of ghostliness, Derrida's ethics of hospitality seems to rely upon a number of emotional affects that, ever since the late eighteenth century, we have come to associate specifically with the Gothic aesthetic, the supernatural literature of horror and terror that arose in Britain with the publication of Horace Walpole's

The Castle of Otranto in late 1764. In principle, of course, the arrival of the other ought always to be met with a smile (Derrida 2002, 358). Compromised by any trace of anger, sadness or obligation on the host's side, the field of radical hospitality should ideally be characterised by a certain degree of mirth, that 'happy' and 'joyous' scene of laughter, smiles and also, conceivably, tears (of joy, of deliverance) to which Derrida so poetically refers (Derrida 2002, 359). However, that these responses are difficult to sustain in reaction to what is likely to be the ghostly other's abrupt and unsettling arrival only serves further to underline the impossibility of absolute hospitality. For if the visitation of the other ought always to remain of the order of the 'unforeseen, unforeseeable [*imprévu, imprévisible*], unpredictable, unexpected and unpredictable, unwarranted [*inattendu*]' (Derrida 2002, 381), it follows that such an arrival is more likely to be met with shock and disruption than smiles, mirth and laughter. As Derrida puts it, if one is to say 'yes' to the uninvited visitor, if one is indeed 'to let oneself be swept by the coming of the wholly other' who is always unexpected and absolutely unforeseen and unforeseeable, one has to lay oneself open to the possibility of a certain discomfort (Derrida 2002, 361). In itself, unconditional hospitality is 'terrible' and 'unbearable' insofar as it breaks with relations of reciprocity, suspends the host's powers of identification and unsettles his mastery (Derrida 1999b, 70). More than this, unconditional hospitality always hovers precariously on the brink of horror and terror since, in refusing to discriminate between those who are and those who are not to be admitted, it always includes within itself the possibility of entertaining a guest that is demonic in nature (Derrida 1999b, 71). The ghostly other, that is, might well take the form of a malevolent spirit, as it does in *The Little Stranger*; yet if absolute hospitality is to be 'absolute' in any meaningful sense, it must remain open to the possibility of entertaining pure evil. A system of ghostliness that is generative of certain 'terrible', 'unbearable' and madness-inducing responses, radical hospitality is potentially Gothic in its effects and affects.

The effulgence of the Gothic in the later eighteenth century coincided historically with the rise of a pervasive political ideology that was structured around the Kantian theme of Universal Hospitality. Following the increasingly anti-clerical turn of events in revolutionary France, and in 1792 the imposition of a new civic oath that required all members of the clergy to swear allegiance to revolutionary principles upon the pain of exile to Guiana, French Catholic clerics fled the country for Britain and other parts of continental Europe in large numbers (Purves 2009, 32). By September 1792, Maria Purves points out, some 1,500 French priests had entered England, with numbers rising to around 5,000 in little more than a year (ibid.). Seizing the opportunity to express his distaste for the Revolution as much as his humanitarian concern for the plight of the French émigrés, Edmund Burke anonymously published his 'Case of the Suffering Clergy of France' in *The Times* on 18 September 1792, articulating a nationwide appeal to Protestant Britons to extend the possibility of refuge, comfort and asylum to the Catholic other: 'They are here under the sacred protection of hospitality – Englishmen, who cherish the virtue of hospitality, and who do

not wish an hard and scanty construction of its laws, will not think it enough that such Guests are in safety from the violence of their own countrymen, while they perish from our neglect' (Burke 1792, 3). Burke was not alone in these concerns. Frances Burney, for example, expressed a rousing call for the extension of national hospitality towards the persecuted French clergy in her *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793), while John Moir rephrased the largely secular views of Burke and Burney in more orthodox Christian terms in his *Hospitality: A Discourse Occasioned by Reading His Majesty's Letter in Behalf of the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793). Similar views were expressed by Hannah More as well as preached from several pulpits across the country. In these and other forums, eighteenth-century Britons were frequently urged to engage and extend a national English or 'Gothic' tradition of hospitality towards French-Catholic others.

And yet, when situated beside such national calls to action, early Gothic writing seems to be the most inhospitable of literary modes; notoriously anti-Catholic in orientation, the Gothic offers the Catholic other anything but a hospitable place of refuge.[5] Instead, the Gothic at its most characteristic is given over to the spectacular exposure and punishment of Catholic indiscretion, not least in the cruel, torturous deaths of Father Ambrosio and the Prioress of St Clare in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk; A Romance* (1796). While Burke, Burney and other advocates of the Catholic cause put their sentimental descriptions of the violence that revolutionaries had aroused against Catholics to work in the interest of evoking British sympathies, Gothic writing stages and exacerbates this violence as a means of punishing and expelling the foreign other, the Catholic Priest, Abbess or Father who, it is feared, poses a threat to everything that the nation cherishes about itself. Gothic fiction of the 1790s, we might say, systematically infringes the cultural and political 'laws' on hospitality towards the Catholic other with which it was contemporary.

Well beyond its treatment of Catholics, early Gothic fiction often depends upon the staged violation of the code and practice of hospitality in its ordinary sense, an aspect of the mode, I would suggest, that derives more often than not from appropriations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), for instance, the heroine Ellena di Rosalba is abducted from the chapel of San Sebastian and taken to the ruined house of Spalatro (the accomplice of the arch-villain Father Schedoni), which is remotely situated somewhere on the Italian coast. In a climactic scene epigraphically framed by Macbeth's words from the closing lines of Act I – 'I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat' (I.vii.80–81) – Schedoni and Spalatro intend to put into action their plan to execute Ellena while she sleeps. The dialogue that ensues between the executioners directly replays that between Macbeth and his Lady concerning their plan to kill the slumbering Duncan. '"The bloody hand is always before me!"' the anxious Spalatro exclaims as he tries to communicate his guilt-induced visions to Schedoni (Radcliffe 1968, 230). Dismissing Spalatro's fears as mere folly, Schedoni's reply echoes Lady Macbeth's questioning of her husband's masculine revolve during the

banquet scene: "'[W]here is this frenzy of fear to end? To what are these visions, painted in blood, to lead? I thought I was talking with a man, but find I am speaking only to a baby, possessed with his nurse's dreams!'" (230). However, Schedoni too will come to experience the wavering resolve of a Macbeth when, dagger poised above the breast of the slumbering heroine, he misrecognises her as his child and fails to carry through the assassination. The tension at this point in Radcliffe's narrative derives from Shakespeare's bloody violation of the laws of hospitality in *Macbeth*.

As though it has encountered in hospitality traces of the same 'hostipitality' identified by Derrida, early Gothic fiction turns to negotiate hospitality in another, more radical sense. Here too, though, the Gothic consistently suggests that the gesture of radical hospitality, an undiscriminating openness to the arrival of an uninvited spectral guest, is beset by all manner of insurmountable difficulties. If the ghost is indeed a figure of absolute otherness, its unannounced and unexpected arrival is registered in the Gothic as an experience of unbearable terror, to the extent that the spectre can never be permanently welcomed in the Gothic text, but must rather be subjected ~~only~~ to a hasty and robust strategy of exorcism. Again, Lewis's *The Monk* epitomises this process. Framed by an epigraph taken from Macbeth's response to the appearance of Banquo's ghost, the second volume recounts the story of the ghost of the Bleeding Nun, the apparition of one Beatrice las Cisternas that, as local legend has it, returns to haunt the Castle of Lindenberg in Germany on the 5th of May of every fifth year. Seeking to escape her imprisonment in the Castle so that she may rendezvous and elope with her lover Don Raymond, the young heroine Agnes proposes to disguise herself as the ghost of the Bleeding Nun on the approaching night of its return. With the plan going disastrously awry, Don Raymond is left in the embrace not of his lover but of the ghostly arms of the Bleeding Nun herself, a spectral figure of otherness that, in a reworking of Gottfried August Bürger's ballad 'Lenore' (1774), unveils herself before the unsuspecting suitor in a moment of absolute, unspeakable horror (Lewis 2004, 155). Unseen by anyone other than Raymond, she is an unwelcome and uninvited guest that, like the ghost of Banquo, 'unmans' the startled host and reduces him to his 'second infancy' (157). Although the ghost is eventually laid to rest through a combination of proper burial and the occult rituals of the Wandering Jew, Lewis's inset tale foregrounds the impossibility of hospitality in its absolute or radical sense; the unanticipated arrival of an uninvited spectral guest is likely to occasion the experience of unbearable terror, the charge of which can be dissipated only by a magical act of expulsion.

Ordinary hospitality results in bloodshed and radical hospitality ends in exorcism. Yet the early Gothic assumes its ethical potential precisely through its tireless vacillation between the two orders of hospitality, the ordinary and the spectral, that it finds realised in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. I shall return to this paradox later, but for the moment it is worth turning to some of the key Gothic fictions of the nineteenth century in order to consider how later writers extended the

earlier tradition's preoccupations with hospitality in both its ordinary and absolute senses, often founding narratives in the complex place of indecision between them. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), for instance, constantly juxtaposes the commonplace welcoming of strangers across thresholds with scenes of hospitality towards ghostly or spectral visitors. "'I don't keep accommodations for visiters [*sic*]'", Heathcliff brusquely replies when, detained at the Heights owing to the inclement turn in the weather, Lockwood requires of him a night's lodging. "'Guests are so exceedingly rare in this house'", he continues, "'that I and my dogs, I am willing to own, hardly know how to receive them'" (Brontë 2009, 5). Such pointed displays of inhospitality, however, are contrasted with the gestures of unlimited, unconditional and absolute hospitality that Heathcliff offers to the ghost of Cathy. "'Come in! come in!'", he sobs at the open window, "Cathy, do come. Oh do – *once* more! Oh! my heart's darling, hear me *this* time – Catherine, at last!'" (24). As he reneges on the human, so his gestures towards the field of the ghostly become more exaggerated. However, when the spectral guest eventually arrives, this results in the host's loss of mastery to the point of an eclipse of subjectivity and death.

While the ghosts of Victorian Gothic are central to the mode's preoccupations, it is, of course, primarily through the figure of the vampire that nineteenth-century writers explored notions of hospitality, hostility and literal or symbolic forms of parasitism. Here too, the narrative interplay between two opposing but interlinked orders of hospitality is paramount. In Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' (1871–1872), for instance, the laws of ordinary hospitality at the Austrian castle of Laura and her father are mobilised with the unexpected arrival of a beautiful young woman, who is involved in a carriage accident in the nearby woods when apparently travelling with her mother. Sympathetic to her plight, Laura and her father act in accordance with the codes 'which hospitality indicated' (Le Fanu 1970, 20), bidding their guest 'welcome'; Laura expresses 'how much pleasure her accidental arrival had given us all, and especially what a happiness it was to me' (20). With her curious habits and demands, however, it soon becomes clear that this guest is anything but ordinary. But, as Le Fanu's text is keen to emphasise, she is more than merely a 'bad' guest; in refusing to disclose her full name, her familial origins or the country from which she originates, this stranger is a figure of absolute alterity that opens up the scene of hospitality at the castle to something far more extreme and unsettling. Frustrating the nominal identification upon which the act of ordinary hospitality depends, this unfathomable guest is known by a plurality of names, including Carmilla, Marcia Karnstein, Millarca and Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. Her ever-changing physicality is equally resistant to classification, as she mutates from a beautiful young woman into 'a monstrous cat' (37), 'a beast in a cage' (37), a 'black creature' (67) and a dark shapeless form across the narrative. "'The precautions of nervous people are infectious'", Laura observes, as she too begins to manifest the guest's strange behaviours (37). In reality, this guest is a blood-sucking vampire, exploiting Laura's position as 'host' in a much more sinister sense, for as a parasite she will feed upon her host. "'I live in your

warm life, and you shall die – die, sweetly die into mine'" (25), Carmilla sweetly croons, as Laura becomes languid, melancholy and as pale as a ghost. The host has been taken hostage, the practice of hospitality perverted into a dangerous, parasitic hostility between host and guest. Like *The Monk*, Le Fanu's narrative ends on a note of expulsion. Eventually tied to, and identified with, one single proper name, Mircalla, Countess Karnstein is traced back to her tomb in the ruined Chapel of Karnstein; following ritualised, magical prayers of delivery and exorcism, the 'perfidious and beautiful guest' is killed (70) by a stake through the heart, her body decapitated and burned. While it continues to throw the patriarchal structures of language, nationality, subjectivity and desire into disarray, the narrative suggests that the absolute other may not comfortably or easily become the subject of any act of hospitality.

Similar assumptions are set in place during the final moments of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), in which the vampiric Count is finally defeated by the wily Crew of Light after a tense game of hide-and-seek. Stoker's novel derives its force, in part, from a concerted interrogation of received conceptualisations of hospitality, illustrating the ease with which the positions of 'guest' and 'host' constantly shift and change place, while amplifying the 'hostility' by which all acts of hospitality in the novel seem to be characterised. It is through the subject-position of 'guest' that the vampire achieves his most deadly effects in Stoker's fiction: as vampire mythology has it, Dracula may only cross the threshold of the bourgeois home and psyche once he has been invited in, either deliberately (in the invocations of the delusional Renfield) or unwittingly (through the carelessness of Lucy and Mina). Even though his hosts are reluctant to acknowledge it, in England the Transylvanian stranger always plays the role of the invited guest; as in 'Carmilla', though, the vampiric guest in *Dracula* rapidly turns parasitic upon its hosts, rendering their blood-drained bodies and selves almost indistinguishable from ghosts. Though Dracula ends his life as a guest, it is as a host, we remember, that he first sets out, not least in the fragment 'Dracula's Guest', the deleted first chapter of Stoker's novel that was posthumously published in 1914. "'Welcome to my house!"' the Count disingenuously proclaims as Jonathan Harker first enters the castle, "'Enter freely. Go safely; and leave something of the happiness you bring!"' (Stoker 1998, 46). Although Harker is at this moment struck by the 'light and warmth and the Count's courteous welcome' (47), he is, in effect, little more than the 'prisoner' that he later acknowledges himself as being (57). Despite appearances to the contrary, hostility has already infiltrated the guest/host relation as the host holds the guest hostage. When Dracula reveals to Jonathan the cold and inhospitable reaches beyond the castle door, taunting him with a paraphrase of Alexander Pope's translation of the *Odyssey* that reads "'Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest"' (81), hospitality is revealed for what it is: little more than a quotable poetic adage that thinly masks a system of more violent and bloodthirsty intent.

Thus the two poles or orders of hospitality come to structure and determine much Gothic writing of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. With the publication

of Wilkie Collins's *The Haunted Hotel: A Mystery of Modern Venice* in 1878, the Gothic is relocated to the hospitable spaces of nineteenth-century modernity, in this instance a Venetian Palace-turned-Hotel that is haunted by the ghostly head of a man who was once murdered there. Ordinary hospitality in the novella is troubled, compromised and threatened by a spectral death's-head that not only vexes the comfort of the hotel's other occupants, but whose anterior presence in the hotel also makes the host and proprietor himself a guest. While the inhabitants of hotels and inns continue to pay for their food and lodgings, the forms of hospitality that they enjoy there can only ever be bound by conditional relations of reciprocity and exchange.

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ghost story, too, often details the horrors and terrors attendant upon the arrival of an uninvited, spectral guest, as if to stress the impossibility of hospitality in its absolute, unconditional sense. In the short fictions of writers such as M. R. James and Algernon Blackwood, these encounters with spectres often take place in spaces of 'ordinary' hospitality, such as the Globe Inn, the seaside guesthouse in James's "'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad'", or the spectral room in the Golden Lion Hotel in 'Number 13' from *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904). Further examples include the hotel room in the mountains that is haunted by the ghost of a suicide in Algernon Blackwood's 'The Occupant of the Room' (1909), as well as the hired rooms and apartments that feature in some of the stories collected in Blackwood's *The Empty House, and Other Ghost Stories* (1906) and *The Listener, and Other Stories* (1907). Edith Nesbit in her turn puts the haunted spaces of hospitality to particularly horrific use in her story of the throat-slitting ghost that appears in the shaving mirror in a room of 'a certain commercial hotel' (Nesbit 2006, 211) in the story 'Number 17' (1910), while in May Sinclair's 'Where Their Fire Is Not Quenched' from *Uncanny Stories* (1923), the ghosts of two unfaithful lovers return incessantly to the Hotel Saint Pierre, occupying the very room (Number 107) in which they once spent an unfulfilling holiday when alive. Undercutting the presumed 'homeliness' of hotel rooms, inns, hired lodgings and rented accommodation with a sense of the 'unhomely', these and other ghost stories in this tradition render hospitality a thoroughly uncanny affair: hospitality in its ordinary sense – the welcoming and entertainment of guests – is by no means the simple matter that it first appears to be. At the very least, it is always violently excluding of a ghostly guest who cannot or does not pay, whose name, because it is often nameless, has not been entered on any hotel register, but who nonetheless inhabits the room. The uninvited, unseen guest in these stories displaces the scene of hospitality into a different register; yet the entertaining of ghostly visitors – the extension of absolute hospitality towards a spectral other – is a gesture so fraught with discomfort that it is impossible to achieve anywhere but in the *frissons* of the ghost story.

Three key fictions of the twentieth century reaffirm the tireless shuttling between hospitality in the ordinary and the absolute senses that, as I have argued, has been characteristic of the Gothic mode since the late eighteenth century.

Drawing upon the Gothic tendency to render abbeys, convents, hotels, inns and other conventional spaces of hospitality as sites of horror and danger, Robert Bloch's *Psycho* (1959) transports Gothic convention to a remote American motel. Arriving at the Bates Motel on that fateful stormy night, Mary Crane is surprised to discover conversation, food and other gestures of welcome. "'And thanks for the hospitality'" (Bloch 2013, 35), she cheerfully calls out to Norman, her seemingly kind and thoughtful host, as she makes her way from the kitchen of the adjoining house to her lodgings. This comment only amplifies the horror of the scene in which, shortly afterwards, Norman brutally murders her, a bloody violation of the laws of hospitality immortalised in the iconic shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 filmic version of Bloch's novel. A replaying of *Macbeth* this undoubtedly is, for as in Shakespeare's play, this murder has been masterminded, or so the delusional Norman believes, by his mother, an avatar of the redoubtable Lady Macbeth. As his psychosis intensifies, so the 'unsex'd' Norman seems to become his mother, washing his own hands as if to cleanse himself of guilt, and musing to himself, "'A regular Lady Macbeth. Shakespeare had known a lot about psychology'" (96).

William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971) explores the impossibility of hospitality in its absolute sense through a powerful and disturbing account of demonic possession. Invaded by a malevolent spirit, the twelve-year-old Regan MacNeil plays host against her will to an unwanted and uninvited spectral guest. To open oneself up to the absolute other, the fiction implies, is to court the dangers of possession. As life-threatening as it is impossible, Regan's act of radical hospitality has to be counteracted by a system of faith and an act of exorcism in which the Host, here the bread that is also the body of Christ, plays a significant role. As concretised in the title of John Ajvide Lindqvist's more recent vampire fiction, the modern Gothic often cautions readers to 'Let the Right One In', cultivating an attitude towards strangers that, though seemingly sensible, is always in danger of excluding the absolute other from the ethical field. As Derrida reminds us, an ethics of hospitality ought always to remain open to the possibility of entertaining pure evil: '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' (Derrida 1999b, 71). Modern Gothic repeatedly explores the horrors and terrors attendant upon this position. Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977) brings commonplace and radical hospitality to bear in the story of Jack Torrance, a man who, like Blatty's Regan, is possessed by the spirit of the past, although in one of modernity's hospitable spaces, the isolated Overlook Hotel. In King's novel, Jack's unquestioning openness towards the other results in violence, alcoholism, attempted homicide and an irreversible descent into madness. At the Overlook Hotel, ordinary hospitality is constantly disrupted by the ghosts of those guests who have previously lived and died there: the murdered daughters of the former landlord Grady, the ghostly revellers in the Ball Room, the bloated body of the suicide in the bathroom of Room 217. As Jack observes, "'I suppose that every big hotel has got its ghosts'" (King 2007, 290), sounding a

note that chimes aptly with Derrida's account of the centrality of ghosts to any ethical encounter. The young, supernaturally gifted Danny's predicament in the novel lies in his ability to see the failure and impossibility of hospitality in both senses, a failure and impossibility that for him clearly spell violence, murder, suicide and bloodshed.

The step towards hospitality

In this way, examples proliferate across the Gothic tradition. Caught between limitation, exclusion and violence, on the one hand, and ghostly impossibility on the other, Gothic textuality tirelessly returns to explore two orders of hospitality that are cognate with those outlined in Jacques Derrida's own 'Gothic' reflections on the subject. Finding solutions to the problem of hospitality in neither term, the Gothic consistently points to that difficult, paradoxical 'hiatus' (Derrida 1999a, 20) or 'abyss' (Derrida 2001, 54) between them. For neither ordinary nor radical hospitality, Derrida shows, can exist without its counterpart. Although the laws of ordinary hospitality can only ever 'pervert' the Law of pure hospitality, they remain necessary if absolute hospitality is to have any purchase beyond the realm of pure philosophical abstraction (Derrida 2001, 22–23). By the same token, ordinary hospitality requires hospitality in its absolute sense as an ethical ideal towards which it may aspire, for '[i]t is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law, and of knowing if this improvement is possible within an historical space' (Derrida 2001, 22–23). As such, ordinary and absolute hospitality in the Gothic are 'irreconcilable' yet 'indissociable' (Derrida 2001, 45) entities, notions that are at once 'contradictory, antimonic, *and* inseparable' (Derrida 2000b, 81). Though the one is problematic and the other impossible, both poles are necessary in what can only ever be a step 'towards' an ethics of hospitality.

This is the step that that Gothic has always already taken. Playing on the doubleness of the French word '*pas*' as both 'step' and a negative adverb in the French phrase '*pas d'hospitalité*', Derrida claims that to take a step in the direction of hospitality is also to cancel out the terms of its existence (Derrida 2000b, 75–77). Even as we offer political, ordinary or commonplace hospitality to a stranger according to certain culturally codified laws, we fall foul of the absolute Law of hospitality that is pure ethics itself; similarly, even as we heed this absolute Law, we risk violating and infringing the cultural laws on which ordinary hospitality is based. Gothic writing works in, and through, similar complexities: figuring ordinary hospitality as an act of violence and absolute hospitality as an experience of the impossible, it returns its readers to the restless, aporetic space of ethics between them. For, as the sheer persistence of the scenes, themes and spaces of hospitality in the Gothic suggests, to remain inactive and altogether to ignore the call to hospitality is no alternative at all. Rather, an ethics of hospitality in the Gothic resides in a Derridean *aporia*, 'the non-road, the barred way, the non-passage' (Derrida 2000a, 13) that, however fraught the journey, remains the only way forward. 'For

me', Derrida maintains, the *aporia* of the non-way 'is not simply paralysis' but the very 'condition of walking: if there was no *aporia* we wouldn't walk, we wouldn't find our way; path-breaking implies *aporia*. This impossibility to find one's way is the condition of ethics' (Derrida 1999b, 73). To offer hospitality even as we cancel it out, to take the step of hospitality even as, in this very gesture, we acknowledge each step's perverting effects: a Gothic ethics of hospitality is implicated in the 'non-dialectizable [*non-dialectisable*] tension' (Derrida 2002, 362) or 'insoluble antinomy' between the Law of absolute hospitality and its multiple conditions and laws (Derrida 2000b, 77).

Notes

1 For an alternative reading of hospitality in the Gothic, one that deploys Derridean insights, but does not locate the ethics of hospitality in the impasse between the 'ordinary' and the 'radical', see Watkiss (2012).
2 Elaborating upon the notion of 'hostipitality' in his essay of the same name, Derrida claims that, like the English word 'hospitality', the German term '*Hospitalität*' is 'a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitised by its opposite, "hostility", the undesirable guest [hôte] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body' (Derrida 2000a, 3).
3 Ultimately, though, Derrida continues, the ethics of absolute hospitality remains as heterogeneous to notions of law as pure Justice itself: 'Just hospitality', Derrida reasons, 'breaks with hospitality by right'; while it is not necessarily opposed to this version, 'it is as strangely heterogeneous to it as justice is heterogeneous to the law to which it is as yet so close, from which in truth it is indissociable' (Derrida 2000b, 25–27).
4 Despite my conflation of the 'stranger' and Levinas's absolute other in this reading of *The Little Stranger*, it is important to bear in mind that, in designating the other as a stranger, one has already, in a sense, limited and circumscribed its otherness by defining and conceptualising it in relation to the structures of family, nation, state and citizenship. As Derrida contends in 'Hostipitality', 'if one determines the other as stranger, one is already introducing the circles of conditionality that are family, nation, state, and citizenship' (Derrida 2000a, 8). The other, by contrast, might well exceed these structures: 'Perhaps there is an other who is still more foreign than the one whose foreignness cannot be restricted to foreignness in relation to language, family, or citizenship' (Derrida 2000a, 8).
5 The anti-Catholic nature of the Gothic has long been a subject of scholarship in the field; for a recent and comprehensive account, see Diane Long Hoeveler (2014).

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