

# Hos(pi)Tes:

## Hospitality, Hostility, and the “perils of intimacy” across Cultures



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TRIESTE

Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici



AIA

Associazione italiana di Anglistica

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MS Teams link diretto (consigliato  
Chrome)

[https://disu.units.it/it/eventi/  
45877](https://disu.units.it/it/eventi/45877)

9:45  
Apertura dei lavori:

Prof. Elisabetta Vezzosi  
Direttrice del Dipartimento di Studi  
Umanistici, DiSU, Università di  
Trieste

Prof. Carlo M. Bajetta  
(Università della Valle d'Aosta),  
Presidente AIA, Associazione  
Italiana di Anglistica

Chair: Roberta Gefter

10:00-10.40

Marilena Parlati (Università di  
Padova)

Singing the Body Exceptional:  
Figuring and Hosting the 'Gift' of  
Life

10.40-11.10:

Barbara Franchi (University of  
Newcastle, UK)

Hospitality as Maternity, Labour  
and Memory in Sarah Moss's Fiction

11.10-11.20: Break

Chair: Carlo M. Bajetta

11.20-12.00

Sabrina Francesconi (Università  
degli Studi di Trento)

Multimodal Hospitality in Tourism  
Discourse

12.00-12.30: Lucia La Causa  
(Università di Catania)

Egypt: hospitable or hostile towards  
English?

12.30-13.00 Discussion

Lunch Break

Chair: Silvia Antosa

15.00-15.40

Roberta Gefter Wondrich  
(Università di Trieste)

The perils of intimacy, treacherous  
hospitality and the inversion of  
tradition in A.S. Byatt's "Morpho  
Eugenia"

15.40-16.10:

Eleonora Natalia Ravizza  
(Università di Bergamo)

Dialogism and Poetic hospitality in  
Bhanu Kapil's "How to Wash a  
Heart"

16.10: Discussion and concluding  
remarks

## ABSTRACTS

**Marilena Parlati (Università di Padova)**  
**“Singing the Body Exceptional: Figuring and Hosting the 'Gift' of Life”**

I take my cue for this talk from Christine Battersby's discussion on “fleshy metaphysics” and the way in which, as she contends, the body of “woman” has been construed in many of Western theories and practices as “phenomenal”, as both “astonishing, peculiar... [and] a surface deviation” (Battersby, 1998, p. 1). Battersby, like many other thinkers and artists, has also inquired into the “phenomenality” of natality, of the self-and-but-other-than-self body during gestation and the relational complexities which are at stake in this enactment. I will use a phenomenological approach to read through this double phenomenality, to sound the depths of embodied hospitality by discoursing with and about literary and artistic works which have taken the prenatal (but with some forays into post-birth time) relation very seriously. I will start with references to early modern ‘mothers’ legacies’ – in the form of epistles dedicated to the child-to-be by pregnant mothers – to leap into contemporary times thanks to poems by Judith Wright (among others) and to a recent novel by I. McEwan, *Nutshell* (2016).

**Barbara Franchi, University of Newcastle, UK**  
**Hospitality as Maternity, Labour and Memory in Sarah Moss's Fiction**

The tension between motherhood as a woman's individual choice and the maternal as the metaphorical ‘hospitable welcome par excellence’ (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, translated by Alphonso Lingis 1969, 155) risks reducing female hospitality to an essentialist view of femininity, while establishing a gendered divide between subjects of hospitality. By portraying women aiming to reconcile their professional ambitions with their experiences of motherhood, instead, contemporary novelist Sarah Moss expands

the scope of female hospitality so as to include the labour of care and strategies of memorialisation within this discourse.

How does hospitality cross the boundaries between the private and the public dimensions of life? How do women claim ownership over their acts of material and maternal hospitality to turn them into feminist strategies? As this paper argues, Moss's neo-Victorian novels *Night Waking* (2011), *Bodies of Light* (2014) and *Signs for Lost Children* (2015) focus on three women's efforts to forge a life of the mind and find professional fulfilment by taking their caring duties outside of the domestic sphere.

In particular, I will examine how the protagonist of *Night Waking*, mother of two and historian Anna Bennett, charts a long-lost history of female silence and child mortality on a small Scottish island and establishes, through her research, the empathy of memory while fighting the sleep deprivation that comes with parenting. In *Bodies of Light* and *Signs for Lost Children*, Victorian socialist philanthropist Elizabeth Moberly and her daughter Alethea, a pioneering woman doctor who eventually marries and has a child of her own, use their work at the service of the poor and the sick to reclaim hospitality as a feminist tool towards their individual emancipations. Ultimately, by caring for vulnerable bodies, minds, and texts, at home as well as outside, Moss's protagonists redefine hospitality beyond the material and theoretical constraints of the maternal, towards an active subjectivity defined by individual agency and transcending gender.

**Sabrina Francesconi (Università degli Studi di Trento)**

**“Multimodal Hospitality in Tourism Discourse”**

The semantic tension revealed by the etymology of the term ‘hospitality’ (AIA 2021 Seminar Call for Papers) finds a visual correlate in the painting *Rooms for Tourists* by Edward Hopper. Set in Massachusetts, the 1945 artwork depicts the exterior of a boarding house, a privileged site of hospitality. A sign

indicates that rooms are being offered and a path is lit in the front garden. Yet, light contrasts operate as the pivotal semiotic system: the exterior environment pervaded by the darkness of night; the interior electrically lit. The overall uncanny lighting foregrounds the invisibility/absence of human beings and generates, in the viewer, feelings of disconnection. Acknowledging this ambiguity, this presentation explores how the language of hospitality is being exploited by the “hospitality industry” in modern history (McNulty, 2007: viii), for promotional purposes: while shaping intimacy, it reveals separation.

In order to realise their promotional function and turn readers into tourists, tourism texts stage an interpersonal relation with a human target they multimodally position and address (Maci, 2020). As a matter of fact, visual-verbal intersemiosis operates, in printed and electronic tourism texts, at both the emotional and cognitive levels to capture and hold the viewer’s attention and make the promotional message pleasant and memorable (Francesconi, 2014: 6). At the verbal level, numerous genres ‘single out’ potential holidaymakers through “ego-targeting techniques” (Dann, 1996: 185ff) and promise ‘tailor-made experiences’. However, target-naming strategies avoid ‘touristy’ terms, preferring lexemes with positive connotations from the semantic field of hospitality, such as ‘visitor’ or ‘guest’. Complimentary visuals deploy close-ups with frontal and eye-level angles, as well as warm light, in order to reduce social distance and shape an interpersonal relation of intimacy and equality (Kress & van Leeuwen, [1996] 2006: Ch. 4). My argument is that, embedded within tourism discourse, multimodally shaped hospitality loses its ethical legacy and becomes a strategy of ideological and social manipulation

**Lucia La Causa, Università di Catania**

### **“Egypt: hospitable or hostile towards English?”**

English exercises a very strong influence in Egypt where it plays the role of ‘power language’ (Schneider, 2011:136; Mollin, 2006: 18). Indeed, it was the language of colonisers during British colonialism and it is today the current Lingua Franca (ELF) for international communications. English allows Egyptians to get a better life (Schneider, 2011: 196) ‘forcing’ them to learn English if they wish to obtain a higher socio-cultural and economic position in society. The strong need they have for a language which is not their own, is generating, at the same time, favourable and hostile feelings among Egyptian English speakers. This paper, which is part of a wider research project, aims at analysing the sociolinguistic reasons for the ambiguous behaviours of Egyptian English speakers towards English focusing on the hostility and/or acceptability of its linguistic influences in Egypt. The key question is whether Egypt can be considered a ‘hospitable’ or a ‘hostile’ host of the English language. My study stems from sociolinguistic analysis and an infield research, which includes the use of some ethnographic instruments, like questionnaires and interviews to a sample of Egyptian English speakers bearing in mind the diastratic, diatopic, diamesic and diaphasic linguistic variabilities. More specifically, an interview has been made to a little sample of Egyptian young boys and girls belonging to different social classes from Cairo, Luxor and Sohag in order to analyse the speakers’ attitude towards English as a guest in Egypt.

**Roberta Geftter Wondrich, Università di Trieste**

### **“The perils of intimacy, treacherous hospitality and the inversion of tradition in A.S. Byatt’s “Morpho Eugenia”**

I consider the conceptual standpoint and the narrative strategies with which A.S.Byatt’s novella “Morpho Eugenia”, published in *Angels and Insects*(1992) engages

with the literary tradition of hospitality, from Homeric parallels through the nineteenth-century novel's interest in self-identity and the recognition of otherness. The novella reworks some crucial tropes of hospitality such as the visit to the family house, the perils and threats to personal identity that come with the crossing of the threshold of hospitality, and the relationship with the other in the (conditional) hospitality that is experienced by the protagonist as a foreigner and stranger, by framing them in an epistemological dimension defined by the mid-Victorian problematic interrelation of science and religion. I will thus examine this text as a case study that engages with all the cornerstones of the contemporary conceptualization of hospitality - the impossibility of its unconditionality, the contiguity between hospitality and hostility, the inequity between guest and host/inclusion and exclusion - by means of an inversion of the traditional tropes of the stranger in the house and a subtle representation of the female hostess as the internal other (Mc Nulty).

"Morpho Eugenia" expands on the concerns of neo-Victorianism by foregrounding the theme of hospitality in discourses that are central to the Victorian novel and to contemporary re-interpretations of Victorian culture. In light of this, I will assess the importance of this work in the context of late twentieth-century English fiction as a neo-Victorian reimagining of the nineteenth-century world that is receptive to a post-structuralist questioning of notions of hospitality precisely by interrogating and renewing those traditional tropes.

**Eleonora Natalia Ravizza (Università di Bergamo)**

**"Dialogism and Poetic hospitality in Bhanu Kapil's "How to Wash a Heart"**

Awarded with the T.S Eliot Prize in 2020, Bhanu Kapil's poetry collection "How to Wash a Heart" features an imaginary conversation between an immigrant guest and a citizen host. Issues of otherness/identity, empathy/hostility are at the heart of Kapil's poem, which deals with anxieties about

local/global experiences, collective/individual identities, and host/guest interactions.

In this paper I intend to focus on poetry and hospitality as an association which conjugates both the ethical and the formal/stylistic dimension of the literary text. Drawing on Rachel Hollander's definition of narrative hospitality, "in which respecting the limits of knowledge and welcoming the stranger define fiction's relationship to both reader and the world", I propose a definition of "poetic hospitality" which addresses the ways poetry engages with otherness not only thematically, but also aesthetically, semiotically, and intertextually. Poetry's potential of "harbouring otherness" is certainly linked to the contact and hybridization with other literary genres that used to be distant from it in the past. Michail Bakhtin claimed that poetry is usually the product of a non-conflictual, monologic poetic voice, and that a dialogic potential and polyglossia are the prerogative of the novel. However, my readings will show that poetry can harbour a dialogic dimension and heteroglossia.