

Reviews

Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 294 pp. ISBN: 978-0748640270

Jacques de Ville

Derrida and Hospitality has a photo of Jacques Derrida on its front cover as well as two small depictions of the figure of 'Hospitality' or Hospitalitá, from Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems* (figure 160), on the front and the back cover. The photo of Derrida was taken by Joel Robine at Derrida's home in the Parisian commune Ris-Orangis on 6 January 2001, aged 70. The photo, as it appears on the Getty Images website, is somewhat uncannily titled 'Jacques Derrida is Dead at 74'. Ripa's description of Hospitality reads as follows:

"A lovely woman, her Forehead surrounded with a Crown set with Jewels; with her Arms open, to relieve some body; a *Cornucopia* full of all Necessaries; clad in white, and overall a red Mantle, under which she holds an Infant naked, seeming to participate some fruit with her, and a Pilgrim lying on the Ground. Handsom, because Works of Charity are *acceptable* to *God*. The Golden Circle denotes her thinking about nothing but *Charity*. In white, shows that Hospitality ought to be *pure*."

The photo of Derrida at home (dead, while alive, or alive, while dead) as well as Ripa's figure of Hospitality, ties in closely with Still's analysis. Still nevertheless does not refer to the title of the Derrida photo, and she also says nothing explicitly about this 'moral emblem' of Ripa. They are left to command in silence. For Derrida, as Still reminds

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us, 'being-oneself in one's own home', or conditional hospitality, and effacing the self, that is, pure, unconditional hospitality (the laws and Law of hospitality) are a double bind, a structure, or rather 'stricture' which is necessary for hospitality to come to pass (82). In *Derrida and Hospitality*, Still develops, mainly with reference to *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford University Press, 1999) and Derrida's unpublished lectures on hospitality as well as Irigaray's thinking, what she calls a 'maternal model of hospitality' (36, 125–134). Still acknowledges the differences between Irigaray and Derrida in this respect (134), yet does not favour one over the other. She seeks to keep both in play, while the emphasis in the rest of the book is on the 'pragmatic, empirical, material, contractual laws of hospitality' (267). With reference to Ripa's figure of Hospitality, one could say that while Still is clearly *au fait* with the impossible, excessive and self-destructive elements of hospitality (perhaps to be detected in the reference to the purity of Hospitality and in her overflowing cornucopia), she chooses to focus mainly on her generosity, which, although it perhaps remains within a circular economy, is to be preferred to the traditional, patriarchal model, where women cannot be hosts or guests and where they often serve as substitute sacrifice (263). In steering between these two laws, Still succeeds admirably, in my view, in exploring the traditional model of hospitality with reference to the *Odyssey* and the Old Testament (chapter 2); and in response to that, the implications of a maternal model of hospitality, first for friendship, which is traditionally viewed as existing only between men (chapter 3); then for naming as an issue of hospitality in the colonial context (chapter 4); thereafter for the welcoming to Europe of migrants with their Gods (chapter 5); and last, for our relation to non-human animals (chapter 6). In each instance, Still convincingly shows the link with hospitality, which may not be immediately obvious to the reader. There are many gems in this book. Two personal highlights, showing the acute insight of Still, are her reflections on the importance of not only considering the borders of the nation-state, but also those within the state and within cities in the context of hospitality, thereby effectively equating hospitality and equality (188, 209–213); and the brief analysis (244–9) of Derrida's reading of D.H. Lawrence's 'The Snake' in *The Beast and the Sovereign* Vol. I (University of Chicago Press, 2009). In respect of Derrida's linking of the poem

with Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (Standard Edition Vol XIII, Vintage) and the question when morality is born (already before, or only after the murder of the father), Still perceptively notes that '[r]egret comes from the failure to exercise impossible unconditional hospitality' (248).

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Must Reading

Sarah Wood, *Derrida's Writing and Difference: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009), 192 pp. ISBN: 978-0826491916

Thomas Dutoit

It is not only desirable or possible or preferable that the author is no longer in control: it is already so. (p. 124)

No author-god will tell us what to think. (p. 125)

One of the two most important things one livelearns from her is how *Writing and Difference* functions as a macro-assemblage. The other is how Derrida writes, at a microscopic level. They are related, of course. They both are extremely important contributions to the understanding of what Derrida did and was and might still be. For, first, in the great body of the great writing on Derrida, there are few (I'm not sure I can think of any) who zoom more microsensibly into the very granular feeling of Derrida's literally embossed writing, while, second, staying in sync with the conceptual arguments (de)constructed by the force whose movements make and unmake them, as such. That contribution makes her work necessary reading, on two scores: no one has tackled *Writing and Difference* as an overall assemblage, and no one reads it that way either. It may be safe to conjecture that when *Writing and Difference* is read, it is actually not read, but this or that essay in it is read. You work on psychoanalysis? You read 'Freud and the Scene of Writing'. You work on alterity, the trace, Levinas? You read 'Violence and Metaphysics'. You work on theatre? You read 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation'. You're studying 'critical