

## NEGOTIATING HOSPITALITY IN PAT MORA'S "BILINGUAL CHRISTMAS" AND SANDRA CISNEROS'S "IT OCCURS TO ME I AM THE CREATIVE/DESTRUCTIVE GODDESS COATLICUE"

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This article explores the link between hospitality and power in two poems by contemporary Chicana writers Pat Mora and Sandra Cisneros, reflecting on how these two poems denounce the complicity of certain discourses and practices of hospitality with oppression and exclusion. Both poems explore the intersection between hospitality, power, and inequality, highlighting the power differentials at play beneath relationships of hospitality. Hospitality appears in the two poems as a cover-up for marginalization and exploitation, the exclusion of migrants and post-migrants, and the subjugation of women through norms of self-sacrifice. However, the two poems also reclaim hospitality and offer textual forms of generosity and care, or poetic hospitality in the way they welcome voices, readers, and stories.

KEYWORDS: Chicana literature, hospitality, oppression, migrants, gender.

**Negociar l'hospitalitat a "Bilingual Christmas" de Pat Mora i "It Occurs to Me I Am the Creative/Destructive Goddess Coatlicue" de Sandra Cisneros**

Aquest article explora les connexions entre hospitalitat i poder en dos poemes escrits per les autores Chicanas contemporànies Pat Mora i Sandra Cisneros, i reflexiona sobre com denuncien la complicitat d'uns certs discursos i pràctiques hospitalàries amb l'opressió i l'exclusió. Tots dos poemes exploren la intersecció entre hospitalitat, poder i desigualtat, i incideixen en el diferencial de poder que subjau a tota relació d'hospitalitat. L'hospitalitat apareix en aquests dos poemes com una façana que oculta la marginalització i l'explotació, l'exclusió dels migrants i postmigrants i la submissió de les dones a través de formes d'autosacrifici. No obstant això, tots dos poemes revindiquen també l'hospitalitat i ofereixen formes textuais de generositat i cura, o una mena d'hospitalitat poètica, en la manera en què acullen diferents veus, lectors, i històries.

PARAULES CLAU: literatura chicana, hospitalitat, opressió, migrants, gènere.

**Negociar la hospitalidad en "Bilingual Christmas" de Pat Mora y "It Occurs to Me I Am the Creative/Destructive Goddess Coatlicue" de Sandra Cisneros**

Este artículo explora las conexiones entre hospitalidad y poder en dos poemas escritos por las autoras Chicanas contemporáneas Pat Mora y Sandra Cisneros, y reflexiona sobre cómo ambos denuncian la complicidad de ciertos discursos y prácticas hospitalarias con la opresión y la exclusión. Ambos poemas exploran la intersección entre hospitalidad, poder y desigualdad, e

inciden en el diferencial de poder que subyace a toda relación de hospitalidad. La hospitalidad aparece en estos dos poemas como una fachada que oculta la marginalización y la explotación, la exclusión de los migrantes y posmigrantes y la sumisión de las mujeres a través de formas de autosacrificio. Sin embargo, ambos poemas reivindican también la hospitalidad y ofrecen formas textuales de generosidad y cuidado, o una hospitalidad poética, en el modo en que acogen distintas voces, lectores, e historias.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** literatura chicana, hospitalidad, opresión, migrantes, género.

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Dan Bulley writes that “[c]ritical reflection must attend to the power relations that enable and limit practices of hospitality, the constraints they seek to impose and the struggle for control involved” (2017: 3). This article will explore the link between hospitality and power relations in two poems by contemporary women writers of color, “Bilingual Christmas” (1986) by Pat Mora and “It Occurs to Me I Am the Creative/Destructive Goddess Coatlicue” (1995) by Sandra Cisneros. As Chicana writers, Mora and Cisneros are connected to the space of the border, a space that, according to Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan, Amanda Elle Gerke, and Patricia San José Rico, is the “site par excellence” to “test” the “logic of hospitality” (2020: 3), a space where the problematics of hospitality linked to immigration, multiculturalism, and diversity are particularly relevant. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the logic of hospitality being tested and contested in their texts, which reflect the idea, proposed by Derrida, that hospitality is always at risk of being corrupted into hostility (2000: 55). In “Bilingual Christmas” and “It Occurs to Me I Am the Creative/Destructive Goddess Coatlicue”, Mora and Cisneros explore the perversion of hospitality when hospitality turns into coercion, oppression, and exploitation. They reflect on the fraught dimensions of hospitality for those (guests or hosts) who are disempowered and marginalized, who are more vulnerable because of their social identities. At the heart of the poems lie the risks and the costs of hospitality for women as well as for migrants and post-migrants, for whom hospitality can be less of an empowering, nourishing, caring practice, and more of an oppressive discourse that conceals and justifies exploitation and inequity. While warning against the oppressive potential of hospitality, the two texts offer hospitality themselves, as this paper will argue. This paper will therefore explore hospitality not only as a theme but also as a feature of Mora and Cisneros’s poems, showing how they can be considered as hospitable forms.

## Denouncing hospitality

### Pat Mora's "Bilingual Christmas": The sick hospitality of tokenism and multiculturalism

Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan, Amanda Elle Gerke, and Patricia San José Rico write that "the post-migrant, or the 'post-other' is really what is of concern in terms of hospitality as a cultural concept. How is the post-migrant incorporated, tolerated, assimilated, excluded? How does the post-migrant find a place in the host society, or how are they allocated a place there?" (2020: 7). It is precisely such questions that Pat Mora's poem "Bilingual Christmas" addresses, suggesting that for both migrants and post-migrants, that is to say, US citizens who are descended from outside the United States, true hospitality is hard to find. The poem implies that post-migrants are often merely tolerated, which in itself constitutes a form of exclusion—as María Elena García suggests, mere tolerance often leads to hostility and violence: "far from a virtue, tolerance is at best a conditional acceptance of difference and at worst it is an enabling condition for violence" (2021: 11). Similarly, Mora's poem reflects on tolerance as a form of hostility rather than hospitality, and underlines how fine the line is between outright hostility and conditional forms of hospitality. In the poem, employees of color at a Christmas party are berated and bullied by their supposed hosts, while outside immigrants live in destitution and fear. While the inhospitality faced by immigrants is clear, the poem emphasizes how post-migrants, exemplified by the employees in the poem, face a similar albeit less extreme form of inhospitality in the way they are conditionally welcomed into mainstream spaces, always made to feel like outsiders, like guests who have to be grateful for being accepted in:

*Do you hear what I hear?*

*Buenos días and hasta luego*  
in board rooms and strategy sessions.  
Where are your grateful holiday smiles,  
bilinguals? I've given you a voice,  
let you in  
to hear old friends tell old jokes.  
Stop flinching. Drink eggnog. Hum along.

Not carols we hear,  
whimpering,  
children too cold  
to sing  
on Christmas eve.

Do you see what I see?

adding a dash of color  
to conferences and corporate parties  
one per panel or office  
slight South-of-the border seasoning  
*feliz navidad* and *próspero año nuevo*, right?  
Relax. Eat rum balls. Watch the snow.

Not twinkling lights  
we see but  
search lights  
seeking illegal aliens  
outside our thick windows. (1986: 21)

Mora's poem contradicts the myth that portrays US society as fundamentally hospitable, which conceals the exclusion and othering processes that immigrants and people of color suffer from. Instead of true hospitality, the poem suggests that immigrants and people of color receive only superficial tolerance, exemplified by the issue of tokenism, or the performative inclusion of people of color within institutions and companies. Tokenism, or "the making of inclusive, but superficial (even unintentionally exoticizing) gestures towards diversity" (Litler, 2008: 95), appears in the poem through the voice that declares they have "let" people of color, or "bilinguals", "in", while actually silencing them. The bilingual employees are supposed to provide an appearance of inclusion, a "dash of color" bolstering the narrative of hospitality and diversity that the company promotes, but they are not supposed to voice any dissenting opinion, or even any discomfort: they are asked to "relax", to "stop flinching", and to confirm whatever the dominant voice is saying, as indicated by the use of the tag "right?" instead of an open-ended question.

The same performative hospitality is at play in the way the dominant voice in the poem uses Spanish phrases. In their exploration of inhospitality, Derrida and Dufourmantelle describe linguistic inhospitality, the act of violence that happens when the host imposes their own language on their guest, who "has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc. This personage imposes on him translation into their own language, and that is the first act of violence" (2000: 15). This act of imposing one's language onto the other is "the monolinguisim imposed by the other" (Derrida, 1998: 39), leading to what Derrida describes as a tyranny of the homogenous. Linguistic inhospitality also manifests in the way certain languages are

excluded from mainstream society, reinforcing oppressive distinctions that exclude immigrants, as Luisa María González Rodríguez points out: “language can be used to delimit the boundaries between majority and minority society, and also serves to construct negative sociolinguistic stereotypes that are tinged with xenophobia” (2020: 59). However, Mora’s poem highlights a different version of linguistic inhospitality, in which the language of the other is used, in a gesture which would appear as hospitable but actually constitutes a form of hostility. The voice in the poem uses Spanish phrases (revealing, therefore, a fossilized use of language that already limits the possibility of communication), not to invite true conversation and exchange, but to force the guests to assent, and to silence them by talking for, and over, them. The poem suggests that, ironically, excluding the other through language can also happen through using the other’s language—especially when using the other’s language in a performative, fossilized way as is the case in the poem since the phrases used are simple expressions and phrases, reflecting a very superficial grasp of the language and not any real effort to learn the other’s language.

Ginette Michaud has argued that “literature gives, if you like, asylum to hospitality in deploying tropes and turns which give place to hospitality in the very medium” (qtd. in Still, 2010: 172). The literary text can accommodate or house hospitality through its structure and devices. In Mora’s “Bilingual Christmas”, the poetic form indeed gives place to hospitality, but to a sick or perverted hospitality that is revealed as hostility. Through the poetic form, the contours of such inhospitality are thrown into sharp relief. For instance, the parataxis in line 7 expresses the sharpness of the host’s voice when they instruct the guests of color to behave more gratefully and cheerfully at the party: “Stop flinching. Drink eggnog. Hum along”. The juxtaposition of short imperative sentences, orders directed at the guests, expresses the hostile and oppressive nature of the hospitality they receive. Hospitality sours into a controlling relationship, and the welcome supposedly offered to those who are conceptualized as guests, the bilingual employees, is revealed as conditional. For Meyda Yegenoglu, tokenism and multiculturalism are forms of conditional hospitality that reinforce relationships of power, inequity, and exclusion: “far from laying the grounds for an interruption of sovereign identity of the self, multiculturalist respect and tolerance implies the conditional welcoming of the guest within the prescribed limits of the law and hence implies a reassertion of mastery over the national space” (2003: 16). Such conditional welcoming, which ends up reinforcing boundaries of exclusion, is at the heart of Mora’s poem, in which the dominant voice expresses the idea that the guests need to behave in a certain way in order to remain welcome. Their difference is not truly welcomed but contained, managed, and repressed, echoing David Palumbo-Riu’s contention that tokenism implies a domesticating of difference, not a welcoming

of it: “within this revision of corporate capitalism as transnational, cultural ‘difference’ is an important element to ‘domesticate’” (2005: 5).

While employees of color face conditional hospitality, Mora’s poem also evokes more obvious forms of inhospitality when alluding to the treatment of undocumented immigrants in the United States, facing destitution and persecution. Ali Behdad has described the “myth of hospitality” that is prevalent in US culture, but clashes with the reality of how immigrants are and have been treated here:

That we are an immigrant nation, hospitable to the huddled masses, makes us feel good about ourselves, regenerating in us a profound sense of national pride. [...] And yet, as an illusory retrospective narrative, the myth of immigrant America needs to deny the historical context of its formation while ignoring the horrendous disciplining and criminalizing of aliens that is happening around us today. (2005: 8)

The hypocrisy of the discourse of US hospitality is pointed out in Mora’s poem which highlights the exclusion and violence faced by immigrants even as US society congratulates itself on its tolerance and inclusion of diversity. The guests at the office Christmas party are well aware of this discrepancy as highlighted by the inversion in the line “Not carols we hear”, which evokes the fact that, instead of believing in the fiction of hospitality and generosity, the guests know the reality of inequality and suffering faced by the marginalized, including immigrants. The rhyme between “whispering” and “sing” also stresses the contrast between the joyful carols at the party and the harsh reality lived by immigrants who have to hide and whisper. This rhyme suggests how immigrants’ whispering voices are covered up by the Christmas carols, which symbolizes the idea that US society turns a blind eye and a deaf ear to their suffering.

Indeed, throughout the poem, Mora highlights a conflict between perceptions and denounces a wilful blindness on the part of certain segments of US society towards the harsh realities lived by more vulnerable communities. For instance, the imperative “watch the snow” suggests how the dominant hosts try to force the guests to avert their gaze from the realities of inequality and injustice happening around them, and to focus instead on more innocuous elements like the snow. The imperative rhymes with the mention of the “thick window,” which underscores the idea that certain spheres of US society try to insulate themselves in order to avoid seeing and thinking about the suffering and injustices that exist outside of their protected bubble. The image evokes the divide between those within and those outside, the separation between those with privileges, whose worldview suggests that US society is inclusive and hospitable enough, and those who experience exclusion and marginalization. Not only is sight used in the poem as a symbol of

the indifference of the dominant white Anglo group to the suffering of those less fortunate, especially immigrants, but so is hearing. The repeated verb “hear” ironically reveals the fact that the dominant white group refuses to see or hear anything when it comes to the way immigrants are treated. The lines “I’ve given you a voice/let you in/to hear old friends tell old jokes”, repeating the adjective “old”, suggest that the voice in the poem does not want to hear anything that diverges from their established ideas, but is closed off to any dialogue.

Moreover, the poem does not simply suggest that there is a divide separating those who experience inhospitality and those who believe in the myth of the United States as an exemplarily hospitable society, but that the dominant, Anglo, white group insists on its version of reality being the only legitimate one. In the poem, the voice of the myth of hospitality appears as the more powerful one, drowning out any dissenting opinion, loudly proclaiming that bilingual employees should be “grateful” as they have been welcomed in. The poem suggests that the discourse that proclaims the hospitality and inclusivity of US society dominates public discourse while, at its margins, immigrants and people of color experience exclusion and suffering, without being given a chance to speak and tell their own stories. The silencing of marginalized subjects has been described through the concept of epistemic injustice. Victims of epistemic injustice are denied the status of credible knowers, deprived of the opportunity to articulate their experience and reduced to the position of objects of knowledge; as Miranda Fricker explains, the victim of epistemic injustice is “unable to be a participant in the sharing of knowledge [...] He is thus demoted from subject to object [...] He is ousted from the role of participant in the co-operative exercise of the capacity for knowledge and recast in the role of passive bystander” (2007: 132). In Mora’s poem, migrants and post-migrants are also silenced and excluded as subjects of knowledge. Instead of being given the opportunity to express themselves freely, they are talked about by the dominant voice in the poem, in order to support a narrative about US society’s inclusivity and tolerance. Such co-optation and instrumentalization are one of the processes that constitute epistemic injustice, according to Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (2017: 1), adding a layer to the epistemic violence evoked in the poem. Allison B. Wolf has argued that the concept of epistemic injustice should be applied to immigrants and recognized as a central component of the injustice immigrants face in many Western countries (2022). Mora’s poem also presents immigrants as victims of epistemic injustice, beyond the material, social and political injustices that they face. In the poem, the inhospitality of US society appears not only in the way it materially treats immigrants and people of color, but also in the way it silences them, preventing them from telling their own stories and speaking about their experiences honestly, just like the “bilingual

guests” at the Christmas party are prevented from expressing their true emotions and instructed to “hum along”.

**Cisneros’s “It Occurs to Me I Am the Creative/Destructive Goddess Coatlicue”:  
The gendered costs of hospitality**

Rachel Hollander has argued that “an ethics of hospitality must grapple with questions of gender” (2013: 20). Cisneros’s poem “It Occurs to Me I Am the Creative/Destructive Goddess Coatlicue” proposes precisely such exploration of the intersection of gender and hospitality, as it highlights the vulnerable position of the female subject in the face of norms of hospitality that veer into exploitation and oppression for women. While Mora’s poem denounces the uncaring nature of a US society whose policies and inequalities leave children out in the cold, Cisneros’s poem shows the problematic facet of care, when women are expected to be caring to a point of excess, leaving them depleted. In this context, inhospitality appears necessary as a form of resistance against a patriarchal society that expects women to give of themselves endlessly:

I deserve stones.  
Better leave me the hell alone.  
  
I am besieged.  
I cannot feed you.  
You may not souvenir my bones,  
knock on my door, camp, come in,  
telephone, take my polaroid. I’m paranoid,  
I tell you. *Lárguense*. Scram.  
  
Go home.  
I am anomaly. Rare she who  
can’t stand kids and can’t stand you.  
No excellent Cordelia cordiality have I.  
No coffee served in tidy cups.  
  
No groceries in the house.  
I sleep to excess,  
smoke cigars,  
drink. Am at my best  
wandering undressed,  
my fingernails dirty,  
my hair a mess,  
Terribly



sorry. Madame isn't  
feeling well today.  
Must

Greta Garbo.  
Pull an Emily:  
"The soul selects her own society..."  
Roil like Rhys's Sargasso Sea.  
Abiquiu à la O'Keeffe.  
Throw a Maria Callas.  
Shut myself like a shoe.

Christ  
almighty. Stand  
back. Warning.  
Honey,  
this means  
you. (2022: 25-26)

In Cisneros's earlier work, hospitality appeared as an ideal, a cherished aspiration, as in the following passage from *The House on Mango Street* (1984): "One day I'll own my own house, but I don't forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house" (1991: 87). This theme of hospitality in *The House on Mango Street* has been explored by Luisa González Rodríguez (2020) and by Amanda Ellen Gerke (2020). Hospitality continues to be a theme in Cisneros's later writings, including her latest poetry collection *Woman Without Shame* (2022), and the poem "It Occurs to Me I Am the Creative/Destructive Goddess Coatlicue" —included in this volume but originally published in 1995— embodies a more critical (albeit tongue-in-cheek) examination of hospitality. In the poem, Cisneros does not offer an unquestioning endorsement of hospitality like the one proffered by Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street*, but rather a cautioning against the oppressive potential of hospitality for women. Focusing on this poem, the remainder of this paper will extend the exploration of hospitality in Cisneros's work by drawing attention to the link between gender and hospitality she establishes.

While hospitality has been associated with a seemingly universal ideal, therefore gender-neutral, it is actually structured by gender. Femininity and hospitality are often linked in an essentializing association that contributes to a stereotyped vision of femininity as involving receptivity, self-sacrifice, and submission to the needs of others, as Irina Aristarkhova notes:

this essentializing connection between women and hospitality [...] creates a hierarchy in which femininity is associated with negative connotations of passivity, lack of control and choice, and subservient subjectivity. [...] by this logic men are assumed to be willing beneficiaries of women's hospitality without consideration for the material and emotional resources that this hospitality requires. (2020: 165)

Cisneros's poem reflects on this normative ideal of femininity, involving endless generosity and hospitality, by stressing the speaker's deviation from such norm. The line "rare she who can't stand kids and can't stand you" implies that the absence of hospitality and cordiality can be seen as surprising in a woman within normative gendered constructions. Similarly, the line "No Cordelia cordiality have I" suggests, through the use of consonance, how cordiality and hospitality are coded as feminine in Western culture. The choice of the name "Cordelia" also brings to mind the eponymous character in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, an interesting reference when one considers how Cordelia, in the play, epitomizes a patriarchal vision of normative femininity. As Catherine S. Cox has suggested, she has a "saintly persona" and corresponds to the ideal of "[t]he silent woman—virginal, enclosed, uncorrupted, and passive" (1998: 149). Clearly, the speaker in Cisneros's poem departs from such vision of womanhood, as she loudly and proudly expresses her desires and is anything but passive, departing from patriarchal ideals of femininity. In particular, the poem subverts the stereotypical image of the "angel in the house", a vision of womanhood described in Victorian writer Coventry Patmore's eponymous novel (1854), which suggested that women's place was in the home and that their role was to make the home an oasis for men, so as to provide them with comfort and respite from the world of politics and business. In this stereotype, women belong in the domestic sphere and their highest, most important role is to care for men and children within that sphere by catering to their needs. They are expected to be self-sacrificing, endlessly attentive, and entirely focused on others' needs. In the poem, Cisneros portrays a very different image of femininity. Her speaker precisely refuses to be an angel in the house by refusing to cater to others and privileging her own needs and wants. She wants to stay in the domestic sphere but not in order to care for others; rather, care of the self is privileged in a subversive move.

Despite the judgment and disapproval this entails, which is expressed in the rhyme between "mess" and "excess", the speaker is adamant in her refusal to perform the cordial, self-effacing, hospitable role expected of women within dominant constructions of femininity. Her refusal of hospitality is mimicked in the text through the repetition of short or one-word sentences separated by full stops, which express her wish to put a firm stop to the expectations of hospitality and

availability she has been subjected to: “I tell you. *Lárguense*. Scram. Go home”, “Christ almighty. Stand back. Warning”. The shortness of the sentences implies a refusal to give much of anything, even words, to those who wish to intrude on the privacy of the speaker. The speaker’s wish to isolate and protect herself from the demands of hospitality is also expressed through the metaphor of the shoe in the line “shut myself like a shoe”. Cynthia R. Wallace has pointed out that “the vocabulary of receptivity, openness, hospitality, responsibility, and care [...] [is] implicitly gendered feminine in a Western cultural imaginary” (2016: 20). It is precisely this patriarchal expectation that women should always be open to the needs and wants of others, that the speaker of Cisneros’s poem rebels against, using the vocabulary of shutting. Instead of merely shutting the door, she is shutting herself up, fully resisting the expectation of being endlessly available to others. Metonymically, the shoe connotes the foot: thus suggesting that she wants to “shut” her body up, that is to say, protecting it from the intrusion of others and refusing to give it up to cater to the needs of others. She refuses to share food (declaring she has no groceries in the house to offer a meal) but also her body, and in so doing she suggests the deeper cost of performing the hospitable role expected of her: it could lead to sacrificing her own body. Indeed, the expression “souvenir my bones” suggests the costs of hospitality for the speaker, explaining her adamant refusal of hospitality. Saying yes to hospitality could mean being annihilated, consumed in the process of attending to the guest’s needs and demands. The endlessness of the demands made on her time and attention is emphasized through the parataxis in stanza one which mimics an endless stream of visitors and requests that threatens to engulf the speaker: “knock on my door, camp, come in, telephone, take my polaroid”. Giving in to the expectation of hospitality would leave the speaker at risk of being exhausted and depleted by these demands, reduced to a pile of bones, an image that evokes death and expresses the sinister implications of hospitality when it leads to a form of exploitation. The anaphoric repetition of the word “no”, connoting lack, also evokes this exhaustion and depletion forced on the female host when she conforms to the expectation of hospitality. Cisneros’s poem emphasizes how hospitality as a discourse and as a norm can lead to the cannibalization of the female body, which becomes a resource or an object of consumption for others’ pleasure and entertainment or even prestige, its bones akin to “souvenirs” purchased in a gift shop. The idea of hospitality as cannibalism is not new as Manzanar Calvo and Benito Sánchez point out, since already in *The Odyssey* some guests are devoured (2017: 4), but Cisneros’s poem gives the idea a clear feminist inflection, using the image of hospitality as devoration to shed light on the specific demands placed upon women to perform a specific hospitable role. Women’s exploitation within a patriarchal society is expressed through the language of consumption, which is fitting given the expectation placed on women to feed others both literally

and metaphorically while starving themselves, something the speaker in Cisneros's poem refuses to do: "I cannot feed you". Hospitality is also linked in the poem to a discourse of aggressivity, of struggle, even of invasion, symbolizing the vulnerability of women to a constant barrage of demands on their time and bodily autonomy: "I am besieged".

Given this threat of invasion, appropriation, and exploitation, refusing hospitality appears as a gesture of survival and resistance, allowing the female subject to free herself from the expectation of self-sacrifice and to nourish herself instead of only attending to the needs of others. By saying no to others, the female speaker is being hospitable to herself, caring for herself and her own needs. Indeed, the inclusion of Dickinson's line "the soul selects her own society" suggests that the speaker is choosing herself as her own company, welcoming herself and treating herself with the same respect and care she would a guest. Commenting on the gendered aspects of hospitality, Mireille Rosello notes that "no discussion of hospitality can ignore [...] how hard it is for women to be treated as guests" (2001: 119). Within dominant conceptions of femininity and hospitality, women are encouraged to welcome and care for others but not to enjoy the position of cherished and cared-for guests themselves. The speaker in Cisneros's poem subverts such expectations, expressing her wish to care for herself. Inhospitability to others appears here as a condition for hospitality to the self and more precisely the creative self. Indeed, the series of references to women artists known for their love of solitude (Emily Dickinson, Greta Garbo, Jean Rhys, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Maria Callas) seems to suggest that inhospitability and creativity go well together, as solitude allows the artist to nourish herself and devote her energy to creating. The choice of saying no to the role of perfect hostess is an act that appears necessary for artistic creation, the condition of possibility of the speaker writing such poems as the ones we are reading. Thus, inhospitability leads to a different form of generosity, the sharing of art: arguably, it is as generous to offer a poem as to offer a meal in one's home (even if the two offerings do not tend to the same needs). Therefore, the speaker's inhospitability needs to be qualified as it leads to the creation of poems that are then generously shared with readers. Whilst the poem denounces an oppressive version of hospitality, whereby women are, in a patriarchal culture, expected to be hospitable to the point of self-sacrifice, the poem can be seen in itself as a form of hospitality and generosity. Indeed, both Cisneros's and Mora's poems can be seen as hospitable texts.

## Reclaiming hospitality

Whilst the two poems criticize perverted, oppressive forms of hospitality, they also reclaim hospitality by offering a textual space of welcome, inclusion, and care. Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan, Gerke, and San José Rico note how literary texts

can be seen as hospitable spaces: “[h]ospitable languages and literatures [...] create hospitable spaces” (2020: 7). The creation of hospitable spaces is, according to Mike Marais, one of the central missions of the writer: “it is the writer’s task to make of the text a home for the other” (2009: xv). Similarly, Luke Thurston proposes to study “literary hospitality” and describes texts that perform hospitality as “host narratives” (2012: 4). For Rachel Hollander, “narrative hospitality” encourages us to recognize that both “characters and authors” can be hospitable and “open themselves to that which is other” (2013: 3). Mora’s and Cisneros’s poems exemplify this textual or literary hospitality through certain features they share. The two poems may be seen as hospitable, open towards alterity. First because they include linguistic alterity, by switching between English and Spanish, and secondly, because they also open themselves up to other writers and other texts through intertextuality: they include the words of others (in the case of Mora’s poem, the popular Christmas song “Do you hear what I hear”, and in the case of Cisneros’s poem, a line from Emily Dickinson). Besides these common hospitable traits, the two poems perform hospitality in other, distinct ways.

Texts can be considered as hospitable through the relationship they establish with readers, when they welcome readers in. While Cisneros’s poem is at first glance a manifesto for anti-hospitality, it can actually be read as hospitable in the sense that it makes the reader feel at home in the text through the use of humor and irony, which create a sense of complicity and intimacy. Humorous references and expressions (such as “Pull an Emily or “Cordelia cordiality”), as well as comical rhymes like “paranoid” and “polaroid” invite the reader to share in the joke. In contrast to the exclusionary humor of the “old” and possibly racist or misogynist “jokes” evoked in Mora’s poem, the humor at play in Cisneros’s poem is inclusive. While declaring her inhospitality, the speaker is quite playful, which in itself indicates a willingness to connect and share with the reader. The use of the term “honey” and the second-person pronoun at the very end of the poem exemplifies the nuanced alliance of rejecting and reclaiming hospitality at the heart of the poem. While the last lines seemingly indicate Cisneros’s refusal to be hospitable, telling the reader that they are included within the visitors the speaker wishes to keep at bay, the very use of the term of endearment “honey” suggests gentleness and intimacy rather than hostility.

Mora’s poem also reclaims hospitality in a distinct way, as it offers a space for usually marginalized stories. Including the story of the other, and being able to accommodate different viewpoints, is at the heart of what Paul Ricoeur has called “narrative hospitality”, defined as “taking responsibility in imagination and sympathy for the story of the other through the life narratives which concern the other” (1996: 7). Kearney sums up narrative hospitality as an act of welcoming “the story of the other, the stranger, the victim, the forgotten one” (2010: 75). Mora’s poem

performs such narrative hospitality as it includes the stories of the outsiders, the forgotten: the immigrants who live in poverty and in fear while dominant discourses proclaim the hospitality of the US nation, thus denying their reality and story. Mora's poem provides a textual space for such stories, caring for the wound of epistemological oppression by validating the marginalized perspectives of vulnerable outsiders.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to their volume on hospitality in American literature, Ana Maria Manzananas Calvo and Jesús Benito Sánchez explain how recent studies of hospitality have focused on hospitality not as an ideal, but as a perverted and oppressive discourse: "Rather than a codification of ethical openness in the face of the Other, hospitality emerges in recent theory as a discourse that underlines and support various forms of power and exclusion" (2017: 10). In Mora's and Cisneros's poetry, the same shift takes place from hospitality as an ideal to hospitality as a discourse that conceals or even justifies oppression and exploitative relationships. In Cisneros's poem, hospitality is revealed as a discourse that masks gendered, patriarchal inequality as it legitimizes the norm that suggests women should adopt a subservient, passive, and giving role towards others. In Mora's poem, the discourse which presents US society as an example of hospitality is shown to be oppressive, erasing the stories and silencing the voices of migrants and post-migrants faced with hostility. Apart from having hospitality as a theme, the two poems also share hospitality as a feature. Nathan Magnusson writes that "just as the host in the text provides a space for a community of strangers, so the text as a host provides a space for a reader, indeed, a community of readers" (2014: 9). The idea of texts as hosts, providing spaces of welcome, provides an illuminating way to read Cisneros's and Mora's poems. While denouncing perverted hospitality, the two poems reclaim hospitality as they offer, through humor or through making space for usually excluded stories, forms of care and reparation that can be described as textual forms of hospitality.

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