

Hospitality, Revolution and the Emigrant Experience: Guests and Hosts in French Revolutionary Novels of Emigration Written by Women Authors

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Article abstract

This article examines the presence of hospitality as a significant theme in four French Revolutionary novels of emigration written by three major female authors of that time, Isabelle de Charrière, Claire de Duras and Stéphanie de Genlis. It aims to highlight the multiple facets of the concept of hospitality in these novels and to demonstrate that beyond its traditional meaning, hospitality operates too in political, social and ethical realms: 1) it becomes the pivot of an introspective reflection: a critical look at the conventions and social practices of the French nobility, 2) it reflects a political thought: tensions between condemnation and loyalty to the Old Regime system, and between adherence to and suspicion of republican ideals, 3) last but not least, it opens a path to a feminist approach through situations that stage relationships of help and care by émigré women for émigré women. The reading angle that I propose in the article confirms the originality of these novels that link emigration and hospitality by evoking the potentiality of new situations, no matter how painful they may be: flexibility, emancipation, adaptation, openness, sharing and care are key themes that recur in the narratives to underline the transformative power of mutual support, responsibility and trust between women.

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Michèle Bokobza Kahan

Introduction

Since ancient times, hospitality has been an unwritten law of social interaction, enshrined in religion, mythology and history as a virtue and an act of mercy. The *Encyclopedia of Diderot and D'Alembert*, for instance, defines hospitality as “a liberality exercised towards foreigners, especially if one receives them into one’s home,” adding that:

*Hospitality is the virtue of a great soul that cares for the whole universe through the ties of humanity. The Stoics regarded it as a duty inspired by God himself. One must, they said, do good to people who come to our countries, less for their sake than for our own interest, for the sake of virtue and in order to perfect in our souls human sentiments, which must not be limited to the ties of blood and friendship, but extended to all mortals.*¹

Throughout the Renaissance and into the Enlightenment, the increasing mobility of travelers, pilgrims and merchants across better roads in Europe changed the practices of hospitality toward foreigners, expanding them from an interpersonal and unconditional gesture of welcome to a national and conditional one, with various countries ‘opening their doors’ to receive large numbers of migrants of all kinds. A good example of this relationship between the economic development of hospitality and the increased circulation of people and merchandise is the network of hospices built and financed by rich families and religious foundations to orientate and facilitate the movement of hundreds of pilgrims along the roads to Compostelle.² This expansion, however, also aroused feelings of mistrust, even hostility, between host nations and their guests, which sometimes legitimized procedures and control mechanisms such as constant police surveillance at cities’ doorsteps. Lyon, for example, which was overpopulated during the seventeenth century, imposed regulative limitations of entrance within the city’s limits.³

Both the virtues and the hardships associated with hospitality on the national scale were thrown into sharp relief by the events of the French Revolution, which sent thousands of expatriated French aristocrats, clergymen and members of the third order to seek refuge amongst their neighbors. According to the historian Donald Greer, estimates of the total number of émigrés have varied between one hundred thousand and two hundred thousand, including thousands of peasants and village artisans who crossed France’s borders.⁴ Most of the literature of emigration, however, was produced by members of the nobility. Indeed, this dramatic political and social upheaval produced a vast number of texts, including multiple works of fiction written between 1789 and 1815

1 *The Encyclopedia of Diderot and d'Alembert*, Collaborative translation project, hosted by Michigan Publishing, article “Hospitality”, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/>

2 See Roche, *Humeurs vagabondes. De la circulation des hommes et de l'utilité des voyages*, Fayard, 2003, especially 479-566.

3 See for example Rau and Zeller, “Police des voyageurs et hospitalité urbaine à Lyon à la fin du 17^e siècle”, in *Commerce, voyage et expérience religieuse : 16-18^e siècles*, [en ligne], Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007.

4 Donald Greer, *The Incidence of the Emigration During the French Revolution*, Gloucester, Peter Smith, 1966.

by both male and female émigrés. Many of these novels, particularly those written by women, addressed the issue of hospitality extensively and explicitly.

This article examines the presence of hospitality as a significant theme in four novels of emigration written by three major female authors of that time, Isabelle de Charrière (1740-1805), Claire de Duras (1777-1828) and Stéphanie de Genlis (1746-1830).⁵ After first establishing a contextual framework that focuses on the extended significations of hospitality from the turn of the eighteenth century to the French Revolution, I examine the novels' representations of two types of relationships. First, the relationships between émigrés and their local hosts: what does it mean, according to the codes of behavior and etiquette represented in these books, to be a "good" or "bad" guest? How are these behaviors associated with characters' ideological convictions, worldview and priorities in the time of crisis expressed in the novels? In other words, how is hospitality used in these books as a lens through which to view and judge the social and political circumstances they describe?

The second type of relationship that I analyze is the relationships among the émigrés themselves, and how these relationships are changed by the particular circumstances of the emigrant experience. More specifically, I suggest reading these new relationships as examples of 'feminist hospitality' a concept defined by feminist ethicist scholar Maurice Hamington as "a performative extension of care ethics that seeks to knit together and strengthen social bonds through psychic and material sharing."⁶ Drawing upon Hamington's theoretical framework, I expand the definition of hospitality *beyond* the traditional confines of relations between guest and host, exploring how these novels' representations of help and care by émigré women *for* émigré women, within that situation of exile, portray the transformative power of mutual support, responsibility and trust.

An unrealizable ideal: Hospitality as a national imperative

From the early eighteenth century, hospitality was already becoming associated with national questions regarding the welcoming or excluding of foreigners seeking refuge in times of conflict, war and other catastrophes. The disasters caused by the French monarchy's aggressive approach to both internal affairs and foreign policy during the reign of Louis XIV stimulated strong interest amongst eighteenth century European thinkers about ways to avoid wars in the future, and to guarantee peace between the nations. In this context, the ideal of hospitality can be found inscribed in major essays dedicated to projects of pacification between the nations since the peace of Utrecht in 1713. Texts ranging from Abbé de Saint-Pierre's *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* (1713), through the peace plans of Rousseau, *Extrait du projet de Paix*

5 Isabelle de Charrière was a Dutch aristocrat and intellectual writing in Neuchâtel, who had already expressed progressive ideas about aristocracy and privilege and women's relationship to knowledge and education in epistolary novels written before the Revolution. Her novels of emigration, written during the Revolution, are known for their association of general political questions with more radical positions concerning the condition of women in society. Claire de Duras was forced to flee France with her mother in April 1794 after her father was executed because of his refusal to vote for the death of the King. They embarked to Philadelphia, reached the Antilles and went back to Europe, Switzerland and later England. As the daughter of a moderate liberal revolutionary, she was not welcomed by the aristocrat émigrés, despite her marriage to the duc de Duras in 1797. Stéphanie de Genlis is best known for her work as an educationalist and 'gouverneur' of the young Orleans princes, for the writing of plays and tales for children, and for influential works on education such as *Adèle et Théodore*, first published in 1782. The revolutionary radicalization obliged her to leave France for more than nine years. Compelled to constantly relocate by her dire financial circumstances, she was in exile in Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig and London.

6 Maurice Hamington, "Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality", *Feminist Formations*, vol. 22, no 1, 2010, pp. 21-38, 24. All following quotations are from this reference.

perpétuelle de Monsieur l'Abbé de Saint-Pierre par J.J. Rousseau (1761), Bentham's *Plan for a Universal and Perpetual Peace* (1789) and Kant's *Zum Ewigen Frieden* (*Perpetual Peace; a Philosophical Sketch*) (1795), all draw associations between hospitality, cosmopolitanism and emigration. Kant encapsulated this association in *Perpetual Peace*, where he proposes a bold plan for creating world peace and endorses a right of hospitality, which he defines as the "right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another country" (118). In establishing universal conditions of hospitality, Kant granted a right of visitation to foreigners, but specified that they must behave peaceably, accept the rules of the welcoming country, and not offend anyone or commit any aggressive and criminal act.⁷

Hospitality was closely associated with the ideals of the French Enlightenment, such as tolerance and openness, and was also, at least initially, at the core of the French revolutionaries' ideals. The idea of universal human rights is embedded in the famous slogan *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, and for most of the main leaders of the Revolution, these three words asserted, among other things, that the young French republic would be a great nation, open and welcoming to all people, including foreigners who had fled their country in fear of being persecuted. Condorcet, for example, claimed on the 29th of December 1791 that the right of asylum would not be revoked by the war, and emphasized his assertion with the following words: "The land of France belongs to freedom, and the law of equality must be universal here."⁸

In its early stages, the Revolution was ostentatiously cosmopolitan, but this ideological position ultimately proved unable to withstand the historical events that led to the radicalization of the revolutionaries and the reign of Terror between 1792 and 1794. Historical circumstances such as Louis the XVI's flight to Varennes and the military crisis of the counter-revolution forced the revolutionaries to react firmly against those who could not prove or demonstrate an active loyalty to the government. Following the collaboration of the counter-revolutionary armies with the Prussian army in the war against the young Republic of France, French émigrés were subject to a climate of suspicion, in which all French nobles who did not share the republican ideals were branded as traitors. After the battle of Valmy and the abolition of the Monarchy in September 1792, uncompromising laws against émigrés were adopted: in September 1792, the property of émigrés was confiscated, and in October 1792, they were banished for life under penalty of death if they returned. Finally, the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, the uprisings in Vendée and other provinces, and a climate of increasing fear and violence threw many French émigrés into destitution. This process of increasing exclusion reveals the tension between two conflicting ideologies - the pacific cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment versus fears for the sovereignty of the newborn nation and a new notion of citizenship based on adherence to a series of shared beliefs.⁹ In other words, while the rise of the French republic expanded the notion of citizenship to include residents from all societal ranks, within a nation clearly defined by geographical borders, it also introduced the idea that the legitimacy of this citizenship depended on the individual's loyalty to the revolutionary government.

7 On Kant's understanding of the concept of Hospitality see Schott, "Kant and Arendt on Hospitality", *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik*, v. 17, 2009, pp. 183-194.

8 Archives parlementaires, t. 36, in Wahnich, *L'Impossible Citoyen. L'Étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française*, Albin Michel, [1997] 2010, p. 108.

9 See Brubaker, "The French Revolution and the Invention of Citizenship", *French Politics and Society*, 1989/7, 30-49; Rapport, "The Treatment of Foreigners in Revolutionary France", PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1997, 1-17.

Accepting the hospitality of the other: émigrés as ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ guests

The community of expatriated French aristocrats can thus be generally divided into two groups: those who left France at the very beginning of the Revolution, and those who followed later, escaping the threat of death and financial ruin caused by the deteriorating political situation.

The characters portrayed in the novels of emigration reflect this heterogeneity within the community of the French noble émigrés, who differed from one another both in the circumstances of their emigration and in their political convictions. If the majority of nobles believed at the beginning of the Revolution that the uprisings would end soon, later, after the outbreak of the French civil war (1792), they were divided by opposing opinions concerning the future of France and their personal destiny. The ideological divergences between ultra-royalist counter revolutionaries and more liberal aristocrats who defended the idea of changes within a parliamentary monarchy are described in detail by historians such as Fernand Baldensperger (1924), Jacques Godechot (1961), Jean-Clément Martin (1998). Contemporary memorialists such as Madame de la Tour du Pin or Madame de Boigne, noblewomen who experienced emigration and exile, drew social pictures of the aristocrat émigrés with some recurrent characteristics. These accounts suggest that the wealthier nobles remained attached to their ancestral values and continued to believe in their superiority and their right of privilege. They therefore isolated themselves, trying to recreate a semblance of the world that they had lost outside the borders of France, and rejecting those who thought differently. Struggles of economic survival and tensions between the rich émigrés and the humbler ones were also a part of the picture. Furthermore, many tensions between émigrés and the locals who sometimes treated them as undesirable and potentially destabilizing intruders, have been investigated by historians like Kirsty Carpenter (1999), Philip Mansel (2011), and Karine Rance (1998;1999).

The selected novels analyzed here describe a wide range of types of émigrés: from the wealthiest to the poorest, from the most conservative to the most liberal, from the humblest and most open-minded to the most conceited. Claire de Duras’ novel, *Les Mémoires de Sophie*,¹⁰ for example, relates many details about the life of the émigrés, the different conditions of their exile, and the contrast between the poverty of some émigrés and the wealth of others. In this powerful sentimental novel, based in part upon the author’s own experience of extended exile during the Revolution, the author tells the story of a young heroine, Sophie, who is the novel’s narrator. The heroine introduces herself as a member of the highest ranks of aristocracy: “ma famille était une des plus considérables de France, elle jouissait à la cour des privilèges accordés au rang de prince étranger” (29). Thanks to her wise and forward-looking grandmother, the Maréchale de S., who saved most of her assets by selling property and transferring the money to England, Sophie and her family avoid the poverty of many other, less prepared aristocrats, and are therefore not forced to rely on the goodwill of foreign hosts. After renting a small house in Lausanne for several months, the family moves to London in order to be closer to Sophie’s brother Charles, who is fighting against the revolutionaries in the region of Vendée.

While travelling through Germany to England, Sophie is fully aware of the tragedy of the French aristocrats as they wander the roads of exile, and are rejected inhospitably by the locals. She draws a dramatic scene of men and women starving, running away from the revolutionary army:

10 This novel was probably written in 1824, but remained unpublished until 2011 (Paris, Manucius). All following quotations are from this reference.

Ce voyage fut douloureux. L'Allemagne était alors remplie de nos malheureux compatriotes fuyant à pied ou dans des charrettes un asile devenu dangereux par l'approche des troupes françaises, nous les voyions arriver mourant de faim et de fatigue dans des villes où on limitait leur séjour ou quelquefois même on refusait de les recevoir. (61)

This scene resonates with true testimonies describing the exodus of many émigrés after the defeat of Valmy, who were confronted by an increasing hostility on the part of the local population. In her *Mémoires*, the duchesse de Gontaut evokes the tragic situation of the émigrés after the military collapse of the counter-revolutionary army, with the following words:

Mais le désordre de la défaite fut horrible. Nous nous retrouvâmes entourés de troupes qui couvraient les chemins. Nous étions obligés d'aller au pas. [...] A la fin de chacune de ces pénibles journées, on cherchait un gîte; une grange, un peu de paille était dispute, et, quand on apercevait un clocher qui faisait espérer un asile, on avait la douleur de s'en voir privé par ces mots si durs, affichés aux portes des villes des petits Etats que nous traversions: "Ici les juifs et les émigrés ont défense d'entrer".¹¹

Both extracts, the testimonial and the fictional, relate how aristocrats, who had always defined themselves as belonging to a privileged order, were suddenly deprived of all resources, homeless and helpless. The texts describe how they became pariahs, unwelcomed and even violently rejected. By presenting both extremes of the émigré experience, Claire de Duras' novel emphasizes the complexity of the aristocratic emigration experience, which incorporated radical disparities of income and circumstances that influenced the conditions of the hospitality with which these émigrés were met.

The arrival of the protagonists in London gives the author an opportunity to describe the organization of the French émigrés there. The author takes a critical look at how the émigrés are spread throughout London, distributed in neighborhoods according to income, and thus living exceedingly different lives. The wealthiest ones have rebuilt their lives abroad along similar patterns to those of Parisian high society life. According to the narrator's description: "là se retrouvaient de jeunes femmes suivies, recherchées comme elles l'eussent été à Paris et des jeunes gens aussi occupés de plaire qu'ils auraient pu l'être quand les succès auprès des femmes étaient l'affaire la plus importante de la vie" (92). Though Sophie's grandmother feels concerned, helping her unfortunate homeless compatriots with periodic gifts of money, her primary concern is for her loved ones, and she chooses to associate mainly with people of her own rank. When she arrives in London with her grandchildren, she joins the rich émigrés, who seem to live in autarchy, reproducing their previous social life as though nothing had changed.

The blindness of the wealthy émigrés to the plight of the indigent ones is symptomatic of a larger theme in these novels of emigration – the overwhelming desire of the fallen nobility to preserve their proud, aristocratic self-image. The poverty that had afflicted some of them was perceived as a wound to the self-perception of nobles whose ethos was constructed on principles of honor and glory. Sophie describes how all émigrés, even the poorest, hide the difficulties of their daily life with pride: "ils souffraient de la misère mais leur fierté ne leur permettait guère de la montrer" (91). Therefore, the rejection of the weakest by the strongest should be understood not just as a simple act of selfishness, but also as the expression of their denial of reality in order to

11 *Mémoires de Madame la Duchesse de Gontaut, 1773-1836*, Paris, Plon, 1891, 25.

cling to a certain self-image, like Sophie's grandmother, who is sure that the counter-revolution will soon bring back all the institutions of the Old Regime: "la société où elle vivait ne pouvait que la confirmer dans cette manière de voir, l'Ancien Régime s'y conservait comme le feu sacré, les titres, les prétentions, les rangs y étaient marqués comme à Versailles" (100). Another example of denial can be found in Stéphanie de Genlis' novel, *Les petits émigrés*, in the character of the Marquise d'Ermont who, though exiled in Switzerland, categorically refuses to recognize the gravity of the events and their consequences, which will inevitably affect the aristocracy's previous life. She writes to her son's tutor, the abbé du Bourg, the following words: "mais vous êtes trop éclairé pour ne pas voir que l'ordre des chausses qui existe maintenant ne peu duré, et que la contre révolution est pour ainsi dire déjà faite".¹²

The theme of the stubborn, unyielding nobles who want to preserve their customs and deny their change in circumstance is closely tied in these novels to the representation of how they *receive* hospitality, as reflected in their relationships with their hosts. Indeed, some of the most prominently recurring figures in the novels are the snobbish French aristocrats, who treat those with whom they come into contact with a disdain that emphasizes their insensitivity to the realities of their new situation. Living in a sort of cloistered social 'bubble', they despise the mores of those who welcomed them in their countries, they laugh at their manners and behave in provocative and condescending ways toward those who receive them. Arrogant, childish, disdainful, extravagant and wasteful, these French émigrés, the novels suggest, are *bad guests*. Examples of this 'bad guest' behavior can be found - represented in varying degrees of harshness - in other novels of emigration, like for example the comte d'Erfeuil in Germaine de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie*, who ignores social protocol by presumptuously inviting himself to occasions in the houses of both his Italian hosts and other émigrés, or Ernestine de Sanzei in Madame de Souza's *Eugénie et Mathilde*, a young aristocrat deeply attached the pre-revolutionary French High Society's way of life, who continues to behave according to previous ostentatious models of interaction incompatible with her new situation.

Such characters are generally presented in these novels through the critical eyes of the protagonists, either émigrés or hosts. This is the case, for example, in Isabelle de Charrière's novel, *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d'émigrés* (1793), and its portrayal of the insufferable Duchesse de ***. The novel relates the story of Germaine, a young émigré who lives in London together with the Duchesse de ***, who is a relative of her father. In her letters to her fiancé Alphonse, Germaine describes life in London among the French émigrés, expressing her love for him as well as her concern about her father's reluctance to allow them to marry. Her father disapproves of the ideological convictions of Alphonse, who wishes to find a solution to the conflict between the revolutionaries and the aristocrats and therefore is reluctant to join the belligerent army of Condé. Although the novel is mostly dedicated to the exchange of ideas concerning the reasons for and consequences of the Revolution, the rising violence which leads to anarchy and chaos, and the choices that should be made to pacify the tensions between the opposing political sides, it is worth noting that these epistolary discussions often evoke the virtue of hospitality defined as kindness, affability and care to the other, and the social - and even political - consequences of inhospitable behavior such as elitism and self-sufficiency.

Germaine condemns the attitude of the Duchesse, who has, in her eyes, transgressed the basic principles of hospitality. The young heroine expresses her anger and her shame

12 Stéphanie de Genlis, *Les Petits émigrés*, chez Maradan, 6^e édition, 1819, 51. All following quotations are from this reference.

when relating, for example, a scene between the Duchesse and a Lord who comes to visit her. The gentleman, who does not speak good French, is cruelly mocked by the Duchesse for his faulty grammar and his misunderstanding of words he does not know. She embarrasses him by ridiculing his mistakes at a social occasion, in front of other guests.¹³ In another situation, the Duchesse and some of her French friends entertain themselves by gossiping maliciously about a relative, the vicomte des Fosses, and spreading licentious anecdotes about his libertine way of life. Their coarseness deeply shocks the nearby English who overhear them, and irritates Germaine, who expresses her displeasure as she describes the scene in a letter to Alphonse (44).

Germaine's complaint echoes the words pronounced by Lady Caroline, an English noble, who is deeply disappointed by the behavior of the Duchesse and her friends:

L'humanité, la pitié m'attirèrent chez votre Duchesse ; je crus qu'une femme éloignée de son mari, de ses parents, de sa patrie, dont le rang et la fortune s'anéantissaient, était une femme fort à plaindre et qu'on ne pouvait trop l'accueillir dans le pays où elle cherchait un asile. La première visite que je lui fis me laissa toutes mes impressions ; mais sans vous et le plaisir que je pris à vous voir, la seconde aurait été la dernière. (72)

The Duchesse's behavior, this passage implies, has relieved Lady Caroline of any sense of obligation toward the ungracious émigré with whom she wanted to establish friendly relations as a sign of support and welcome in a foreign country. In light of the indifference of the guests themselves to the principle of reciprocal respect and generosity that hospitality is meant to entail, she feels entitled to withdraw her hospitality in future without remorse. In contrast, the kindness of the young émigré, Germaine, pleases her and convinces her to offer her continued friendship.

Isabelle de Charrière's point of view is also reflected in Stéphanie de Genlis' epistolary novel, *Les Petits Emigrés*, where she expresses a similar critique through the rigid behavior of some of the characters, who seem unaware of the crisis through which they are living. This long and polyphonic novel tells the stories of several families that have been dispersed throughout Europe by the Revolution, and are keeping in touch through the exchange of written correspondence. Many of the characters take the form of first-person narrators who, while informing their correspondent about the latest developments in their lives, also reveal their own personality through the language and the style they use. Stéphanie de Genlis' criticism of bad guests is no less scathing than in Isabelle de Charrière's book, as evidenced, for example, in the character of the marquise d'Ermont. Very much infatuated with the superiority of her bloodline, the marquise maintains that the duty of the nobility is to do nothing other than be served by commoners. She expresses her reluctance to pursue the curriculum developed by the abbé du Bourg for her son Gustave, as studying too hard may exhaust him, and writes a letter in which she explains her aristocratic vision of the privileges of the nobility. Her arguments, however, are completely spoiled by the multiplicity of spelling errors in her letter, which testify to her own ignorance and lack of education. The blatant errors when she writes her claims of superiority and dignity serve to undermine her arguments even as she makes them. The marquise's cultural deficiencies contrast ironically with the authoritarian tone she uses to formulate statements addressed to her recipient:

[...] Dailleur, songé que Gustave aveque le nom qu'il porte et soissante et quinze mille livre de rante substitués sur sa tête, n'a pas besoin de travaillé

13 Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d'émigrés* (1793), côté-femmes éditions, 1993, 38-40. All following quotations are from this reference.

comme un artiste ou un manœuvre. Vous diré peut-être que nos terres sont confisqué, mais vous êtes trop éclairé pour ne pas voir que l'ordre des chausses qui existe maintenant ne peu duré, et que la contre révolution est pour ainsi dire déjà faite. Je vous suppli donc de ne faire de mon fils, ni un sava, ni un bel espri : car son père et moi nous détestons la pédanterie, et les éducation mairvélieuse ne sont nullement de notre goût. C'est pourquoi la peinture et l'étude des langues me paraissent bien inutiles. Quant on est Français, on doit se contenter de bien savoir sa langue maternelle. Mon fils entrera dans la Carrière Dyplumattick, mais on parle français dans toutes les cours de l'Europe, ainsi à moi je lui cervirais l'Allemand ? (50)

In this passage, where so many words are spelled incorrectly, the marquise not only expresses her reluctance to make any intellectual effort, but also rejects the opportunity to study German and learn about the mores of the locals, their hosts. Neither Charrière's Duchesse living in London nor Genlis' Marquise in Berne understands that displacement implies being positioned at a new crossroads of identity. Instead, both maintain the illusion of living in a reproduction of their former life, and therefore refuse to entertain the possibility of any kind of change.

In contrast to such intransigent, ungrateful, 'bad guest' aristocrats, these novels of emigration also portray 'good guest' protagonists – émigrés who are willing to adapt, and even to use their new position as an opportunity to personally change for the better and rectify past mistakes. One such character is the vicomte des Fosses in Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres trouvées*, who wants to change his reputation as a licentious French libertine. It is no coincidence that his first step towards reparation is the decision to live in the countryside, away from the French aristocrats in London, and to become acquainted with the inhabitants of his host country. He asks for hospitality from the Catholic priest of a village situated in the valley of Herford-Shire,¹⁴ expressing his wish to stay, and establishing an agreement based on reciprocity. Together, he and the priest define the conditions under which he can stay in the guest house with his servant. What might he receive from his host and what should he give in return? In this novel, the moral redemption of the young libertine is channeled and represented through a contract of hospitality based on a *give and take* exchange. The Christian call to practice hospitality by sharing resources and needs is combined here with a more secular conception of a hospitality founded not only on pecuniary reciprocity, but mostly on the idea that hospitality leads to openness toward the other and the self. Both parties learn to know each other through the study of their respective languages, shared daily labor, and conversation.

Similar matters are further analyzed in *Trois femmes* (1798), another novel of emigration by Isabelle de Charrière. The story takes place in Germany in the small village of Altendorf in Westphalia, and follows three French émigrés: Emilie, a young aristocrat, left alone after the death of her parents, her faithful chambermaid Josephine, who takes care of all her material needs, and her close friend Constance de Vaucourt, a French-born widow and heiress to a great fortune amassed in the French colonies.

From the very beginning of the novel, the family d'Altendorf plays the role of host, welcoming the young émigré and her maid, but the presence of two young foreigners represents an unfamiliar and potentially destabilizing situation for them too. Theobald d'Altendorf, the young son in love with Emilie, feels insulted that she maintains a strong attachment to her homeland and its cultural beauty and richness. The tensions between

14 The name of the valley has been written here as it appears in the French novel.

the two lovers accentuate the difficulty of accepting the other, and even renouncing, for his sake, old customs and personal habits. Theobald's personal conflict is shared, on a broader, social level, by his parents. As hosts, the members of this German family feel the need to reevaluate their own behavior in society and to redefine their identities as Germans. Conversations on the subject lead the baronne d'Altendorf to the conclusion that one should be faithful to one's way of life and beliefs, and at the same time open enough to learn from the others and accept cultural differences: "Un peu de partialité me plaît : elle est bonne, elle est nécessaire pour se trouver bien au milieu des gens avec lesquels on est appelé à vivre, et ne pas donner à tout ce qui vient du dehors une préférence outrageante pour son pays".¹⁵ Her statement is corroborated by the words of the freethinking abbé de la Tour, a dear friend of the family, who responds by declaring: "Il me semble qu'on ne peut pas trop être, soit fier, soit humilié d'une chose qui nous est imposée si absolument, que d'être né ici ou là" (34). These points are reiterated by Constance as she advises Emilie on the resolution of her conflict with Theobald, telling her to accept the rules of the host and formulating a radical approach in favor of the receiver:

Gardons-nous de vouloir établir ici la France, et de traiter des gens qui nous souffrent, comme s'ils étaient étrangers chez eux, et que ce fut nous qui les tolérassions. Quoi ! dit Emilie, quand je suis exilée du plus beau pays du monde, il ne me sera pas permis de m'entourer pour ainsi dire, de ses mœurs, des usages que le goût y avait consacrés ! non, dit Mme de Vaucourt, non, cela ne vous est pas permis. (45-46)

According to her, Emilie should be open to the unknown and accept new patterns of behavior as a mark of respect to those who have opened their doors, and as an act of broad-mindedness and maturity.

Constance is herself a central personage in the plot and a paragon of 'emigration done right'. She pronounces vigorous statements on rules of hospitality and the issues of identity that derive from this basic, dynamic and reversible relationship of being the one who receives and the one who is received, advocating for tolerance and commitment to pluralism. Her financial and intellectual autonomy and her experience of life allow her to solve problems like Theobald and Emilie's disagreements. She takes an active approach to the task of settling into a new country, involving herself in the social life of her new community. Furthermore, she is the predominant narrative voice in the second part of the novel, writing letters to the abbé de la Tour on various topics, including religion, education and knowledge. As a cosmopolitan figure, she circulates through and navigates between a number of discourses: she shares intimate thoughts with her friends, adapts herself to the cultural norms of the local nobility, discusses philosophy with the abbé, and negotiates a wedding contract with a family of peasants. Simply put, throughout the book, she provides answers that offer new opportunities not necessarily to ruin the rigid structures of the patriarchal world, but rather to reinject them with values of acceptance and exchange based on other, more equal and more convivial rules.

One recurring symbol of openness and reciprocity in these novels is language. By learning one another's languages, both guests and hosts demonstrate their conviviality and their desire for mutual understanding. Thus, in the second part of *Trois femmes*, Mme d'Altendorf insists that the three heroines learn German, as a sign of successful

¹⁵ Isabelle de Charrière, *Trois femmes* (1799), The Modern Language Association of America, 2007, 33. All the following quotations are from this reference.

integration in their new homeland. Speaking the languages of others is portrayed not only as an act of openness and tolerance, but also as a tool of empowerment. Indeed, the German noble Theobald thanks his mother for giving him the opportunity to study French, English and Italian at an early age: “Je vous suis fort obligé de m’avoir fait apprendre de bonne heure le français, comme l’anglais et l’italien, mais je ne me piquerai jamais de le parler comme un français, ni comme je parle l’allemand” (34). In *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d’émigrés*, Germaine studies English to escape the negative company of the Duchesse and to grow closer to Lady Caroline, a character who opens new horizons for her. In *Les Petits Emigrés*, Gustave d’Ermont studies German with his mentor, the abbé du Bourg, despite his mother’s rebukes, and through his new *apprentissage* discovers the pleasures of learning and the power of knowledge, gradually gaining his own autonomy. In the same novel, the members of d’Armilly’s family, who escaped France in the summer of 1792 because the father strongly opposed revolutionary politics and was denounced to the authorities, speak English and some German, skills that enable them to move easily from place to place and to disguise their identity. Thanks to their flexibility, they manage to solve problems of adaptation and thus avoid dangers and other obstacles. Finally, in *Les Mémoires de Sophie*, the end of the second part is devoted to a visit made by the heroine and her grandmother to the castle of Lord Arlington, where, from the inside, she becomes familiar with the way of life, the intimate familial relationships and the mores of the British aristocracy. Through her narrator, Claire de Duras develops a long and subtle picture of the encounter with the other and the confluence of two cultures, because even though both guest and host belong to the same social class, they come from different countries, and therefore, they need to get to know each other.

Expanding the concept of hospitality: New relationships between emigrants as examples of an ‘ethics of care’

In the previous section, I explored the more explicit representations of hospitality in these novels of emigration, showing how scenes of ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ hospitality, are repeatedly portrayed as tied into the openness and flexibility of the characters’ self-perception, correlating ‘good’ hospitality with an ability to embrace the unknown and a willingness to change. In this section, I argue that the novels also propose a more implicit, nuanced, *expanded* perception of the notion of hospitality, which is tied inextricably into the experience of emigration they describe. This expanded perception, I claim, can be read as an example of what feminist ethicist Maurice Hamington calls ‘Feminist Hospitality’.

What is ‘Feminist Hospitality’ and how does it differ from other definitions of the term? Many forms of hospitality, Hamington notes in his article, “Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality,” are designed “to maintain or advance existing power hierarchies” (23). They are “conditional” (i.e. predicated on a consideration of the host’s own benefit), and therefore also “limited, defensive, and rooted in mistrust of strangers” (24). Feminist hospitality, in contrast, is based in “a nonhierarchical understanding of hospitality,” which “mitigates the expression of power differential, while seeking greater connection and understanding for the mutual benefit of both host and guest” (23). One of the keys to the distinction Hamington draws is the perception of hospitality as “a performative act of identity”:

To give comfort or make welcome the stranger, the host must act; to resettle displaced people, a host nation must act. In the process of this action, the performance of hospitality, the host— whether it is an individual or a nation-

state—is instantiating identity. There must be an “I” who gives, welcomes, and comforts, and that “I” is only known through action. (24)

These “acts of hospitality”, Hamington claims, “constitute the identity of the host as well as the identity of the group, culture, or nation for which the host acts” (24). Feminist hospitality posits an alternative to the “master of the house” identity created by acts of hospitality that rely on “constructing a ‘fortress’ of rigid ritual that is ready to provide for others while simultaneously keeping them at a ‘safe’ distance” (26). Instead of “recreating acts that constitute identity through positions of power over others,” it seeks “to foster the atmosphere for lateral exchanges,” viewing hospitality as an opportunity for “mutual discovery” and change (25-6). In other words, the basis for this hospitality is an assumption of equality and reciprocity between host and guest, in which each learns from and changes the other. As Hamington notes, this reciprocity “implies a flattening of the relationship out of mutual respect and humility; the distinction between guest and host is blurred as both learn and grow together” (28).

Importantly, Hamington’s paper implies that the ideals associated with feminist hospitality can be expanded *beyond* the narrow definitions of hospitality “as an event or occasion,” arguing that it is “central to an *ongoing relational morality*” about what it means to behave ‘hospitably’ towards others (32 – emphasis mine). He thus redefines hospitality as, “an ethical disposition toward the Other that is capable of transcending individual transgressions through forgiveness to maintain a *relationship of care*” (32 – emphasis mine). He continues this line of thought by asserting that this “disposition” should include a set of caring practices to foster deeper connections among people.

Such ‘relationships of care’ are strongly evident in the novels of emigration described in this paper, which offer many representations of help and care by women *for* women within the particular circumstances of shared exile. The novels provide various examples of how this shared experience forges new kinds of relationships *between* émigrés and how emigration can create the conditions for transforming how the characters relate to one another. One such “relationship of care,” for example, is the relationship between Sophie and another young émigré, Ernestine, in *Mémoires de Sophie*. Although the heroine tells the reader of her constant concern in her unlucky compatriots and her efforts to provide help and support to them, something changes radically when she meets Ernestine and her dying mother, Madame de Valory. The spectacle of the loving young daughter Ernestine, who is working “nuit et jour” (106) to survive, affects Sophie profoundly. She stops looking at the misery of the unfortunate émigrés from outside and involves herself physically by joining Ernestine in her efforts to nurse her sick mother.

When Sophie helps the impoverished mother and daughter, it is not just a matter of giving something to a poorer person as an act of charity or of being a polite guest. The encounter prompts Sophie to take a critical look at herself, to undergo a fundamental change of consciousness. Sophie recognizes in Ernestine, because of her courage, her kindness and total devotion to her sick mother, a kind of *alter ego* that helps her to recognize her own inner aspirations to be a good person. She describes this process as a genuine feeling of self-fulfillment, as she says: “[l’âme] retrouve comme une patrie”. Deeply moved by Ernestine’s misery and pain, she can no longer live as she did before: “je n’en revenais pas de me sentir si changée” (109). She is more sensitive to her surroundings and to the feelings of others. She acquires a deeper knowledge and understanding of the political reality and takes personal action for the sake of her poor friends by soliciting help and support from highly placed people she knows. This example portrays an act of hospitality that emerges from the situation in which these two girls find themselves, and ultimately influences the formation of Sophie’s identity in a

close reflection of Hamington's claim that "women who help other women, not in the spirit of charity or to alleviate class guilt but with a generous disposition and for mutual benefit, exemplify acts of feminist hospitality" (25).

An alternate approach to the promotion of 'relationships of care' is reflected in Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres trouvées dans des portefeuilles d'émigrés*, in which several characters speculate about the potential negative consequences of the *absence* of such relationships. Germaine, as mentioned above, is shocked by the behavior of the Duchesse and by the violent contrast between the great poverty of some émigrés, and the ostentatious, wasteful lifestyle of the many others who have retained their wealth. She dislikes the manners of the Duchesse and her guests, who show a lack of solidarity with their poor compatriots – exiled just as they themselves are –, and she speculates that this attitude of carelessness toward other émigrés carries social and political repercussions:

[...] n'est-il pas affreux qu'on se permette une chère de vrais gourmands, quand on voit de pauvres gens, nos compatriotes, nos compagnons d'infortune, chassés par les mêmes fléaux, [...] quand on voit, dis-je, ces pauvres gens mendier, souffrir, mourir presque de faim ? si les Anglais ont ignoré ce que nous étions en France avant la Révolution, ils le savent aujourd'hui ; et voilà encore une manière de justifier nos ennemis [...] S'il n'y avait eu que des Germaine et des Alphonse, j'ose croire qu'on n'eût pas fait de révolution. (37)

A similar link is made by another tolerant character in the novel, the abbé de *** who makes the following remark in a letter to Alphonse, his young protégé:

[...] n'est-il pas désolant de voir ces malheureux Français se compromettre dans l'esprit des étrangers par leur frivolité, leurs indiscretions, leur méchant commérage ! on va les croire incorrigibles ; et qu'est-ce qui pleurera sur des gens à qui l'infortune ne donne pas un instant de circonspection, sur cette noblesse qui exigeant qu'on la respecte, se montre sans dignité, sans générosité, sans rien de ce qui pourrait la rendre respectable ! entre eux, les individus se déchirent, se vilipendent, et puis ils prétendent qu'en masse ils doivent être honorés. Qu'est-ce donc que cette dignité d'un corps qui ne se compose pas de la dignité de ses membres ? (58)

Isabelle de Charrière thus creates a causal link between the selfishness of the privileged class and the uprising of the people. Via her characters, she explicitly articulates the claim that the principle of honor that characterizes the identity of the nobility had been perverted and emptied of its ethical value long before the Revolution. Both Germaine and the abbé de *** call attention to the indifference of the strong toward the weak, even as both share the same destiny of exile, suggesting that this moral deterioration has compromised the aristocracy's capacity to show concern for others. The idea that this selfishness has repercussions on larger realms of society is frequently expressed by Charrière's characters. They argue that caring for others, including the less fortunate and those who welcome you in time of war, is a virtue that might have prevented the violent division of the French nation. As Germaine writes to Alphonse: "Si les Anglais ont ignoré ce que nous étions en France avant la Révolution, ils le savent aujourd'hui ; et voilà encore une manière de justifier nos ennemis, dont ceux-ci peuvent nous remercier" (37).

Isabelle de Charrière deepens her reflection on these political aspects of hospitality in *Trois femmes*, through the new relationship developed by Emilie and Josephine, two girls from different social backgrounds who, when they find themselves alone in a foreign country, learn to share a common destiny. The relationship between these two

characters, originally that of mistress and servant, changes fundamentally following their exile. Emilie, orphaned and left destitute by the revolution, is not only incapable of paying her maid any wages, but becomes wholly dependent upon her for their livelihood. As the two rent rooms in a small house in the small village of Altendorf, it is Josephine who sees to their material needs – keeping the house, working in the garden, selling their possessions in the market, and even soliciting the aid of a local servant in exchange for sexual favors. When Emilie discovers the pragmatic relationship between Josephine and the manservant Henri, based on the exchange of favors, she first condemns the immoral behavior of her maid. But Josephine's arguments in her defense, citing their dire need of help and her deep concern for the well-being of her beloved mistress as the rationale underlying her decisions, convince Emilie that more flexibility with the boundaries of 'acceptable behavior' is necessary in the light of the stark reality of their new lives. The solidarity established between the two young women makes possible a previously unheard-of open dialogue between them about the ways in which they grapple with their former sets of values and their present situation as exiles.

The need to articulate her reasons for the 'immoral choices' she has made for the sake of her young mistress leads Josephine to elaborate moral principles that are far from being those defended by traditional values (such as the holiness of virginity), but are based on caring and sharing with the one for whom you feel responsible. Emilie in turn learns to moderate her inherited moral education once she is confronted with the complexities of the real world, and she listens to Josephine's arguments, coming to know her as a friend and to appreciate her devotion. Since she sees Josephine as her protector, she decides to reciprocate that protection when Josephine becomes pregnant by Theobald's servant, who then refuses to marry her. Emilie declares that she will leave Altendorf with the pregnant Josephine and help her raise the child. By doing so, she ties her destiny with that of Josephine and formulates a new kind of contract based on equality between them: "Nous gagnerons notre vie et celle de ton enfant" (64). Emilie's internal conflicts between her previous moral and cultural values (e.g., the immorality of Josephine's extramarital relations), and the new reality in which her ties of loyalty and mutual interdependence with Josephine have rendered these moral codes irrelevant, force her to adapt both her perceptions and her behavior to a changeable reality. This profound change in Emilie's sensibilities is a response to the total devotion of Josephine, who says: "Chacun a une vertu à sa manière: la mienne est de tout faire pour vous" (68).

By helping each other, Emilie the aristocrat and Josephine the commoner move into a more horizontal relationship, which transforms their personalities, and their way of thinking and of making choices. The two heroines set aside the rules of social hierarchy in order to invent a kind of communication and relationship based on sharing and caring that may, implicitly, suggest a model for new political options, such as a less hierarchical social order and openness to compromises between opposing ideological views.

The autonomy gained by the heroines in the novels of emigration written by Isabelle de Charrière could not have happened outside the context of emigration. In *Trois femmes*, because Emilie lost her parents in the revolution and finds herself free from patriarchal authority under emigration's conditions, she has to readjust her former, and highly restrictive, moral views of acceptable behavior for women. Her capacity for empathy and forgiveness, which reflects the elements of feminist hospitality proposed by Hamington, blossoms in the very specific context of exile. The possibility of creating new models of sociability, of modifying roles and erasing, to a certain degree, the stiffness of hierarchical configuration, is presented here as inherent to the feminine experience of exile. Josephine, as a woman and a servant, would have been excluded from participation in the Kantian self-regulating moral community as it is formulated in the essay *Über den*

Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis [*On the Proverb: That May Be True in Theory, but it is of No Practical Use*] (1793). Isabelle de Charrière's story does not just tell us how women must build their own ethical and moral principles, beyond the laws of the men who have excluded them from the juridical playing field, as the historian Carla Hesse claims.¹⁶ I argue here that the autonomy gained by the heroines could not have happened outside the context of emigration. Josephine makes practical decisions with potentially critical consequences, and argues with her mistress about the extent to which roles and duties should be distributed according to pragmatic principles. By representing, in various situations, the capacity of these heroines to act and to react to events, the author creates a strong link between hospitality and gender. This is the starting point from which these women experience empowerment and independence, embracing a new participatory role under circumstances of displacement.

Conclusion

The few examples presented and analyzed here cannot, in the scope of this article, fully explore the emigration experience represented in the novels written by women in the wake of the French Revolution. They do, however, emphasize the importance of the concept of hospitality in this particular genre, and highlight some of the specific ways in these books, and others like them, used hospitality as a vehicle for addressing social, ethical and political issues. The representations in fiction written by women propose a complicated and therefore interesting reflection – an entanglement of situations showing the act of hospitality from different angles. When women write about emigration, they provide a feminine point of view of the ways in which hospitality is linked with identity formation in a time of crisis. Representations of various characters as 'good' and 'bad' guests and hosts are employed as critiques of the French nobility's social conventions and practices, but also as a means of articulating personal and political tensions – between condemnation and fidelity toward the *Ancien Régime* system, and between adherence to and suspicion of republican ideals. These books show how women can – voluntarily or otherwise – go through a process of emancipation with the emergence of new conditions of life. They present heroines who are at a pivotal point in their lives, in which they are required to reevaluate the laws and norms in which they have been educated. Flexibility, adaptation to new situations, openness, sharing and caring, become key themes that recur throughout these novels.

Far from being apolitical, authors like Stéphanie de Genlis, Claire de Duras and Isabelle de Charrière are very much concerned with the consequences of the Revolution, and with the problem of emigration. They capture the conflicting feelings and behaviors that arose in response to this social and political upheaval, and propose alternative perspectives towards political issues involved in the emigration, in which hospitality has its role to play. In many ways they advocate a form of hospitality that supports a cosmopolitan worldview and a more open and generous society, in which women are active and powerful agents of change.

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