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*Céad Míle Fáilte ? Récits d'hostilité et d'hospitalité dans From a Low and Quiet  
Sea de Donal Ryan : éthique et esthétique de l'inclusion*

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# Céad Míle Fáilte? Narratives of Hostility and Hospitality in Donal Ryan's *From a Low and Quiet Sea*: Ethics and Aesthetics of Inclusiveness

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## Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> Ricoeur (1992, 172<sup>1</sup>) defined ethics as “aiming at a good life lived with and for others in just institutions”. Donal Ryan’s novel *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018) examines what this “good life” means while exploring human relationships in the contemporary Irish context, as it portrays characters who are in turn hospitable, hosted, hostile and victims of hostility. The novel precisely focuses on the ambivalent nature of humankind, which its readers are invited to face along with the matters of ethics it raises, especially as the present volume interrogates Irish institutions and identity/ies in today’s global world. This is all the more topical as the Republic of Ireland, which used to experience mass emigration, has also become a land of immigration, the change fostering a reassessment of its national identity/ies and narrative(s). The novel illustrates the changing narratives of migration in recent years, highlighting how stories and storytelling are deeply interlaced with those issues. The latter cannot be separated from the question of inclusiveness since the novel thematically and narratively explores the processes of inclusion and rejection of the “other”, of what is hostile, but also of the reader—who is, in a way, the text’s “other”. This paper thus aims to examine the narratives of hostility and hospitality at work in *From a Low and Quiet Sea*

and their relations with ethical and aesthetic preoccupations. I briefly review the characters' relationships before focusing on Irish national identity/ies and its narratives. Narrative choices are instrumental in creating the ambivalence of the dialectics of hospitality and hostility in the novel. Therefore in the third part I will discuss whether the text is a hostile or a hospitable one and examine how the storytelling modes and intentions at the core of the novel are fundamentally linked to inclusiveness.

## Hospitality and hostility in the plot: Pervading ambivalence

- 2 The novel opens in war-torn Syria, focusing first on Farouk, who flees his country aboard a coffin ship. His family drowns in the Mediterranean and the sea which features in the title of the novel claims lives, as is also illustrated by the poem on Norman invasions included in the third section ("Armoured they came from the east, / From a low and quiet sea. / We were a naked rabble, throwing stones; / They laughed, and slaughtered us", 122). Those lines, which appear more than halfway through the book, confirm that the title actually foretold a threat, not the serenity that "quiet" might have hinted at. *From a Low and Quiet Sea* indeed focuses on the narratives of three men facing hardships and defining moments of crisis. The first is Farouk; the second is Lampy, a young, heartbroken Irishman trying to come to terms with the beginning of his adult life; the third is John, a mysterious, dying Irishman who confesses to a long string of sins and dubious actions. All three struggle with inner violence and are shown to oscillate between depression and resilience. Similarly, the hostility they face—from themselves or the outer world—is sometimes balanced, or at least mitigated, by hospitable people.
- 3 Human relationships in the novel are neither wholly hostile nor fully hospitable. As Stavo-Debaugé (2020) argues, hospitality is not so much an intrinsic as a relational quality<sup>2</sup>. Gotman (2001: §8) explains:
 

The Littré Dictionary defined hospitality among the Ancients as "a contract between two or more people from different places, between families and even entire cities..." This "contract" was legally and bindingly deeply linked to the state of social relations at the time. Today, the contract made possible through hospitality has essentially the quality of an interpersonal relationship. These examples show how hospitality, which is an age-old and universal institution, now takes on the aspect of contemporary individualism and can only really be identified when allowing for a quality interpersonal relationship, which has become its true purpose<sup>3</sup>.
- 4 The moral quality of human relationships in the novel varies. On the one hand, discord and betrayal are key themes and impact the three main characters. On the other hand, care and assistance are also included: in the refugee camp, an old man helps Farouk grieve, and doctors and relief workers help him get on a boat to Ireland; Lampy is a caregiver at an old people's home. Men and women's relationships often vary between those poles. Their nature mostly depends on whether they occur in the private or public sphere, as evidenced by Farouk and his wife (husband/wife relationship) or Florence and Dixie (daughter/father relationship). Traditional—some might say sexist—attitudes mostly persist in public, hinting at hostility, but what is shown in private presents those relations as hospitable and inclusive, proving that public attitudes are

for show and that hostility is constructed as a survival mode to match old-fashioned societal expectations.

- 5 The fact that human relationships happen in a social context is something of a truism, but it is nonetheless key to apprehending the mechanisms of hospitality and hostility, especially when migration is concerned.

## Ireland: A hospitable country?

- 6 The novel chronicles today's era of globalisation and mass mobility in which Ireland has become a country people migrate to. Newcomers, such as Farouk, face xenophobia. In fact, (in)hospitality and population mobility have always been interlaced: "Hospitality [...] is the founding element of the link between mobility and immobility" (Raffestin, 1997: 167<sup>4</sup>). It also conditions the nature and quality of the relationships between natives and newcomers: "Hospitality, as a 'bridge' between two worlds, is a syntactic element in social life that expresses the articulation between the known and the unknown" (Raffestin, 1997: 167). As such, it is often said to have always been part of human societies and its definition is generally considered as unproblematic:

Hospitality seemingly is a simple and universal practice. [...] It would therefore be tempting to provide the following generic definition: hospitality is the institution that regulates the interaction between a host (at home) and a guest (a newcomer), and which consists in a process of mutual familiarisation (getting to know each other, sustaining a relationship, etc.). It aims at dispensing advantages, initiating social relations, identifying strangers and temporarily integrating guests<sup>5</sup>. (Boudou, 2017: 11)

- 7 Hospitality is "a rite that authorises the transgression of limits without resorting to violence" (Raffestin, 1997: 166), providing a contract (Boudou, 2017)<sup>6</sup> and thereby supposedly peacefully regulating the relationships between hosts and guests, natives and newcomers. Hospitality acts as a threshold between the outside and the inside and, as such, is also located at the meeting point of self and other. It determines the nature and modalities of this junction, including the mutually transformative potential of such interactions:

Hospitality can be imagined as the knowledge of the relationship that a person maintains with the Other through him/herself. The hosting party, who is therefore in a sedentary position, is in fact a migrant, a stranger in-waiting, while the hosted party, who is therefore in a nomadic position, is in fact a sedentary person in-waiting. This is a case of potential symmetry: one is the deferred—or virtual—image of the Other. (Raffestin, 1997: 167–168)

- 8 Such symmetry may be welcome or perceived as a threat to individuals and even to the national integrity and identity. In this case, hospitality may turn into hostility. Derrida (1999: 119) calls this phenomenon the "contamination of hospitality by hostility", hinting at the corruption of an inclusive, ethical process by less humane feelings. This leads to a breach in the peace contract typically created by the law of hospitality (Boudou, 2012). On the national scale, under the cover of hospitality—and occasionally its religious expression, charity—power relationships show through with political, sometimes hostile undertones:

For a long time, hospitality was a way of governing foreigners, of course in the name of extra-political values such as virtue or charity, but still aiming to control their mobility while allowing them passage. [...] Hospitality remains a political activity: it involves drawing boundaries, deciding how open and closed they should

be, determining who can and cannot belong to the community, as well as institutionalizing [...] the interaction between the inside and the outside. (Boudou, 2017: 18)

- 9 The power relations and political stakes which steer the politics of hospitality (and institutionalised hostility) of a particular country or area are highly topical questions in a world where the nature and role of borders (Amilhat-Szary, 2015) remain extremely controversial, especially in relation to migration. In a novel opening on the fate of a Syrian man who flees his country and ends up in Ireland through an international programme, the hospitality/hostility dialectics with regard to migration raises the issue of how the Irish characters react to the presence of foreign characters. The hostility displayed against Farouk (see below) may hint at a sense of insecurity as far as national identity is concerned. This may stem from the fact that Ireland is presented as a country which, after the prosperous parenthesis represented by the Celtic Tiger era, is once again crippled by mass emigration (Ó Riain, 2014). Lampy “applied for a job in a mine in Canada” (88): although he renounced this idea so as not to abandon his family, his friend Dean carries the plan through, puts up a picture on Facebook “and Lampy wished when he saw the picture that he’d had the balls to go” (92). This phenomenon is also alluded to through Mrs Coyne’s son, who emigrated to Australia. It is shown to produce distorted family relationships characterised by estrangement:

Several times she had visits from grandchildren. [...] One lad came a couple of years ago and he stayed a fortnight or so [...] He showed her [pictures of] all sorts of people and children and babies and they were all relations of her but she couldn’t hold them in a line in her head in a million years, and he came to a photograph of a big round man with a baldy head [...] and she’d gotten a terrible shock at the realization that the old man in the picture was her son and that this tall boy who was half a step or less from manhood wasn’t her grandchild at all but her great-grandchild. (169)

- 10 This interrogates what becomes of the identity of a nation in such circumstances, when even family ties and filial transmission are hindered. What sense of Irishness and what Irish culture will be passed on to the younger generations are recurring questions. Irish identity is present through various motifs and themes that regularly surface in the narrative, such as references to Irish history, hurling and religion. Based on this, Irishness may appear as quite traditional and rather hostile to anything outside its usual bounds. The confrontation between such a vision and the contemporary context of globalisation and mass mobility raises the question of how Irishness is defined, and of whether Irishness is a hospitable national identity.
- 11 In recent years, many specialists in Irish studies (Chan, 2006; Fanning, 2002; Kiberd, 2005; Lentin, 2002; Lingley & Kiberd, 2001) have focused on how Ireland has become a destination for immigrants, and on how Irish people react to the situation. The country has had a long tradition of marginalisation of both its diaspora abroad and of its population on its own island under British rule, and is no stranger to (post)colonial experience. One might think the history of the country could have created a national sense of ethics helping people to empathise with migrants and to welcome them. Things are not so simple: “as far as intolerance is concerned, the Irish, despite the constraints due to and imposed by insularity, are no happy exception” (Mikowski, 2004: 222–37). While the motto “Céad Míle Fáilte” (“a hundred thousand welcomes” in Irish Gaelic) is very often on display as an upholder of Irish culture and soft power, it does not seem to include migrants: now that it has become a destination for new population

groups, “Ireland has had widely disparate and contradictory responses to its growing role as a host country for contemporary migrants” (Tucker, 2010: 107). Deane (1986: 57–58) evoked a “mystique of Irishness” (Kiely, 1950; Ward, 2002) that, as Garden (2016: 70) argues has become synonymous with a “racialised concept of Irish identity [...] which is actually a legacy of anti-colonial praxis”, but now paradoxically turns against other marginalised groups.

12 Racism and xenophobia towards migrant characters and migrants in general can be found in Ryan’s novel, as illustrated in the poem that gives the book its title and establishes a parallel between foreigners arriving in Ireland and invasion (122). Several people in Lampy’s town seem to abide by this racialised “mystique of Irishness” and display hostile attitudes towards immigration and mixed-race couples (“Do you know what some boys called me [Farouk] on the street yesterday? Shit-face. Go home, shit-face. Go home to fuck”, 163).

13 Contrary to these secondary characters though, most of the protagonists, and in particular Lampy and his family, appear more hospitable. Florence, a mother-figure who embodies the idea of a hospitable Ireland—caring (Tronto & Fischer, 1990), inclusive and benevolent—, seems to have no issue in welcoming migrants, as symbolised by the fact that she lets Farouk into her life and her heart. Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto (1990: 19) define care as species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

14 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 161) suggests a slightly updated, less anthropocentric, definition:

Care is everything that is done (rather than everything that “we” do) to maintain, continue and re-pair “the world” so that all (rather than “we”) can live in it as well as possible. That world includes... all that we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

15 Lampy acknowledges that his mother is dating a foreigner but does not seem to be bothered by this (“he sees that his mother and the foreign fella are holding hands and he’s happy for his mother”, 180). His grandfather paints a more ambivalent picture. He first reacts with suspicion and hostility, which illustrates the rampant xenophobia in their village:

And his heart sank back at the realisation that it wasn’t Lampy at the table, it was his daughter’s friend from the hospital, the brown-skinned, dark-haired lad, [...] and he couldn’t watch them at it, it was unbearable [...]. He’d suffered terrible, Florence said, and he was here on licence and he was a locum, and Pop didn’t know what that was and nor did he ask. Every foreigner had a story, a lament, and they had all to be taken with a pinch of salt or, even better, not at all. He wondered how it would go at Ciss’s if Florence married a foreign Johnny, after all the jokes he’d heard cracked there and all the jokes he’d cracked himself and all the talk along the years about keeping them out, about there not being jobs enough for the Irish, about there not being space enough for all the madding hordes. Fuck them, he thought. It’d nearly be a pleasure telling them. (161)

16 The end of the passage shows that he is not totally opposed to the idea of his daughter being with a foreigner. There are hints (such as the fact that in this internal focalisation, he thinks of himself as “Pop”, not as Dixie) that he is probably more worried as a father for his daughter in a new relationship than he is about whom she

dates, and that apparent racism and stereotypes are actually put forward to hide his worry:

Pop would humph and grunt out through the blinds, and ask why [Farouk] wasn't coming in, and she'd say, Maybe he doesn't feel very welcome, Dad, and he'd pretend offence and say, Lord Almighty, what has a man to do. Roll out a red fuckin carpet for every cunt? And she'd say Farouk was from a culture with a welcome imperative, where even your enemy was afforded your hospitality in your house, and he'd say, Welcome imperative my bollix, that's all very well until they're flying planes into skyscrapers [...]. And she'd say, DAD! and she'd shake her head, but she knew what he really meant, what his fear really was, because she knew the truth of her father well, the warm and wounded heart of him. (164–5)

- 17 Dixie does not seem to share the same welcome imperative or, rather, does not feel like his hospitality needs to be explicitly offered to the newcomer: Farouk and Florence are apparently supposed to understand that his reluctant attitude is no obstacle to their relationship and that Dixie actually does—albeit ostensibly begrudgingly—accept Farouk into his home, and metaphorically into his family. At the end of the novel, Florence, Farouk and Dixie all come together to help Lampy. As exemplified by that, and contrary to what one might believe, despite the characters' outward religious beliefs and the historical links between religion and hospitality (Raffestin, 1997: 168; Boudou, 2017: 17; de Jaucourt “hospitalité”), hospitality towards foreigners and migrants in *From a Low and Quiet Sea* does not seem to stem from religious ethics as much as from humane—or secular—ones. Not only does Ricœur (1992: 172) define ethics as “aiming at a good life”, as quoted earlier, but he also equals this concept with “*what is considered to be good*”<sup>8</sup> and comes prior to the very idea of a moral code (Ricœur, 1989: 200). In the novel, ethics are indeed a personal or interpersonal matter, based on each character's idea of “what is considered to be good.”
- 18 Ricœur considers ethics to be a dynamic process as he speaks of an “ethical intention [...] to underline the project-like character of ethics and the dynamism that underlies it” (Ricœur, undated). Ryan's choice to include a protagonist from another culture, giving his work a transnational aspect, is in keeping with such an ethical impulse aiming at deconstructing the “mystique of Irishness” evoked earlier (Henning, 2005; Bellacasa, 2017; Varela, 1999; Zylinska, 2014). The first chapter of the novel highlights the ambivalence of human relationships in Syria. This way, when the readers are parachuted in Ireland in the following sections, they come to acknowledge that hostility and hospitality are present in all societies. They are also encouraged to perceive echoes between attitudes in Syria and Ireland, especially as regards societal matters or the phenomena of mass mobility and population intermingling. By including Syria as a revealing prism through which Ireland can be observed, the novel interrogates the mystique of Irishness in today's world, and it does so by emphasising that while national identity does retain some specificities, it cannot but be considered through a transnational lens. This opening is what allows for one's ability to make global sense of the dialectics and narratives of hospitality and hostility, pointing at a form of universal (un)humanity. Through this game of mirrors, national identity can become inclusive and hospitable thanks to the symmetry Derrida (1999: 118) evoked:

The possibility of welcoming foreigners does not necessarily mean being exposed to threat, aggression or disorder. More radically, it is a chance offered to the welcoming host to have access to his/her own dwelling place. [...] The foreign hosted party is a chance to appropriate my “own”.

- 19 The author's decision to include—to host—Syria in his Irish narrative is therefore also a way to make better sense of the hosting party, Ireland. This course of action, which helped build the depth and scope of the novel, raises the question of whether Ryan's narrative choices produce a hostile or a hospitable text for the reader.

## A hostile or hospitable text / story? The ethics of telling stories and storytelling

- 20 Some elements may give the impression of an “unfriendly” narrative, hindering the reading process and perhaps even excluding the readers from fully comprehending and appreciating the text.
- 21 First, *From a Low and Quiet Sea* tackles difficult topics (exile, grief, mental health issues, violence), and part of this exacting story is told through the perspective of John, one highly unlikeable focaliser. What's more, silence over difficult—even taboo—matters is a key feature of the plot, as expressed by John's “I still can't say it” (132), Lampy's “he said nothing to her for a long while” (63) or Dixie's refusal to talk about Lampy's father (68). Incidentally, when John finally comes out of his silence, his speech is explicitly shaped as a confession of a long list of sins, which contributes to making the act of speaking out appear rather hostile.
- 22 This is also translated by the extremely recurrent use of ellipses in dialogues as well as in the general rhythm and structure of the text. The wreckage of the ship carrying Farouk and his family is not described, as the narrative cuts from the beginning of a storm, to Farouk being in Europe in a camp, weeks or maybe even months later (30–31). The narration of Farouk's time in the camp is a mere collage of episodes, the chronology of which remains uncertain, probably aiming to translate the disorienting experience of trauma. John says he hired someone to beat his rival up, but says no more and never admits that the man actually died; instead, he tells the ominous dream he had, possibly to hint at his guilty conscience. Ironically, this lack of information is paralleled by the proliferation of embedded stories.
- 23 Finally, the last thirty pages are highly kaleidoscopic. This part, called “Lake Islands”, includes a series of very short sections with various viewpoints: Dixie's (153–161), Florence's (162–166) and Mrs Coyne's (167–174). These are followed in quick succession by even shorter parts consisting in one-page blocks told by an omniscient narrator with deictic pops (Galbraith, 1995) into various characters' consciousnesses (175–182). These quick changes make for a feeling of fragmented vision, which, along with the open ending, may confuse and/or frustrate the reader.
- 24 This unsettling use of rhythm is coupled with the use of Irish English and the representation of orality in the text:
- Lampy [...] said, Bollix, loud enough for him to hear, and Cian Delahunty stood up from the subs' bench and said, Don't get smart, Lamp, don't fuckin shoulder my oul fella like that again. (67)
- They weren't on the best of terms since Dixie'd been a bit too enthusiastic in greeting him below in Ciss Brien's one night. Ha-hah thee faith, look who tis, he'd said [...]. Here's me face me arse is coming. (153)
- 25 This may alienate or at least deter some readers, as may the frequent inclusion of long sentences with little subordination. Instead, accumulations and appositions are the

norm, and coordination—especially its most basic declension, “and”—is overused, whoever the focaliser<sup>9</sup>. This lack of hierarchy in the information renders the narrative blurry and difficult to follow; conversely, it creates an impression of fluidity and unfiltered access to the character’s psyche, encouraging empathy.

- 26 On the contrary indeed, a few choices—the use of internal focalisation, of an affect-based narration, the inclusion of mostly relatable characters—point to a “hospitable” text, as in a text it is easy to engage with, featuring characters it is easy to empathize with. Even John, who is the least likeable character, still manages to inspire some measure of empathy, if not sympathy. His section is presented as a confession and, perhaps more interestingly, is the only first-person narration in the novel, perhaps as a way of forcing the reader into empathy based on mirror neuron function (Gallese, 2003: 176) and intersubjectivity (Gallese, 2003: 177). Kuno and Kaburaki (1977: 627–672) have conceptualised “Empathy Hierarchy” and their conclusions have led Majola-Leblond (2015: 177) to argue that “for the reader, empathy is easiest with the subject of the speech act, that is to say with the speaker/narrator, then possible with the referent of the subject, i.e. possibly a character”. This allows the novel to offer “humanistic and humanising portraits” as Etienne Ciapin (2020) phrased it, encouraging empathy, which consists in projecting oneself towards the other but also, conversely, in welcoming, even including the other in oneself—the ultimate form of hospitality.
- 27 One section is a first-person narration while the others are third-person, but the narrative pattern is easy to follow for the first three sections: one section is devoted to one protagonist who is also the focaliser. The shifts are then faster in the “Lake Islands” section but the pattern remains clear with three shorter sections consisting in a third-person narration with internal focalisation. As explained above, the final section is kaleidoscopic, which creates a fragmented vision of the plot and makes it more difficult to follow. Yet, this is also what allows for wider scope: switching from long internal focalisations (the three main characters) to shorter ones (secondary characters) then to an omniscient one (the heterodiegetic narrator) makes it necessary for readers to take some distance to better understand. While it may be perceived as difficult and even hostile, this wider scope is precisely what provides the missing pieces of the puzzle and the key to understanding the novel. The “hostile” elements thus eventually produce a “hospitable” text, as Jacques Derrida (1999: 113,115) pointed out, underlining the links between an inclusive poetic language and hospitality. Narrative choices therefore participate in the complex dialectics of hostility and hospitality.
- 28 The very act of telling a story is central. The metanarrative focus mostly dwells on the transformative power of words and how it can be used to affect, persuade or even manipulate the addressee, as well as with the ethics of such a process and such a power. All three main protagonists actively rely on the narratives they tell as tools for survival, using them as weapons, as means of escapism from horrendous situations and of communication with others. The protagonists are characterised by the fact that they extremely regularly tell anecdotes (the novel opens on one about trees communicating, incidentally), jokes (see Dixie, 53–54), legends (28–29), stories (60), poems (122), even songs (90). Stories are crucial, as are the way they are told and the mere act of listening to them. Agreeing to do so is portrayed as an act of goodwill and even as a form of love:
- [Lampy] knew that Pop had heard him on the stairs. Here he’s on, he was saying, and he was clearing his throat again, in preparation, Lampy knew, for the retelling of the stories he had just practised on his daughter. Lampy toyed for a moment with

the idea of cutting his grandfather off, saying, I heard you already, Pop, George Clooney, Mickey Rooney, fancy dress, blah blah blah. But he couldn't do it, he couldn't put the boot in like that. (58)

- 29 The high stakes involved in the act of telling a story are epitomised in John's section. It consists in a confession he seems to be telling as a way of saving his soul—while acknowledging that redemption may be far beyond him. John also embodies how telling stories can come with more nefarious intents and purposes. He is pictured as having made a life and even a career of telling lies (141) and manipulating (130–131), culminating in his job as a lobbyist, a word he delays “saying” out loud:

Still I can't say it. I can't say what I was. I'll say what I looked like to be to other people. An accountant. Then a lobbyist. I was given that title only years later, though. There was no official word for what I did until recently enough, though it's an ancient art. I arranged things for people. I read people well, and always knew the right words. [...] I was asked to present ideas, to persuade people to make certain decisions. That became the thing I was. [...] There was nothing, it seemed, that I couldn't get done. No plans I couldn't have brought to fruition, no White Papers I couldn't have transformed to law, no land I couldn't see bought or sold or parcelled or changed from green to red on council maps: whole towns rose up from the soil with the energy of my whispered words, my unbreakable promises. (132–133)

- 30 A difference can arguably be made between Dixie using the power of words to reach maximum efficiency in telling a witty but harmless joke about George Clooney and John lobbying in high circles. Telling stories could be associated with manipulation and hostility, as hinted at by the frequent collocation of “tell” and “lies”; conversely, storytelling as a means of expressing oneself and reaching out could be identified with hospitality. If such a distinction is accepted, I would argue that the difference is a matter of ethics, and more precisely of ethical intentions.
- 31 According to Walter Benjamin, “the storyteller provides stories of experience with the aim of opening up a communal dialogue; [...] Benjamin implies that a vital difference between the work of a storyteller and the work of a novelist is the textual construction of communal space” (Garden, 2016: 355). Benjamin insists on the collaborative aspect of the storytelling process, which is seen as a phenomenon of accretion that is made possible through an exchange (Benjamin, 1969: 107) during which storytellers collect the experience of their interlocutors. They then shape it into stories they transmit to others, who can appropriate them (Benjamin, 1969: 87), that is to say host other people's stories and include them in their own personal universe. As such, storytelling is an inclusive, hospitable process, as is its reception. The stories told in *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, be they poetic (like Farouk's) or trivial (like Dixie's), and whether they are meant to be transmitted or not, live on in the minds of those—characters and readers alike—who listen to them and who may, in turn, share them with others.
- 32 The novel therefore appears to be a meditation on stories, and in particular on the power of ethical, inclusive storytelling, by foregrounding plotlines and characters who engage in such processes. By doing so, it also points to the figure of the author-as-citizen, that is to say a writers or storytellers with socially-engaged discourses and ethical intentions. By way of the piece of literature they create, they take responsibility in the extralinguistic world by encouraging hospitality and inclusiveness through storytelling. This of course forces authors to walk a thin ethical line: hospitable intentions may, even unwittingly, induce situations of domination and asymmetric relations whereby the hosting party, real or metaphorical, is omnipotent while the hosted party has only limited scope. Here again, the writers ethical intentions and

inclusive narrative choices (Lewis, 2006) may be implemental in guaranteeing that the hospitality produced and promoted to the readers and citizens are based on inclusiveness and balanced relations.

## Conclusion

- 33 *From a Low and Quiet Sea* highlights how stories are about facing what it means to be hospitable and allowing oneself to be transformed by the confrontation with difficult, sometimes hostile truths and feelings, including ethical questions and doubts. In the end, the novel shows and embodies how stories create a sense of community through plurality and inclusiveness, as demonstrated by the last section which sees multiple voices and points of view connect and combine, piecing the puzzle together. This process and the readers' involvement it creates hint at the message and mechanisms put forward by the whole novel, which seems to illustrate Colum McCann's idea that stories connect human beings, creating hospitality, hostility, and often both. In a 2019 interview, McCann underlined the ambivalence of storytelling and the necessary self-contradiction of people and their stories by quoting Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes)". Donal Ryan's novel emphasizes and embodies how the power of stories indeed lies in the fact that they contain multitudes, allowing hospitality and hostility to coexist, and inviting the reader to collide with these grey areas before appropriating and hosting them.

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## NOTES

1. Original italics. All translations of quotations from Ricœur’s works are mine. I am using the date of publication here to distinguish between the various works by Ricœur quoted in this paper.
2. Thinking of hospitality with the notion of relationality is in keeping with current academic approaches, which tend to focus on relational thinking rather than on compartmentalised paradigms specific to one particular discipline (Walsh, Böhme & Wamsler, 2021).
3. My translation.
4. All translations of quotations from Raffestin’s article are mine.
5. All translations of quotations from Boudou’s 2017 essay are mine.
6. See also “Hospitality is not the suspension of mistrust, but its peaceful management. [...] It is a relationship that must be free from the very risk of conflict, disagreement or antagonism. This is also why hospitality can only be temporary” (Boudou, 2012: §30-31) [my translation].
7. My translation.
8. Original italics.
9. See for instance page(s) 47 (Farouk), 69–70 (Lampy) and 116 (John).

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## ABSTRACTS

Ricœur (1992, 172) defined ethics as “aiming at a good life lived with and for others in just institutions.” Donal Ryan’s novel *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018) examines what this “good life” means while exploring human relationships in the contemporary Irish context, as it portrays characters who are in turn hospitable, hosted, hostile and victims of hostility. The novel focuses on human ambivalence and invites its readers to confront it along with the ethical questions thereby raised. It also points to the changing narratives of migration in Ireland in recent years, highlighting how matters of inclusiveness and exclusion are interlaced with stories and storytelling. This article thus examines the narratives of hostility and hospitality at work in *From a Low and Quiet Sea* and their correlation with both ethical and aesthetic preoccupations. It briefly reviews the character relationships on display, before focusing on Irish national identity and its narrative. Since, in the novel narrative choices shape the ambivalence of the dialectics of hospitality and hostility, it finally asks whether the text is a hostile or a hospitable one, examining how storytelling modes and intentions—which turn out to be at the core of the novel—are fundamentally linked to inclusiveness.

Ricœur (1992, 172) définit l'éthique comme « la visée d'une vie bonne, avec et pour autrui, dans des institutions justes ». Le roman de Donal Ryan *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018) explore ce que signifie cette « bonne vie » en examinant les rapports humains dans le contexte irlandais contemporain ; il met en effet en scène des personnages qui, tour à tour, font preuve d'hospitalité, bénéficient de celle d'autrui, doivent faire face à l'hostilité, et en sont victimes. Le roman se penche sur l'ambivalence des êtres humains ; il invite ses lecteurs à s'y confronter, ainsi qu'aux questions éthiques qu'elle soulève. Il met également en évidence la manière dont les récits de la migration ont évolué en Irlande au cours de ces dernières décennies, montrant ainsi que les thématiques d'inclusion et d'exclusion sont liées aux histoires et aux récits. Cet article étudie donc les récits d'hostilité et d'hospitalité à l'œuvre dans *From a Low and Quiet Sea*, leurs modes de narration et leur corrélation avec des préoccupations à la fois éthiques et esthétiques. Il passe brièvement en revue les relations entre les personnages, avant d'examiner l'identité nationale irlandaise telle qu'elle est ici racontée. Enfin, et puisque ce sont les choix narratifs qui modèlent l'ambivalence de la dialectique hospitalité/hostilité dans le roman, la dernière partie de l'article se demande si, pour son lectorat, le texte est caractérisé par l'hostilité ou l'hospitalité, en examinant le lien intrinsèque entre d'une part les intentions et modes narratifs, qui s'avèrent être au cœur du roman, et de l'autre la question de l'inclusion.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Irish contemporary literature, Donal Ryan, empathy, hospitality, hostility, storytelling, inclusiveness, ethics, Irishness, migration, mass mobility, Paul Ricœur

**Mots-clés:** littérature irlandaise contemporaine, Donal Ryan, empathie, hospitalité, hostilité, narration, inclusion, éthique, irlandité, migration, mobilité de masse, Paul Ricœur

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