

Literature and Remix

**HOSTILITY, HOSPITALITY AND AUTOIMMUNITY
IN DE BERNIÈRES' *CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN***

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Abstract

The article explores Louis de Bernières' novel Captain Corelli's Mandolin from the perspective of Derrida's concepts of hospitality and autoimmunity. In Derrida's work, the concepts of unconditional hospitality and autoimmunity overlap in their focus on openness to the Other, which constitutes both a threat and an opportunity, while destabilizing the binary opposition between friendship and enmity. This paper claims that the novel, which is set mainly during and following the Italian and Nazi occupations of the Greek island of Cephalonia in World War II, also deals with such themes, questioning and deconstructing the division between friendship and enmity. This is particularly evident, for instance, in the love story between the Italian soldier Captain Corelli and the local girl Pelagia; there are, however, many other incidences of friendship between political enemies and enmity between supposed political friends in the novel. In this regard, this paper focuses on four episodes/events in the novel which, read through Derrida's concepts of hospitality and/or autoimmunity, destabilize the binary opposition between friendship and enmity: the history of Cephalonia as depicted in Dr. Iannis' 'A Personal History of Cephallonia', Captain Corelli's relationship with his 'hosts' Pelagia and her father Dr. Iannis, the story of 'The Good Nazi' Günter Weber who is forced to shoot his Italian friends and, finally, the disastrous takeover of the island by the Communist Greek resistance group ELAS.

1. Introduction

British author Louis de Bernières' 1994 novel *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* is set primarily on the Greek island of Cephalonia, an 'island seemingly accursed and destined forever to be part of someone else's game'.¹ The events in the novel take place mostly during the Second World War and its aftermath, when the island is occupied first by the Italians, then the Nazis and eventually, following the departure of the Nazis, by ELAS, the Greek Communist resistance.

¹ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 361-362.

In this context, the novel focuses on the love story that develops between a local girl, Pelagia, and a mandolin-playing Italian soldier, Captain Antonio Corelli, who is billeted with her and her father, Dr. Iannis. Indeed, as Sheppard argues, the novel is 'normally and exclusively read as a love story'.²

In addition to love, however, war is an important theme of the novel: the story of the Second World War is told from the perspectives of multiple characters, including those of the soldiers Mandras (Pelagia's fiancé) and Carlo Guercio, a closet homosexual Italian soldier who, eventually, sacrifices his own life to save that of Captain Corelli. In addition, the story is also recounted from the points of view of those who make (and break) history, including, among others, Mussolini, whose "fateful attempt to restore the Roman empire is presented in the novel as a tragic farce and a farcical tragedy,"³ and the dictator Metaxas,⁴ who tried to resist Mussolini's ultimatum.

Indeed, then, the themes of love and war overlap in the novel, which depicts the love, hospitality and friendship that can flourish even across the borders of political enmity. However, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* also portrays hostility and aggression amongst those who are, supposedly, political friends; the Greek resistance group ELAS, for instance, terrorizes the very islanders whom it is supposed to protect from the fascist occupying forces. Like Derrida, then, de Bernières challenges the idea that friendship and enmity are mutually exclusive opposites.⁵

Thus, the novel not only explores the themes of hospitality and hostility, enmity and friendship as they relate to the borders between states; it also arguably questions the semantic borders between these binary oppositions: as Sheppard argues, "Within this kind of historical context, things turn into their opposite at every level."⁶ In this sense, the themes of the novel arguably resonate with Derrida's deconstructive project, and, more specifically, with his work on hospitality and autoimmunity.

The word hospitality, as Derrida notes, "carries its own contradiction incorporated into it"; it is "parasitized by its opposite, 'hostility', the undesirable guest which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body."⁷ Hospitality, then, derives from the Latin *hospes*, meaning 'host, guest or stranger' which itself derives from *hostis*, which originally meant a stranger, and came to refer to an enemy, or 'hostile' stranger (*hostilis*).⁸ This etymology thus hints at the

² Richard Sheppard, "Savagery, Salvage, Salves and Salvation: The Historico-Theological Debate of *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*," *Journal of European Studies* xxxii (2002), p. 51.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 52

⁴ It should be emphasized here that, despite the popularity of the novel, it generated a considerable amount of controversy particularly among Cephalonian veterans and survivors of the *Acqui* division. Among other issues, such criticism has focused on an arguably idealized and romanticized depiction of Metaxas and of the Italian soldiers, and an overly harsh portrayal of the Greek resistance. See, for instance Seumas Milne, "Greek Myth", *The Guardian*, 29 July 1997.

⁵ Antonio Calcagno, *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and their Time*. (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 46

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," *Angelaki* 5, no.3 (2000), pp. 3-18.

⁸ John Caputo, *Deconstruction in a nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 110.

interchangeable status of host and guest, as well as at how the concept of hospitality is apparently intertwined with that of hostility.⁹

For Derrida, as explored further below, hospitality is ideally *unconditional*; thus, the Other must be welcomed no matter who they are, and they should be accepted *as* they are, without being expected to adapt to the rules or conditions of the host. Thus, unconditional hospitality implies a risk, as the (uninvited) guest may turn out to be a destructive enemy. However, the absolute openness to the Other in unconditional hospitality is also, potentially, an opportunity as the stranger may also be someone who brings friendship and renewal. In this sense, unconditional hospitality can be compared to Derrida's concept of *autoimmunity*, which he describes as "that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, 'itself' works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its own immunity."¹⁰ Thus, as in unconditional hospitality, in autoimmunity the border between self and other disintegrates; the openness to the Other that this implies can be understood as both a threat and a promise.

In this context, following a brief discussion of Derrida's concepts of hospitality and autoimmunity, the paper focuses on four episodes/events from *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* in order to explore the inseparability of hostility and hospitality, and that of friendship and enmity in the novel. Firstly, Cephalonia's long history of invasion and occupation, through a discussion of Dr. Iannis' *A Personal History of Cephallonia*, is examined through the lens of (auto)immunity and unconditional hospitality. The interwoven theme of hospitality and hostility is then discussed in the context of Captain Corelli as (uninvited) guest in Dr. Iannis' home. Following this, the theme of friendship and enmity is explored in the story of Günter Weber, the 'Good Nazi', who is eventually forced to shoot his Italian 'friends'. Finally, the collapse of the distinction between friend and enemy implied in the takeover of the island by the (supposed) anti-Nazi Greek resistance group ELAS, perhaps the most destructive of all the island's occupations, is explored from the perspective of autoimmunity.

2. Derrida on Hospitality and Autoimmunity: The Risk of Welcoming the Other

2a. Hospitality

For Derrida, hospitality is ideally unconditional, involving welcoming the Other without even asking questions about his or her identity or origins; this can be contrasted with conditional hospitality, which is restricted and regulated by the state, and grounded in law.¹¹ Conditional hospitality, then, requires the guest to adapt to the cultural norms of the host; it implies that the host maintains control over the guest, and can be understood in terms of closed borders and nationalism.¹²

However, for Derrida, true hospitality is unconditional; it involves welcoming whoever, or whatever, may be in need of that hospitality, and relinquishing claims to property

⁹ Ana Maria Manzananas Calvo and Jesús Benito Sánchez, *Hospitality in American Literature and Culture: Spaces, Bodies, Borders* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 5.

¹⁰ Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 100.

¹¹ Marguerite La Caze, "Terrorism and Trauma: Negotiating Derridean 'Autoimmunity'," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (2011), p. 614.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, translated by Anne Dufourmantelle (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 135

and ownership. Thus, unconditional hospitality involves openness to the stranger, whoever he or she may be:

a foreigner, an immigrant, an uninvited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female.¹³

According to Derrida, then, the Other must be welcomed no matter what the circumstances and without questioning or even knowing their identity:

I have to – and that's an unconditional injunction – I have to welcome the Other whoever he or she is unconditionally, without asking for a document, a name, a context or a passport. That is the very first opening of my relation to the Other; to open my space, my home – my house, my language, my culture, my nation, my state and myself.¹⁴

Thus, in contrast to conditional hospitality, which limits the Other's stay as a visitor, demands that they act in certain ways, and recognizes the sovereignty of the host,¹⁵ unconditional hospitality does not require the guest to assimilate or to adapt to the host's rules. As Derrida argues, then, "hospitality should be neither assimilation, acculturation, nor simply the occupation of my space by the Other."¹⁶

Unconditional hospitality therefore potentially leaves us open to abuse, as we can never be sure "whether the one we are welcoming into our home is a friend or an enemy, someone who will help us or harm us, aid us or destroy us"¹⁷: it can thus be compared to a Trojan horse, as "what seems promising could contain your enemy."¹⁸ As Derrida emphasizes, then, unconditional hospitality implies a risk: "I have to accept if I offer unconditional hospitality that the Other may ruin my own space or impose his or her own culture or his or her own language"¹⁹; indeed, there is a risk of them "initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone. That is the risk of pure hospitality and pure gift, because a gift might be terrible too."²⁰ Emphasizing the common root shared by host/guest (*hôte*) and hostage, Derrida argues that, in unconditional hospitality, "The one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited, of the guest, the hostage of the one he receives, the one who keeps him at home."²¹

In this context, Derrida emphasizes that an important *aporia* exists at the heart of the concept of hospitality. This *aporia* results from the opposition of "*The* law (of hospitality), in its universal singularity, to a plurality that is ... a number of laws that distribute their history

¹³ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, "Politics and Friendship: A Discussion with Jacques Derrida," 1997.

<http://www.dariarothmayr.com/pdfs/assignments/Politics%20and%20Friendship.pdf>

¹⁵ Marguerite La Caze, "Terrorism and Trauma," p. 615.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, "Politics and Friendship."

¹⁷ Michael Naas, *Derrida from Now On* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 32.

¹⁸ Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 128.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, "Politics and Friendship."

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility," p. 71.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 9.

and their anthropological geography differently.” In this sense, “*The law is above the laws. It is thus illegal, transgressive, outside the law.*”²²

Unconditional hospitality is, then, seemingly impossible, as it involves the host completely relinquishing control over the guest, and thus over his own space:

For there to be hospitality there must be a door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality. There is no hospitable house. There is no house without doors and windows. But as soon as there are a door and windows, it means that someone has the key to them and consequently controls the conditions of hospitality. There must be a threshold. But if there is a threshold, there is no longer hospitality.²³

As the passage above suggests, for Derrida such unconditionality is fundamental to the concept of hospitality itself; however, this is a two-way dependence as “*the unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it requires them*” in order to become “effective, concrete, determined.”²⁴

Thus, unconditional hospitality will always be haunted by conditional hospitality, and *vice versa*: “We will always be threatened by this dilemma between, on the one hand, One of them can always corrupt the other, and this capacity for perversion remains irreducible. It *must* remain so.”²⁵

In this sense, referring to his concept of autoimmunity, which will be further discussed in the following section, Derrida argues that these contradictions result in hospitality *auto-immunizing* itself:

Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct – put otherwise produce itself as impossible, only be possible on the condition of its impossibility – or protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct itself – precisely in being put into practice.²⁶

2b. Autoimmunity

Derrida’s concept of autoimmunity was developed throughout the last decade of his life,²⁷ and, as Inge Mutsaers points out, he “uses the notion of autoimmunity in different ways.”²⁸ Indeed, he proposes that the logic of autoimmunity, which is a medical term, albeit one whose roots

²² Ibid., p. 79.

²³ Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality,” p. 14.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 79.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality,” pp. 4-5.

²⁷ Derrida’s first use of the concept of autoimmunity dates to the 1990s, in *Spectres of Marx* (1994), *Politics of Friendship* (1997) and *Faith and Knowledge*. However, it arguably becomes central to his philosophy following the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, most notably in an interview with Giovanna Borradori (2003), and, subsequently in *Rogues* (2005). In these works, Derrida applied his concept of autoimmunity to a variety of contexts, including religion and science and, perhaps most famously, in his analyses of reactions to terrorist attacks and of democracy.

²⁸ Inge Mutsaers, *Immunological Discourse in Political Philosophy: Immunisation and its Discontents* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 103.

were originally political, can be extended to “life in general.”²⁹ Generally speaking, there are two major, and intertwined, implications to Derrida’s version of autoimmunity. Firstly, it is self-destructive; it is a “quasi-suicidal” drive³⁰ which “amounts to the self’s attacking its own organs, tissues and processes, including the very immune system which was to have protected it and its identity.”³¹ Secondly, as in absolute hospitality, the destruction of the immune system³² leaves the self open to the intrusion of the Other.³³ Thus, according to the logic of autoimmunity,

the greatest threat of terror comes from within, in that destruction of the immune system which allows the relatively strict border between one’s self and the outside to collapse, not because of an external enemy’s attack but as a result of internal corruption.³⁴

As La Caze points out, autoimmunity can be understood in terms of the integral protections found at the level of state or community and even at the level of the psyche³⁵: in effect, it destroys the integrity of all these sovereign forms. In *Specters of Marx*, for example, Derrida explains that,

the living ego is auto-immune. To protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego ... it must ... take the immune defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once for itself and against itself.³⁶

Thus, for Derrida, whether at the state, community or psychic level, autoimmunity is, fundamentally, a relationship between self and other; however, it also deconstructs the traditional opposition between self and non-self,³⁷ so that the relation “is neither one of exteriority nor one of simple opposition or contradiction.”³⁸

²⁹ Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 187.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³¹ Michael Lewis, “Of (Auto) Immune Life: Derrida, Esposito, Agamben,” in *Medicine and Society, New Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Darian Meacham (New York: Springer, 2015), p. 216.

³² Derrida’s definition contrasts with the actual medical definition of autoimmune disease, which results not from the destruction of the immune system by the body, but rather from the destruction of the bodily tissues by its own immune system. Indeed, as Timár (2014), for instance, has argued, Derrida’s definition of autoimmunity seems, rather, closer to the body’s response to infection by the AIDS virus which, as Timár points out, stands in a somewhat spectral relationship to autoimmune disease. See Andrea Timár, “Derrida and the Immune System,” *Et al: Critical Theory Online*, 2015, <http://etal.hu/en/archive/terrorism-and-aesthetics-2015/derrida-and-the-immune-system>

³³ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 123.

³⁴ Michael Lewis, “Of (Auto) Immune Life: Derrida, Esposito, Agamben,” p. 219.

³⁵ Marguerite La Caze, “Terrorism and Trauma,” p. 606.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, translated by Peggy Kamouf (London: Routledge, 1994), p., 177.

³⁷ Andrew Johnson. *Viral Politics: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Auto-Immunity and the Political Philosophy of Carl Schmitt* (Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), p. 12.

³⁸ Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 114.

In a similar vein, autoimmunity also deconstructs the oppositional structure between friend and enemy; indeed “One function of the concept of autoimmunity is to act as a third term between the classical opposition between friend and foe.” In this sense, it can be understood as a “characteristically deconstructive move aimed at displacing the traditional metaphysical tendency to rely on irreducible pairs.”³⁹

In fact, as Johnson argues, Derrida’s deconstruction of Carl Schmitt’s friend-enemy dichotomy in *Politics of Friendship* can also be understood in terms of autoimmunity.⁴⁰ For Schmitt, as Derrida points out, the distinction between friend and enemy is the foundation of politics itself; notably, in Schmitt’s theory, enemy is the privileged term of the two; friendship is defined in relation to enmity. However, as Derrida argues elsewhere, the breakdown of the clear distinction between friend and enemy leads the way to autoimmunity:⁴¹

One would then have the time of a world without friends, the time of a world without enemies. The imminence of a self-destruction by the infinite development of a madness of self-immunity.⁴²

As has already been touched upon, autoimmunity is intimately bound up with the concept of hospitality⁴³ in that both involve an openness to the outside which implies risk. As Michael Naas explains,

If autoimmunity describes the way in which an organism, an individual, a family, or a nation, compromises its own forces of self-affirmation so as to become open and vulnerable to its outside, then autoimmunity is always a kind of hospitality – the welcoming of an event that might well change the very identity of the self, of the *autos*, the welcoming of an event that may thus bring good or ill, that may invite a remedy or a poison, a friend or a foe. To be open to the event, to offer hospitality, it is essential *not to know* in advance what is what or who is who.⁴⁴

Thus, immunity can be likened to conditional hospitality where we are able to assert and defend our sovereignty and thus to protect ourselves from the potential excesses of the Other. In contrast, although autoimmunity is not entirely equivalent to unconditional hospitality,⁴⁵ both share the feature of receptivity or susceptibility to the unexpected.⁴⁶ In this way, then, autoimmunity, like unconditional hospitality, is imbued with both risk and promise⁴⁷; it is “a double bind of threat and chance, not alternatively or by turns promise and/or threat but threat *in* the promise itself.”⁴⁸ As Derrida argues, autoimmunity,

³⁹ Ibid., p. 152

⁴⁰ Andrew Johnson, *Viral Politics*, p.33.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁴² Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. 76.

⁴³ Andrea Timár, “Derrida and the Immune System,” *Et al: Critical Theory Online* (2015), p. 4, <http://etal.hu/en/archive/terrorism-and-aesthetics-2015/derrida-and-the-immune-system/>

⁴⁴ Michael Naas (2009) *Derrida from Now On*, p. 32.

⁴⁵ Marguerite La Caze explains that unconditional hospitality “is a complete defencelessness in the face of the Other,” while autoimmunity implies “an eroding of our defences through our own decisions to protect ourselves.” See “Terrorism and Trauma,” p. 115.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 615.

⁴⁷ Andrea Timár, “Derrida and the Immune System,” p. 5.

⁴⁸ Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 82.

is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and *who* comes – which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect another, or expect any event.⁴⁹

On this basis, for Derrida, autoimmunity, despite the risk it entails, appears to be vital for the health of any community:⁵⁰ it is thus “both self-protecting and self-destroying, at once remedy and poison.”⁵¹ In this context, then, according to Naas, both deconstruction as hospitality and deconstruction as autoimmunity help explain,

Not only how we live, how we remain open to the future and to a renewal of life in the future, how we remain open to innovation and invention through the reception of others, but how we die, how we inevitably turn against ourselves, against the very principles that constitute and sustain ourselves and our identities.⁵²

3. Hospitality and Autoimmunity in Four Episodes from Captain Corelli's Mandolin

In his *A Personal History of Cephallonia*, Dr. Iannis describes the island's long history of invasion and domination by various imperial forces, including the Romans, the Venetians, the Ottomans and the British. Its openness to outsiders, its lack of immunity and sovereignty, have arguably long obliged the island to an attitude of unconditional hospitality towards these frequently destructive strangers:

Because the island is a jewel it has since the time of Odysseus been the plaything of the great, the powerful, the plutocratic, and the odious ... There began a long and lamentable history of its being passed from hand to hand as a gift, at the same time as it was repeatedly being raided by corsairs from all the many corners of the malversated Mediterranean Sea ... From the time of the Romans, the only prize for us was survival.⁵³

In this sense, unconditional hospitality can perhaps be enforced; Derrida suggests that “the distinction between invitation and visitation may be the distinction between conditional hospitality (invitation) and unconditional hospitality.” In this context, a visitation can even be an invasion; as Derrida notes,

if I accept the coming of the other, the arriving [arrivance] of the other who could come at any moment without asking my opinion and who could come with the best or worst of intentions: a visitation could be an invasion by the worst. Unconditional hospitality must remain open without horizon of expectation, without anticipation, to any surprise visitation.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁵⁰ In this context, Derrida gives the example of immune-depressants, which prevent the body from rejecting organ transplants; these drugs act against the body's own immunity to something from the outside.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵² Michael Naas, *Derrida from Now On*, p. 33.

⁵³ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, p. 341.

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality,” p. 17.

Judith Still also appears to understand Derrida's conception of unconditional hospitality as, potentially, a hospitality which is, in some cases, enforced; she notes that "the dangers of welcoming guests might be illustrated by the fate of Native Americans or that of the indigenous peoples of many formerly colonized peoples."⁵⁵

However, while the invasions certainly brought their share of death and destruction to the islanders, they also played an important part in shaping the culture of Cephalonia. The six-hundred-year Venetian occupation, for instance, gave the island a distinctly Italian flavor, influencing its architecture, which, as Doctor Iannis notes, is "highly conducive to a civilized and sociable private life." The occupation also influenced the dialect of the island, rendering it "replete with Italian words and manners of speech," while "the educated and the aristocracy," including Doctor Iannis and Pelagia, speak Italian as a second language.⁵⁶ Overall, then, as the Doctor continues, the Venetian occupation left the islanders with "a European rather than an eastern outlook on life," with a considerably freer attitude towards women than elsewhere in Greece. Indeed, Dr. Iannis evaluates the Venetian occupation in relatively positive terms; while the islanders were glad to see the Venetians' departure, there was far worse to come:

they were undoubtedly, along with the British, the most significant force that shaped our history and culture; we found their rule tolerable and occasionally amusing ... Above all, they had the inestimable merit of not being Turks.⁵⁷

In this context, the Venetians left the island with a culture that is arguably hybrid; Golban, for instance, argues that the identity of Dr. Iannis himself can be understood in terms of hybridity as he "represents a clear case of 'dislocation' of the self, his position in relation to the notion of 'the Greek' or 'the Italian' describing a situation of inexorable ambiguity."⁵⁸

The double-edged risk of opening to the Other is, however, perhaps most notably illustrated in Dr. Iannis' depiction of the British occupation of the island, which, he argues, was both beneficial and devastating:

The British were worse than the Turks for some of the time, and the best of all of them for the rest ... It teaches us that to be associated with the British is to be offered the choice of one of two bags tied at the neck with string. One contains a viper, and the other a bag of gold.⁵⁹

In this context, despite some thieving on the part of the occupying soldiers, the 1941-1943 Italian occupation of Cephalonia was a relatively benign one; according to Dr. Iannis, the islanders even came to feel affection for their Italian oppressors. Indeed, following the devastating Nazi occupation of 1943, the Doctor remembers the Italian invaders with nostalgia:

⁵⁵ Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality*, p. 267.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁵⁸ Tatiana Golban, "Reconstructing the Ancient Mythemes: Thematic Enclosure of Dr. Iannis as a Postmodern Odysseus in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*". *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 54, no. 2(2014), 347.

⁵⁹ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, 177-178.

Now there were no more Italians working amid the vines beside the farmers in order to escape the boredom of garrison life ... there were no more tenor voices to send snatches of Neapolitan song and sentimental aria out across the pine of the mountains.⁶⁰

In contrast to the Italians, whose attempts to cover up their misdemeanors at least “disclosed that they knew that what they did was wrong,”⁶¹ the Nazi occupation is portrayed as a brutal one, which the doctor records as “the direst time of all.”⁶² The German soldiers’ attitude to the islanders, in Dr. Iannis’ account, was a callous one; they frequently beat up the islanders regardless of their age, destroyed their houses, and stole their possessions:

It was amusing and appropriate to humiliate the negroids whose culture was so paltry. Casually they let the people starve, and made the sign of thumbs up when Greek coffins passed over the stones to tombs.⁶³

In the context of the Italian occupation, Dr. Iannis and his daughter, Pelagia, are introduced to the Italian soldier Captain Corelli when they are ordered to host him for the duration of the occupation. Although Corelli is imposed on them, the hospitality that Dr. Iannis and Pelagia offer him, despite his status as an enemy soldier, and despite wartime food shortages, appears at first sight to be unconditional, with Pelagia even giving up her bed for the Captain. Thus, although Captain Corelli’s stay is enforced on the Doctor and Pelagia, they grant him access to their living space as though he were a valued guest. For the Doctor, however, such hospitality is a point of honor, something which he does not neglect to point out to Captain Corelli:

Kyria Pelagia will bring water, some coffee, and some mezedakia to eat. You will find that we do not lack hospitality. It is our tradition, Captain, to be hospitable even to those who do not merit it. It is a question of honor, a motive which you might find somewhat foreign and unfamiliar.⁶⁴

Indeed, the father and daughter, who both speak Italian as a second language, even adapt themselves linguistically to their new guest, speaking to him in his own language rather than forcing him to attempt to communicate in Greek. Notably, for Derrida, language is a vital component of hospitality; as he argues, the requirement to speak in a foreign language is “usually the first violence to which foreigners are subjected.”⁶⁵ Hence, Dr. Iannis and Pelagia’s willingness to communicate with Corelli in Italian is arguably an indicator of unconditional hospitality.

However, at least at first, their hospitality is also heavily tinged with hostility, hospitality’s ‘parasitic double’.⁶⁶ In their (understandable) hostility to Captain Corelli, then, the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 439

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.439

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁶⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, translated by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 68.

⁶⁶ Ana Maria Manzananas Calvo and Benito Sánchez, *Hospitality in American Literature and Culture*, p. 4.

Doctor and Pelagia attempt to imbue their hospitality with resistance to the Italian occupation of the island. Indeed, their hospitality is arguably offered in a spirit of hostility in that its goal appears to be that of making the Captain feel guilty and inferior, as in the following extract: offering Corelli dinner, Dr. Iannis explains that, "This is Cephalonian meat pie [...] except that thanks to your people, it doesn't have any meat in it."⁶⁷

Given Corelli's pleasant and playful nature, however, their hostility is usually of itself playful, although it sometimes seems almost to border on cruelty, and is generally expressed in misleading the Captain and/or playing practical jokes on him. One of the more humorous examples of Dr. Iannis' gentle torture of Captain Corelli is when he teaches him some Greek swearwords, misinforming him that they are greetings.⁶⁸ Pelagia also attempts to imitate her father's treatment of Corelli, trying to treat him "as badly as she could." In the following passage her behavior towards Corelli can perhaps be described, in Derrida's terms, as hostipitable:

If she served him food she would set the plate before him with a great clatter that sent the contents of the bowl splashing and overflowing, and if by any chance it did spill onto his uniform, she would fetch a damp clout, omit to wring it out, and smear the soup or stew in a wide circle about his tunic, all the time apologizing cynically for the terrible mess.⁶⁹

Golban reads the relationship of hostility/hospitality between Dr. Iannis and Captain Corelli in terms of the Cyclops episode of the *Odyssey*, where the Cyclops Polyphemus "is both the oppressor and the host of the island and cave, while Odysseus is a guest and later an oppressed subject in the cave."⁷⁰ However, for Golban, this relationship is reversed in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* in that here it is the Odysseus figure Dr. Iannis who is the host, and Corelli, the Polyphemus figure, who is the (victimized) guest: "the doctor/hero is the host on the island and a Master in his house, while the invader Captain Corelli/Cyclops (who is supposed to dominate the doctor's space), becomes victimized in the house."⁷¹

Meanwhile, Pelagia has lost contact with her fiancé, Mandras, since he left for the front, as she comprehends that their relationship, at least from her perspective, had been based on physical attraction only. Thus, if Mandras can be read as a postmodern Odysseus figure,⁷² Pelagia is arguably a failed Penelope, a comparison that is further entrenched by her unsuccessful attempt to crochet a cover for their marriage bed which she is constantly forced to unpick.⁷³ Unlike Odysseus, however, when Mandras returns, he finds that his beloved greets him not with love but with "despair, unbearable excitement, guilt, pity, revulsion."⁷⁴ Here, then, Corelli can perhaps be compared to Penelope's suitors; in contrast to the suitors, however,

⁶⁷ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, pp. 236-237.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁷⁰ Tatiana Golban, "Reconstructing the Ancient Mythemes," p. 353.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁷² Tatiana Golban, "Reconstructing the Odysseus Myth: The Postmodern Condition in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 23, no.5 (2014), pp. 2497-2512.

⁷³ Emily A. McDermott, "Every Man's an Odysseus: An Analysis of the Nostos-Theme in Corelli's *Mandolin*," *Classical and Modern Literature* 20, no. 2(2000), p. 22.

⁷⁴ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, p. 130.

whom Penelope tries to keep at bay and who are killed by Odysseus upon his return, Corelli eventually displaces Mandras in Pelagia's affections.

Corelli's love for Pelagia, then, is eventually reciprocated; Corelli's virtuosity on the mandolin and his composition of *Pelagia's March* arguably play an important role in this. The Doctor, too, also grows fond of Corelli, even entrusting him with "his most precious treasure – his daughter Pelagia – a fact which can be considered as a supreme form of hospitality."⁷⁵ However, while Corelli turns out to be, quite unexpectedly, a friendly guest, he remains a political enemy, at least until the overthrow of Mussolini and the subsequent Nazi invasion of the island. Thus, while accepting Corelli as a potential son-in-law, Dr. Iannis remains deeply concerned about the difficulties that Pelagia would face in a marriage with Corelli who is, after all, a member of the occupying army. As he counsels Pelagia,

Technically the captain is an enemy. Can you conceive the torment that would be inflicted upon you by others when they judge that you have renounced the love of a patriotic Greek, in favor of an invader, an oppressor? You will be called a collaborator, a Fascist's whore and a thousand things besides ...⁷⁶

In other words, the Doctor implies, Pelagia would be left with the choice of remaining on her island, where she would be treated as an enemy Other, or emigrating to a strange land, Italy, where she would be at the mercy of her new hosts, and be required to adapt to their culture, to their rules of hospitality.⁷⁷

As is further discussed in the following section, the friendship between Pelagia/Dr. Iannis and Corelli thus apparently deconstructs the binary opposition between friend and enemy, as put forward by Carl Schmitt. As Derrida notes, Schmitt argues that 'the political' is characterized by the distinction between friend and enemy;⁷⁸ for Schmitt, the concept of enmity is dominant in this regard as "the meaning of 'friend' is only determined within the oppositional distinction 'friend-enemy'."⁷⁹

Thus, as Derrida emphasizes, "one has a feeling that the very sphere of the public emerges with the figure of the enemy" in Schmitt's work.⁸⁰ However, for Schmitt, the enemy in politics is always the *public* enemy; i.e. the *hostis*, rather than the *inimicus*, with whom we have a personal relationship of enmity. Here, Derrida notes that Schmitt's argument flounders as we can wage war on and destroy our friend while continuing to love him:

The friend (*amicus*) can be an enemy (*hostis*). I can be hostile towards my friend, I can be hostile towards him publicly and, conversely, I can, in privacy, love my enemy. From this, everything would follow, in orderly, regular fashion, from the distinction between public and private. Another way of saying that at every point where this border is threatened, fragile, porous, contestable ... the Schmittian discourse collapses.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Tatiana Golban, "Reconstructing the Ancient Mythemes," p. 357.

⁷⁶ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, p. 344.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

⁷⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. 373.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

In this sense, for Derrida “friend and enemy are not mutually exclusive opposites.”⁸² Similarly, as has already been suggested in the case of Corelli’s friendship with Pelagia and Dr. Iannis, de Bernières also highlights this semantic slippage between (private) friend and (public) enemy in *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*. Perhaps the most notable example of this the novel, however, is the story of Günter Weber, ‘The Good Nazi’, who is required to shoot his Italian friends.⁸³

While relations between the German and Italian soldiers garrisoned on the island were “superficially friendly and co-operative,” there was, in reality, no love lost between them, with the Nazi soldiers regarding the Italians as “racially inferior negroids,” and the Italians perplexed by the Nazis’ “cult of death,” their “iron discipline, their irrational and irritating uniformity of views and conversation, and their incomprehensible passion for hegemony.”⁸⁴ However, Captain Corelli, along with his opera club and a group of Italian military whores, does befriend one young Nazi soldier, Günter Weber, whom they encounter sunbathing on a local beach in a desperate attempt to become blond.⁸⁵ Despite the political differences between them, Corelli and Weber strike up a friendship, with the latter, despite his inability to sing, even joining Corelli’s opera club.

Following the fall of Mussolini and the subsequent Nazi occupation of the island, however, Weber and the Italian soldiers become political enemies as Weber, despite his protests, is ordered to shoot his Italian friends. However, threatened with being shot by firing squad himself, and reminded that the Italian soldiers will be shot by someone else in any case, Weber reluctantly agrees to participate in the massacre. Before the shooting, however, he begs forgiveness from his (former) friends:

‘Antonio, I am very sorry, I tried’...

‘I am sure you did, Günter. I know how it goes...

Weber’s face trembled with suppressed tears and desperation, and at last he said suddenly, ‘Forgive me.’

Carlo sneered, ‘You will never be forgiven.’ But Corelli put his hand up to silence his friend, and said quietly, ‘Günter, I forgive you. If I do not, who will’.⁸⁶

In addition, the binary opposition between friend and enemy, as well as that between self and other, is also deconstructed in the episode in the novel, which depicts, in the context of the Greek Civil War, the takeover of the island by ELAS, the Communist Greek People’s Liberation Army, following the departure of the Nazis. Arguably, this can be understood in the context of an autoimmune logic: indeed, as Johnson argues, civil war is autoimmunity.⁸⁷ Derrida himself emphasizes the autoimmune nature of civil war, and the complete breakdown of the division of friend and enemy it entails, even leading people to go against their own allies as well as against the “principal, declared enemy” in a “quasi-domestic confrontation.” Indeed,

⁸² Antonio Calcagno, *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and their Time*, p. 46

⁸³ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, p. 239.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

⁸⁷ Andrew Johnson, *Viral Politics*, p. 36

for Derrida “In all wars, all civil wars, all partisan wars or wars for liberation, the inevitable escalation leads one to go after one’s rival partners no less than one’s so-called principal adversary.”⁸⁸

ELAS, the military wing of the EAM, with connections to the Greek Communist party,⁸⁹ had supposedly formed a part of the resistance against the fascist occupations; however, despite the brutality of the Nazi occupation, it is ELAS itself which arguably constitutes the greatest threat to life on the island. ELAS, according to de Bernières, had learned much from their former oppressors:

From a safe distance, they had watched the Nazis for years, and were well versed in all the arts of atrocity and oppression. Hitler would have been proud of such assiduous pupils. Their secret police (OPLA) identified all Venizelists and Royalists, and marked them down for Fascists.⁹⁰

Like an immune system gone haywire, then, ELAS, apparently formed to protect Greece from fascist/Nazi rule, turns against the very people it was supposed to protect. In this way, the autoimmune entity turns on itself, and “must then come to resemble [its] enemies, to corrupt itself and threaten itself in order to protect itself against their threats.”⁹¹

Having left home for a second time following his rejection by Pelagia, Mandras joins a small group of *andartes*, or guerrillas, who were “driven by something from the very depth of the soul, something that commanded them to rid their land of strangers or die in the attempt.”⁹² Mandras and his comrades are, however, forced at gunpoint to join ELAS when they are attacked by a group of its members.⁹³ However, they appear almost relieved to be taken under ELAS’ wing; as Mandras notes,

It was good to have found a leader who might know what ought to be done. It had been demoralizing to wander like Odysseus from place to place, far from home, improvising a resistance that never seemed to amount to anything.⁹⁴

Far from being directed against the Nazis, however, the ruthlessness of ELAS is primarily focused on EDES, a rival resistance group and, perhaps especially, on the ordinary inhabitants of the island, the very people whom it was supposed to protect. Notably, following the departure of the Germans, ELAS “imposed themselves on the people with the aid of British arms” and “irreparably blighted” the lives of the islanders. Mandras’ very first mission, for instance, is to brutally murder an old man, vaguely reminiscent of Dr. Iannis, whose “crime” was to take a bottle of whiskey from supplies dropped by the British.⁹⁵ Mandras’ time with

⁸⁸ Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, p. 112.

⁸⁹ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, p. 229.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

⁹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 40.

⁹² Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, p. 228.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

ELAS, then, eventually corrupts him completely, turning him into a man capable not only of stealing from the starving, but of cold-blooded murder and rape.

As has been emphasized above, the division between friend and enemy collapses completely in civil war; despite their supposedly Communist ideology, ELAS appears to have no qualms in attacking fellow Communists. After beating up Pelagia, ELAS drag Dr. Iannis away on suspicion of being a bourgeois fascist; his friend Kokolios' Communist beliefs do not, however, protect him from sharing the Doctor's fate:

When Kokolios emerged from his house to defend the doctor, he too was carried away, even though he was a Communist. By his actions, he had betrayed the impurity of his faith, and he was supported on the arm of the monarchist Stamatis as all three were herded to the docks for transportation.⁹⁶

Indeed, Golban⁹⁷ argues that Dr. Iannis' own psyche, which had remained intact through the Italian and Nazi occupations, itself undergoes an autoimmune destruction as a result of his experiences at the hands of ELAS, which leave him "speechless and emotionally paralyzed":

He would hear the cries of villagers as their houses burned, the screams of live castration and extracted eyes, and the crackle of shots as stragglers were executed, and he would witness over and over again Stamatis and Kokolios, the monarchist and the Communist, the very image of Greece itself, dying in each other's arms...⁹⁸

Mandras is also, ultimately, destroyed by his experiences with ELAS, as well as by his earlier wartime experiences and by Pelagia's rejection. Returning home after three years with ELAS, he attempts to rape Pelagia, accusing her of being a "traitor slut."⁹⁹ Shot in the collarbone by Pelagia, he is then forced out of the house at gunpoint by his mother Drosoula.¹⁰⁰ Returning to the sea, where he had spent many happy hours as a fisherman in his pre-war life, Mandras decides to commit suicide, rendering him a victim of war as well as a war criminal:

It did not occur to him that he was a statistic, one more life warped and ruined by a war, a tarnished hero destined for the void. He was aware of nothing but a vanishment of paradise, an optimism that had turned to dust and ash, a joy that had once shone brighter than the summer sun, but now had disappeared and melted in the black light and frigid heart of massacre and cumulative remorse.¹⁰¹

As Derrida argues, then, "Autoimmunity is always more or less suicidal, but more seriously still, it threatens always to rob suicide itself from its meaning and supposed integrity" as "it consists not only in committing suicide but in compromising sui- or self-referentiality, the self or sui- of suicide itself."¹⁰² In this sense, Mandras' suicide can also perhaps be

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 444.

⁹⁷ Tatiana Golban, "Reconstructing the Ancient Mythemes," p. 361.

⁹⁸ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, p. 445.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 449.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 451.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 451.

¹⁰² Jacques Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 44.

understood in terms of autoimmunity, in which the integrity of self-identity itself is threatened; he has merely become a statistic.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, de Bernières' Cephalonia is an island which, attractive yet vulnerable, has long been forced into an attitude of openness, of unconditional hospitality towards the Other. In this sense, the wartime invasions of the island by the Italians and then the Nazis are just the latest in the island's long history of domination by outsiders, conquests which, for better or worse, have shaped the island's culture. In this context, then, the binary oppositions between hostility and hospitality, friendship and enmity are constantly challenged in the novel, as unconditional hospitality brings friends as well as enemies, love as well as war and devastation. Thus, political enemies, such as Captain Corelli and Dr. Iannis, become friends or even, as in the case of Pelagia and Corelli, lovers. In other cases, friendships, such as that between Weber and the Italian soldiers of the *Acqui* division, become overwhelmed by political enmity, with tragic results. Finally, in the takeover of the island by ELAS, the distinction between friend and enemy collapses in a nightmare of autoimmunity.

The horrors of the civil war destroy the previously patriotic Pelagia's pride in her Greek identity to the point where she "pretended to herself that she was Italian."¹⁰³ Ironically, it later turns out that Corelli, also motivated by shame in his national identity, moved to Athens and became a Greek citizen instead of returning to Italy after the war:

After the war all the facts came out. Abyssinia, Libya, persecution of Jews, atrocities, untried political prisoners by the thousand, everything. I was ashamed of being an invader. I was so ashamed that I didn't want to be Italian any more.¹⁰⁴

Tragically, the relationship between Corelli and Pelagia is not revived until their old age; although Corelli secretly visits the island regularly, leaving what Pelagia perceives as ghostly traces, he never approaches her as, seeing her with her (adopted) daughter, he assumes she has got married. Thus, neither Pelagia nor Antonio ever marry; Corelli later tells Pelagia, "You were always my Beatrice, my Laura. I thought, who wants second best?",¹⁰⁵ while Pelagia confesses that she feels like an "unfinished poem."¹⁰⁶

Corelli is, however, eventually reunited with an ageing and querulous Pelagia through her grandson, Iannis, whom Corelli encounters playing Antonia, his beloved mandolin. Meanwhile, Cephalonia is already subject to a new influx of outsiders; these new and benign 'invaders' are tourists who bring a new wave of prosperity to the islanders. Pelagia, however, cannot escape from the trauma of her past in her dealings with the tourists who fill her taverna; while she enjoys speaking Italian with the Italian customers, who remind her of Corelli and her long-departed Italian friends, her hospitality towards her German guests is, despite her best intentions, heavily tinted with hostility. As she explains to Corelli,

¹⁰³ Louis de Bernières, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, pp. 462-463.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 519.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 520.

I still have trouble being pleasant to Germans. I keep wanting to blame them for what their grandfathers did. They're so polite and the girls are so pretty. Such good mothers. I feel guilty for wanting to kick them.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 523.