

Seminar Description

Civility, with its origins in Roman rhetoric and its presence in humanist classrooms, was a vital concept for early modern England. The sixteenth-century explosion in conduct books expanded civility from intellectual and political ideals into expectations for social behavior. Yet the phenomenal popularity of revenge tragedies, with their lush violence and spectacular conclusions, complicated the cultural valorization of civility. Today, the term energizes early modern studies and even scholarship far afield as well as contemporary politics—but not without significant baggage.

Although cast as a virtuous reprieve from discourtesy and partisanship, civility often suppresses conflict and conceals violence in service to the status quo. For minoritized peoples, calls for civility in the face of injustice can be especially exasperating, if not downright deadly.

This seminar explores how civility (e.g., civil behaviors, discourse, and expectations for) intersects with early modern structures of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, nationalism, & indigeneity. On what grounds is civility extended or negotiated? By what modes is it inculcated in or weaponized against subjects? To what extent does the Shakespearean world recognize the wounding potential of civility? How might current trends in museum curation, performance, pedagogy, and funding indicate the political instrumentalizing of “civil” versions of Shakespeare as a means of suppressing certain conflicts? Might his work also model more transformational forms of civility?

The seminar aims to bring together scholarship that both interrogates the concept’s unwieldiness and traces its variability across the archives (early modern and contemporary) with which the seminar community engages. More specific objectives include an examination of the rhetorics, technologies, and permutations of civility as well as its diffuse consequences. Though the seminar evinces skepticism of civility—particularly its potential for social transformation—it will not calibrate toward some idea of group conformity on the matter. Nevertheless, the seminar infuses the study of rhetoric, humanism, and, more broadly, discourses on civility with an attention to social justice and power structures.

Abstracts

“There goes a proper ciuill young man’: Contested civilities in Thomas Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft*”

Claire M. Busse, La Salle University

Thomas Deloney’s tale of Richard Casteler depicts the London and Westminster of the late sixteenth century as a space of competing value systems, each advocating for their own conceptions of civility. The values of business and industry contend with those of sociability and nationalism, as the increasing Dutch population in London provides economic competition for English craftsmen and romantic competition for English maidens. In the second part of *The Gentle Craft*, Thomas Deloney portrays Richard Casteler’s “civil” behavior, which privileges commerce over sociability, as a rejection of that which is truly English. Through Richard’s story, Deloney explores the tensions that occur between a more traditional England, represented through the inclusion of Long Meg of Westminster, and the newer commercial England that, by valuing individuals based on their business acumen, enables foreigners to benefit to the detriment of English workers and English society. Casteler’s privileging of business over community and foreign wealth over English virtue leads to a

childless marriage for him and the downfall of Meg, who will become the infamous “Long Meg of Westminster,” a promiscuous tavern owner made famous in several eponymous jest books.

“Counterfeit Civility”

Douglas Clark, University College Dublin

Barnabe Barnes identifies one key consequence of civil culture as the “odious affectation of civilitie” in those who lack “any condition verily virtuous, or constant”.¹ This strain of incivility can be seen in those who “grossely counterfeit a kind of gravitie, to conceale their foolishnesse”, and those who “would seeme civile adulterating their arrogant natures, with the mere colours of gravitie”.² Barnes’ manual usefully demonstrates how social dissimulation both stemmed from and was a primary threat to the ideals of honesty, modesty, and temperance taught in contemporary courtesy literature. Many writers of the period presented barbarity, rusticity, and savagery as primary counterpoints to the ideals of *civilitas* and *urbanitas*, yet such barbarity and savagery at home and abroad were, at least, easy to discern. The key problem with civility is that it was often imitated by the foolish and used as a façade by the immoral, instead of being adopted as a “constant” principle of self-temperance. Honesty, in this respect, was but “an art to seem so”.³ The artful performance of civility created new opportunities to denigrate and exploit individuals, rather than simply being used to indicate one’s social refinement. My paper engages with this topic to propose two related points. First, that the notion of counterfeit civility was a key idea born from the age’s commitment to the refinement of manners. Second, that counterfeit civility represents an important facet of the period’s broader fascination with interrogating the concepts of imitation, falsity, and superficiality (as a means more fully understand the slippery notion of humanity). I develop these points primarily in relation to *Othello* and *Timon of Athens*. Exploring the extent to which counterfeit civility underpins forms of social disorder and personal trauma in this play will help me to determine the broader destructive potential and detrimental artistry attributed to civility in early modern literary culture.

“Malign Intent Unrealized: The Troubled Communal Settlements of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*”

Christopher Crosbie, North Carolina State University

What is at stake for a community when an offender is pardoned for an attempted – yet not materially-realized – criminal deed? An act of clemency may be understood as a second chance for the offender, an occasion for graciousness by the pardoner, but it also may represent for others in the community a potential, even (in its way) an already-realized, form of harm. One person’s vision of civility might well appear to another, then, as an instance of incivility. Such a scenario, this paper argues, appears at the end of *Measure for Measure*, where clemency toward Angelo invites a question never itself articulated openly on the stage: what are the ramifications for community-safety in the play’s final (social, quasi-judicial) settlements? Part of my larger project examining intention on the early modern stage, this paper examines how such troubled social settlements depend on using the

¹ Barnabe Barnes, *Four Bookes of Offices: Enabling Privat Persons for the special service of all good Princes and Policies* (London, 1606), sig. D1^r. STC 1468.

² Barnes, *Four Bookes of Offices*, sig. D1^r.

³ See Maquerelle’s brazen statement in John Marston’s *The Malcontent* (1604) that “honesty is but an art to seem so”. John Marston, *The Malcontent* (London, 1604), sig. G4^r. STC 17479.

potential ambiguities surrounding intentionality to fashion micro-communities within larger polities. Drawing on communitarian ethics to explore this fraught dynamic, this essay argues that Shakespeare draws our attention to community-formation as, by turns, a worthy end unto itself, an endeavor nonetheless capable of wreaking damage upon still others, and, when governed by an *ethos* of charitable care, holding forth the promise for its own self-critique and metamorphosis into something ever more capacious and ecumenical.

“A Bird of My Tongue, a Beast of Yours: Tweeting Transformation in Shakespeare's *Much Ado* and Twitter's #MeToo”

Christine Hoffmann, West Virginia University

“A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours,” says Beatrice to Benedick in Act I of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Granting its function as a comeback in a skirmish of wit, how does Beatrice's declaration alert readers to Messina's standards for civility? What distinguishes bird from beast from human; bird tongue from beast tongue; Don John's dog's mouth from constable Dogberry (from an Ass)? When Beatrice later bids Benedick to “Kill Claudio,” are we to understand her outrage has triggered some (more) bestial transformation in her, or does the “rare parrot-teacher” maintain her bird's eye view of the play's comic milieu? As for Benedick, does Beatrice make a beast out of him, a fool, or a man?

I like to think these questions are prompted by more than my own ornithophobia. Early moderns had classical and contemporary mythological narratives to remind them that birds/birdsong could be sinister: Sirens lure. Harpies seize. A swan might be a rapacious god. A fowl might prove a protean magician cycling through disguises. Bestiaries warned readers of the thieving tendencies of magpies and jackdaws, deceptive by nature. For some twenty-first century media consumers, meanwhile, it's no harder to imagine one Angry Bird™ bringing down a house than it is to charge one tweet with dismantling a reputation. My seminar contribution argues that, more than a coincidence of naming, a social media tweet can be heard as a mythological echo. By first making much ado of the small detail of Beatrice's birdspeech, I will trace the intertextual connections between folk and classical metamorphosis stories, Shakespeare's play, and the ongoing mythologizing of the #MeToo movement. I read the species hybridity embraced by both modern social media and premodern story as commentary on the incoherence of metamorphosis as a reformist gesture. As in Ovid's poem, metamorphosis remains an agent of continuity, in the sense that stories of transformation are formally composed as accommodations for the same conditions that make transformation desirable, necessary or inescapable.

“Nice customs curtsy to great kings’: Cynical Civility in *Henry V*”

Fayaz Kabani, Allen University

America is obsessed with civility. A perceived lack of civility was blamed for years of increasing partisanship, leading to the 2016 election of Donald Trump, who declared, “I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct.” Those opposed to Trump's presidency regularly found themselves exhausted by his daily affronts (via Twitter) to social standards once held sacrosanct. His rhetorical style seemed the perfect counterpart to his administration's policies regarding federal lands, environmental regulations, and the civil rights of minorities. Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election was hailed by many as a “return to normalcy” placing “the adults back in

charge.” However, many of the Trump administration’s policies have gone unchecked: Louis DeJoy currently remains Postmaster General; the Senate Parliamentarian has the final word on immigration; and permits for drilling have increased. Meanwhile, defenders of filibusters and bipartisanship itself implore “civility” while hamstringing their own party platform. Executive orders decriminalizing marijuana and abolishing student debt (of any amount) have not been issued because of their supposed “impropriety.” Fewer people claim the sky is falling, although many of the same trends continue. Why? The biggest difference between the two administrations has not been policy but *style*.

This paper, focusing on *Henry V*, investigates the ways the powerful, particularly Harry, deploys civility, demanding it of others while also civilizing his most questionable actions. Civility becomes an apparatus in service of aristocratic privilege and the king’s masculine self-worth. Despite significant changes in worldview between late 16th century England and 21st century America, rhetorical strategies like those utilized by Harry and his followers continue to persist and uphold social hierarchy. Can it be in the civic interest to say, “hell no!” to civility?

“Ask it Kindly’: Animal Neighbourship, Charity, and Civility in *Coriolanus*”

Chris Klippenstein, Columbia University

This paper uses Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* to reorient civility as 'kind' behaviour: behaviour that is not only gentle and courteous, but premised on the early modern concept of 'kind' as a classifying system based on perceived similarities (and differences) in fundamental character. I focus on animal metaphors as a way of locating the limits of kind and the expectations of civility in this play. Centering my analysis on a text that has often been read in terms of its political and class relationships, I lay those familiar frameworks aside to draw attention to the more equalizing dynamic of neighbourship, which centers complicated expectations of charity and kind behaviour to others. I show how characters in *Coriolanus* employ a vast menagerie of animal metaphors in order to characterize each other as irreconcilably different, and I analyze how characters use these perceived differences as an excuse to deny kindness to each other. What does it mean to be civil to neighbours whom you consider to be animals? And how can a new focus on neighbourship — especially animal neighbourship — rewrite the familiar associations of community and civil conflict in this play?

“Women’s Conduct and Violence in the Early American Republic”

Erzsi Kukorelly, Universities of Geneva and Neuchâtel, Switzerland

This paper stems from an observation I made regarding the publication history of eighteenth-century European conduct books for young women. I had been researching cultural exchange between England and France through translations and editions of such texts and, when researching a particularly popular title, John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), was struck by the number of editions printed in the United States: 31 of 79 verified entries in the ESTC (c. 40%). When I looked at other titles, a similar pattern emerged. US print rates seem to confirm my hypothesis that European conduct books for young women were part of the imperial project. The construction of an ideal-type of European womanly behaviour – particularly the conduct of women in family management and cultural transmission. – was key to delineating the metropolitan self against a colonial Other.

In this paper, I look at one conduct anthology and one anthology of captivity narratives, both printed in Philadelphia in 1794, by Mathew Carey. Drawing inspiration from Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity*, I draw productive parallels between the two, showing how the civility of the conduct book arguably legitimises the violence of the narratives of captivity and encounter.

“Hannah Woolley and Civility Discourse”

Kristina Lucenko, Stony Brook University

Although many, if not most, popular early modern treatises and handbooks on civility describe how elite men who aspire to advance their status should comport themselves in a range of social situations, a significant number of conduct guides focus on women's behavior, in particular on social relations within the household. As feminist scholars have pointed out, however, contradictions and ambiguities within these books reveal tensions between prescriptive gender norms and practical operations that open up pathways for thinking and behaving beyond the stated instructions. These contradictions can reveal the presence of what Frances E. Dolan calls “functional fictions” of well-governed household relations that disguise, challenge, or re-write discomfiting truths about women's power or men's dependence, and invite opportunities for women's agency or authority. In this paper I consider how fictions that animate the culture of conduct and civility enable a writer like Hannah Woolley (born around 1622-23, died in or after 1674) to build a professional reputation and career by publishing books about domestic knowledge and service. As I will suggest, Woolley presents her advice in the context of what Patricia Akhimié has termed “the ideology of cultivation” and defines as “the notion that all can and should seek to better themselves through following prescribed actions.” The first English woman to publish conduct guides, Woolley's writing is firmly rooted in the ideology of conduct, and bears traces of racialism in moments that identify disobedience with darkness. I am particularly interested in how these cultural notions related to the immutability and inherent differences of humans, and their accompanying racializing ideologies, shape Woolley's advice to young women about demeanor and conduct, and to what ends.

“Barely Civil: Posthumous, Rank and Honor in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*”

John Mucciolo, Chatham, NJ

Cymbeline's is a world of a ranked, honor society. Honor, the mark of rank based on lineage, is a matter of reputation, public esteem which a gentleman must preserve and enhance and, among other of his peers, assert (virtu). In such a competitive society, a gentleman's honor is always at stake, as it is a function of physical courage, keeping promises, sexual conquest, and female chastity (Bryson 232-241; James 310-316; Kelso 96-110). To negotiate his way through this competitive world requires that the gentleman display a civil, sometimes not so civil, equipoise of assertion and restraint. While operative in many of Shakespeare's plays, as they reflect his own ranked social milieu, rank and its code of honor and their complex social interaction haunt *Cymbeline* (Berry 170-74). Their presence is especially manifest in Posthumous. This paper has been excerpted from a chapter about *Cymbeline* and decorum.

“When Civility Feels White: Shakespeare, Race, and the Emotional Conduct of Change”

Justin Shaw, Clark University

What is the relationship between early modern discourses of civility and melancholy? What happens to that relationship when both melancholy and civility are tied up with racial associations? This short paper explores these questions through a brief examination of a scene in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The character Hamlet, imagined by Shakespeare as white, young, and male, experiences conflict with the newly established norms of racial civility and sociability that clash with his desire for darkness and grief. Hamlet, who performs as white and melancholic, comes into conflict with other characters and systems of civility and whiteness; yet he resists and searches for agency against social policies that demand performances of civility that govern ideologies of race, gender, and ability in his dramatic world. The paper also begins to critique the knowledge present in Shakespeare’s time around medicine and emotions and, especially, the ways that writers believed they could treat, cure, and civilize the English body, which, under the influence of melancholy, was thought to be temporarily disabled, effeminizing, and less-than-white, all of which approximated social death.

“Translating Civility: From *King Lear* to *Ran*”

Kristina Sutherland, Baton Rouge, LA

While *King Lear* is filled with cruelty and disorder, Shakespeare emphasizes the concept of civility by staging his opening scenes at court. As Lear calls on his daughters to perform their duties as courtiers, the heartfelt objections of Cordelia foreshadow the crux of the kingdom. While her sisters perform the courtesies expected at court by paying obeisance to their father and acquiescing to the perilous move of splitting the kingdom, Cordelia instead acts according to her heart, displaying her true feelings as she refuses Lear’s test. From this point on, Goneril and Regan make it clear to audiences that their expertise at civil behavior hides their lack of propriety and their bad citizenship. This use of mannerisms as a disguise for cruelty and disorder is similarly shown in Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran*, in which the king becomes a warlord and his daughters become sons. My essay will explore how Kurosawa adapted European ideas of civility using Japanese theater conventions in Nō and Kabuki drama to create his Japanese telling of *King Lear*.

“Incivility as Revenge Against Political Bodies in Senecan Drama”

Simone Waller, Reed College

Historian Phil Withington discusses civil discourse as “a double-edged sword”: “Offering the possibility of a structured discussion between unequal parties, it was also a tool of stigmatisation and exclusion” (144). This paper examines civil discourse in Senecan drama to assess how the genre wielded this “double-edged sword.” I will analyze acts of counsel internal to the plays, determining the extent to which civil speech proves useful to or limiting for speakers differentiated by gender and relative status. Whom do the plays present as capable of engaging in civil speech, and whom do the plays exclude from these civil performances? I am particularly interested in what Withington recognizes as “strategic and subversive use of uncivil and illicit words” (143). For whom is incivility a strategy, for whom is it a failure, and how do plays signal the difference? On Withington’s reading, civility can serve as a tool for the subordinated to address conflicts with superiors without violating norms of a hierarchical social order. While civility appears to function well in the plays when speakers are closer in status, I posit that as Senecan drama moved into increasingly public venues,

the increasing social distance between those consuming, producing, and performing these conflicts and the social rank of the authorities addressed within the plays complicated civil discourse's ability to suppress conflict.

“Ascham’s *Schoolmaster* and Courteous Pedagogy”

Pattie Wareh, Union College

Making use of Castiglione’s *Courtier* as a springboard, this paper seeks to develop a model of courteous pedagogy, considering courtesy not only as a topic of instruction, but also a method. I suggest that the link between pedagogy and pleasure on which Castiglione insists has a formative effect on Ascham’s *Schoolmaster*, seen not only in that text’s insistence on securing the will of the learning subject, but also in its emphasis on the links between judgment, discretion, and social approbation. I suggest that Castiglione serves as a model not only for the kind of learning that the student should pursue, but also the kind of teaching that Ascham himself does in his treatise, albeit with key differences. While Castiglione emphasizes the need for discretion in shaping a courtly performance suitable to its audience, Ascham’s concept of discretion is less about social decorum and more about what Corey McEleney has called “the judgment to distinguish honest pleasure from dishonest pleasure” (*Futile Pleasures* 71). For Ascham, I argue, pleasure and courtesy are both essential and dangerous to his pedagogical project; it is imperative to be able to use both rightly, distinguishing their good forms from the bad. The project of distinguishing oneself as a member of a social elite, central to Castiglione, does not disappear in Ascham, but is uneasily mapped on to his joint project of defining a gentle pedagogical program for the gentility and critiquing the self-indulgence of the court. This paper is part of a larger project in which I juxtapose how both Spenser and Shakespeare make use of the vocabulary of courtesy as they prompt readers and audiences to define their relationship to the text and consider critically their own social identities.