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## 'Civilized with death': Civility, Duelling and Honour in Elizabethan England

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David Hume wrote in 1742 that 'the point of *honour*, or duelling, is a modern invention, as well as *gallantry*; and by some esteemed equally useful for refining of manners'.<sup>1</sup> Many of his contemporaries agreed, but recent commentators of early modern English duelling have not taken up Hume's suggestion. Instead, modern scholars strongly contrast duelling as a remnant from the medieval honour community, on the one hand, and the civility of manners as the early modern novelty, which quickly deplced medieval honour culture, on the other. In his well-known essay – 'English politics and the concept of honour, 1485–1642' – Mervyn James argued that duelling was one of the most 'characteristic expressions' of medieval 'honour violence' – of the knightly code of honour, which early modern "civil" society' quickly ousted.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, for Richard McCoy, the challenges and single combats of Elizabethan aristocrats were epitomes of the chivalrous 'rites of knighthood'.<sup>3</sup>

Many more recent commentators have followed suit. Of course, they have expanded the area which honour and reputation occupied in early modern England and have thus questioned James's rather neat transition from one honour culture to another, and in its stead have perceived multi-vocality. But in so far as duelling and its ideology are concerned, they have merely confirmed James's earlier analysis. It is the clear-cut transition from one honour culture to another which is called in doubt, not the definitions of these cultures. Duelling in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century is still taken as a clear sign of the vitality of an earlier honour culture which allegedly demonstrates multi-vocality. Little wonder then that duelling is habitually described as a 'neo-feudal' custom.<sup>4</sup> When the Earl of Essex was 'fighting duels' he not only 'proselytized his belief in the nobility's right to use violence in the defence of honour'; he also expressed 'the neo-feudal dimension' of his self-fashioned image.<sup>5</sup> And Lord Eure's fashionable education, his employment by the government and his European tour have been juxtaposed (rather than linked) with his propensity to duelling, which

ostensibly was part of his 'general sympathy for the old faith, and an acceptance of the violent elements of the honour code'.<sup>6</sup> Anna Bryson notes in her study on the early modern notion of civility that the duelling theory was a recent import from Italy, but sees the wider ideology in which it was embedded as 'left over' from the late medieval political world.<sup>7</sup> John Adamson has set duelling as part of 'an inherited value-system' over against new 'courtly *politesse*' and 'decorum'.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this scholarly consensus, I argue in this essay that the ideology of duelling (and thus a distinct notion of honour) emerged in Elizabethan England as part of the novel Renaissance Italian theory of courtesy and civility. Far from being a remnant from medieval honour culture which a new humanist culture of civility replaced, the duel of honour came to England alongside the Italian Renaissance notion of the courtier and gentleman.

Of course, the duel of honour ultimately derived from various medieval forms of single combat – most importantly from the judicial duel. Yet, medieval precedents notwithstanding, the duel of honour was essentially a Renaissance creation. As many recent scholars of the Italian Renaissance have emphasized, during the first half of the sixteenth century the medieval forms of single combats were refashioned in Italy into a duel of honour which replaced the vendetta.<sup>9</sup> From the very beginning the duel of honour was an integral part of the new Renaissance ideology of courtesy and civility. It was created within a new court culture, where a prime emphasis was placed on sophisticated manners and where courtiers and gentlemen were compelled to control and repress their emotions.

Perhaps the earliest English commentary on this novel theory of courtesy and duelling is to be found from *The Historie of Italie*, published in 1549 and written by William Thomas, a scholar who had just returned from his five years stay in Italy. Dedicating the volume to the Earl of Warwick, Thomas noted that 'the Italian nacion ... semeth to flourishe in civilitiee moste of all other at this date'. Later in his work Thomas described the Italian customs in the following manner:

And generally (a few citees excepted) in maners and condicions they are no lesse agreeable than in theyr speche: so honourable, so courtesie, so prudente, and so grave withall, that it shoulde seeme eche one of them to have had a princely bringing up. To his superiour obedient, to his equall humble, and to his inferiour gentill and courtesie, amiable to a straunger, and desyrous with courtesie to winne his loue.<sup>10</sup>

There were two momentous consequences of this courtesy. First, 'a straunger can not be better entreteigned, nor more honourable entreated than amongst the Italians'. Secondly, the Italians were 'sobre of speche', but also 'enemies of ill reporte, and so tendre over their owne good name

(whiche they call theyr honour)' that 'who so ever speaketh ill of one of them, shall die for it, if the partie sklaundered maie know it, and finde tyme and place to do it'. The Italians' disposition to private revenges had been responsible for the fact 'that few gentilmen goe abroade unarmed' (p. 4r). Moreover, 'if one gentilman', Thomas wrote, 'happen to defame another, many tymes the defamed maketh his defiaunce by a writte called *Cartello*, and openly chalengeth the defamer to fight in campe: so that there are seen sometyme woorthy trialles betwene them' (p. 4r). Was this habit of duelling reprehensible? Of course, Thomas admitted, there were some who 'dooe discommende them', but, he argued, 'mine opinion dooeth rather allow than blame them'. The benefits of duelling were obvious. As Thomas put it, 'the scare of suche daungers maketh men so ware of theyr tounes, that a man maie goe xx yeres through Italie without findyng reproche or vilanie, unlesse he provoke it hym selfe' (p. 4r).<sup>11</sup>

In this remarkable passage, Thomas put forward several views which would become central to the entire duelling tradition. First, duelling was described as a relatively new phenomenon. Second, Thomas argued that unflinching courtesy and a penchant for duelling went hand in hand. Third, not only was duelling perceived as an integral part of courtesy, but it was even said to enhance the general level of civility within gentlemanly society. Moreover, both the exceptionally high level of politeness and the concomitant aptitude for duelling were seen as a peculiarly Italian phenomenon. Finally, it was perhaps only natural that Thomas, a great admirer of Italy, found duelling a highly commendable social custom.

At the time Thomas published his account of civility and duelling its message seemed rather foreign to the English, and few, if any, paid close attention to it. Yet, none of his points were lost on the subsequent generation of Englishmen. By 1590 the situation had dramatically changed. One Englishman pointed out that if one wanted to know more about duelling and the concomitant notion of honour, one could do worse than peruse Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, first published in English in 1561. 'The Earle Balthazar Castilio in his booke of the Courtier', the Englishman wrote, 'doth among other qualities requireable in a gentleman, specially advise he should bee skillfull in the knowing of Honor, and causes of quarrell'.<sup>12</sup>

During the latter part of the sixteenth century there occurred a sudden rise of Italian treatises and guides which explored courtly and gentlemanly civility as well as the concomitant notion of the point of honour and duelling. There had of course been a long medieval tradition of courtesy books and also a distinctively Christian tradition of civility whose origins are to be found in monastic and clerical rules of conduct.<sup>13</sup> The most famous and influential work in this tradition was Erasmus's *De civilitate morum puerilium*, first published in 1530 and translated into English as early

as 1532. Although the Italian treatises had much in common with religious civility guides, they also differed from them in many important respects.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to Castiglione's *Courtier*, these Italian treatises published in England included Giovanni della Casa's *Il Galateo* (originally published in 1558) translated into English by Robert Peterson in 1576, Stefano Guazzo's *La civil conversatione* (1574) published in English in the early 1580s and Annibale Romei's *The Courtier's Academie* (originally published in 1585) translated into English by the poet John Keper in 1598. A strikingly similar account of the courtly code of conduct was to be found in Philibert de Vienne's satirical *The Philosopher of the Court*, originally a French work published in Lyon in 1547 and Englished in 1575.

The thoroughness with which this code of conduct was perceived as an import from Italy is most graphically attested to by the fact that the only comprehensive English imitation of these treatises was camouflaged as a translation of an Italian tract. This was Simon Robson's *The Courte of Civill Courtesie* first published in 1578. The invented author of Robson's short tract was 'Bengalasso del Mont. Prisacchi Retta'. The trick obviously worked efficiently for it seems to have misled Gabriel Harvey who wrote: 'And nowe of late forsoothe to helpe countenance owte the matter they have gotten Philbertes Philosopher of the Courte, the Italian Archebyshoppies brave Galatro [Galateo], Castiglioes fine Cortegiano, Bengalassoes Civil Instructions to his Nephewe Seignor Princisca Ganzar: Guatzoes newe Discourses of curteous behaviour.'<sup>15</sup>

One of the overriding themes in these Renaissance courtesy treatises was to explain how the perfect courtier and gentleman should conduct his manners and behaviour so that he won a favourable response from other courtiers and gentlemen. A successful pursuit of this end demanded two kinds of behaviour. On the one hand, the courtier had to master a technique of self-representation – to offer as good a picture of himself as possible. On the other hand, he had to take his fellow courtiers and gentlemen into account and to accommodate his outward behaviour accordingly.<sup>16</sup>

The code of civility ensured that courtiers and gentlemen were agreeable and pleasing to one another. The aim was, as Castiglione argued, 'to purchase ... the general favour of great men, Gentlemen and ladies'.<sup>17</sup> According to Philibert, 'courtly civilitie' entailed 'a certayne framing and agreeing in all our actions, to the pleasing of the worlde' – to 'be pleasing to all men'.<sup>18</sup> Della Casa's central topic was 'what manner of Countenance and grace, behoveth a man to use, that hee may be able in Communication and familiar acquaintance with men, to shewe him selfe pleasant, courteous, and gentle'. The answer he gave was to the effect that, although virtues might be necessary, they were rarely of great use. It was therefore the gentleman's 'courteous behaviour and entertaynement with good manners and wordes' that assumed the most central part in conveying his courtesy and pleasantness.<sup>19</sup>

Good manners and grace, beauty and attire were important, but speech and words were perhaps the most crucial factor in shaping a gentleman's courteous image. 'You must', della Casa advised, 'accustome your selfe, to use suche gentle and courtious speache to men, and so sweete, that it may have no manner of bitter taste' (p. 84). According to Castiglione, in order to please his interlocutors, the courtier had to 'frame himselfe' and his topics according to those with whom he happened to converse (pp. 110, 136). He must, in short, never 'wante good communycatyon and fyttre for them he talketh wythall, and have a good understandynge with a certein sweetenesse to refresh the hearers mindes, and with meerie conceites and Jestes to provoke them to solace and laughter, so that without beinge at any time lothesome or satiate he may evermore delite' (pp. 149–50).

The fullest analysis of the centrality of conversation in civil courtesy is to be found in Guazzo's lengthy *The Civile Conversation*. According to Guazzo, civil conversation was of great importance, it had a central place in gentlemanly courtesy, in conveying politeness. It referred to both 'our tongue, and ... our behaviour'.<sup>20</sup> There was nothing surprising in Guazzo's insistence that the main aim of conducting a civil conversation was to please one's interlocutors. He emphasized several times that the end was to be 'better thought of', to win 'the love & good will' of our peers. But the converse was no less true. 'I first admonish him', Guazzo noted, 'which taketh pleasure in civile Conuersation, to eschue all things which make the talke lesse delightfull to the hearers' (p. 60v).

The Christian tradition of courtesy had always emphasized the fact that the body was the outward reflection of the soul – 'this outward honesty of the body cometh of the soul well composed and ordered', as Erasmus had put it.<sup>21</sup> In the Renaissance notion of civil courtesy a much greater emphasis was placed on the exterior – decorum.<sup>22</sup> When James VI wrote to Robert Cecil in 1602 he assured him that his words 'proceed *ex abund[ant]ia cordis*, and not of any intention to pay you with Italian complementoes'.<sup>23</sup> In civil courtesy the content of the conversation could be negligible as long as *decorum* was maintained.

It followed that there could be a considerable discrepancy between surface and reality in conduct or speech and that dissimulation was an integral part of civil conversation.<sup>24</sup> Honest dissimulation was thus justified because social life took precedence over inner life.<sup>25</sup> This is of course central to Castiglione, who pointed out that 'it is not ill for a man that knoweth himselfe skilfull in a matter, to seeke occasyon after a comelye sorte to shoue hys feat therein, and in lykecase to cover the partes he thynketh scante woorthye praise, yet notwithstandinge all after a certeine warye dyssymulacion' (pp. 148, 146, 127). Whereas for Erasmus and others courtesy was an outward sign of the soul, for Castiglione and his followers it was largely a means to repress outward indications of inner feelings.<sup>26</sup>

Della Casa accepted flattery as a necessary component of courtesy in his discussion of ceremonies. Ceremonies were almost like 'lyes & dreames'. 'Though so fayre and gallant without', ceremonies were 'altogether vaine within'; they consisted 'in semblance without effect, & in wordes without meaning'. Yet, no matter how empty they were, it was misleading to assume they were dispensable. First of all, they were faults of the times rather than of particular gentlemen, and gentlemen were thus bound to follow them. Moreover, ceremonies performed an important social task. 'For he that faileth to doe them, dothe not onely displease, but doth a wrong to him, to whom they be due' (pp. 40–8).

Guazzo's view was very similar. 'To be acceptable in companie', he insisted, 'we must put of as it were our owne fashions and manners, and cloath our selves with the conditions of others, and imitate them so farre as reason will permit'. Of course, in so far as 'honestie and vertue' were concerned, 'we ought to be alwayes one and the same'. But far otherwise were things with manners. As Guazzo put it, 'but touching the diversitie of the persons with whome we shall be conversant, we must alter our selves into an other' (p. 46v).<sup>27</sup> Underlying this conviction was a more general principle that exterior was more important than interior – that 'we take more pleasure to seeme than to bee' (p. 75r). Guazzo agreed with Castiglione that 'the dutie of a perfect Courtier ... is to doe all things worth carefull diligence, & skilful art', but 'so that the art is hidden, and the whole seemeth to be done by chaunce, that he may thereby be had in more admiration' (p. 8r).

Guazzo also concurred with della Casa's analysis of the importance of ceremonies. Of course, it was possible to argue that many 'professe them selves mortall enemies to those ceremonies'. But on closer inspection this was not the case and even those who 'openly detest' ceremonies, in fact, 'secretly desire them'. The reason was not far to seek. 'Ceremonies', Guazzo maintained, 'displease no bodie', because 'they are doone in signe of honour, and there is not he, who is not glad with all his heart to be honoured'. The conclusion was obvious: 'these worldly ceremonies purchase us the good will of our friends and superiours, to whome they are addressed and make us knowne for civile people' (pp. 77r–v).

Why was it so essential to meticulously follow the rules of outward civility? The key to this lies in Simon Robson's claim that to master civil courtesy would enable the young gentleman 'to purchase worthy prayse of their inferiours: and estimation and credit amonge theyr betters'.<sup>28</sup> Civil courtesy and conversation were, in other words, an important way to win and confer honour and reputation. Honour was horizontal: a gentleman's honour was taken to be his reputation amongst his peer group. It was his exterior or appearance; above all, it was how other gentlemen regarded him.<sup>29</sup> Explaining how other people's 'good opinion' could be received,

Guazzo argued that this was done 'by using that common meane and instrument, whereby mens hearts are wonne, that is, curtesie and affabilitie'. It followed that 'our name dependeth of the general opinions, which have such force, that reason is of no force against them' (pp. 72v, 24v–25v).

If a gentleman's status and reputation *qua* gentleman depended on other gentlemen's opinion, the importance of dissimulation was understandable. This becomes clear in Guazzo's analysis. According to him, all those were good men who were 'wel reported and reputed of in the worlde'. Conversely, they were bad 'who for their apparent faults are pointed at with the finger and holden for infamous' (pp. 23r–v). But in such a case it would be possible to dissemble and thus to appear honest. As Guazzo posed the question, 'howe shall I behave my self with some, whom I knowe farre more wicked than those whome you have spoken of, albeit by their dissembling hypocrisie, they are accounted of everie men for honest men?' He admitted that this was a real problem but insisted even more strongly that we have to accept that if someone through his cunning dissimulation earned a good reputation, he was then to all intents and purposes a good and honourable man (pp. 24v–25v).

Annibale Romei concurred. He noted that there were two kinds of honour. First, there was 'acquired honour, and perfect', which was simply 'the reward of vertue'. Second, there was 'natural and imperfect honour', which was 'a common opinion, that he [who was] honored, hath never failed in justice, nor valor'. It was, in brief, his reputation. This was not honour which could be won, 'because man bringeth it from his mothers wombe'. It could thus only be lost; man 'preserveth it unspotted, except through some greevous offence or suspition, he loose[s] this good opinion' (p. 100). The gentleman's genuine moral character was negligible as long as he could maintain a favourable reputation. It followed that all those were men of honour who – be they 'good or wicked', as he revealingly put it – 'have not lost the good opinion that the worlde conceived of them' (p. 100).

From a perspective that emphasized manners rather than matter, identity was to be derived from external behaviour and social indelicacy was a most serious vice.<sup>30</sup> The authors of civility and civil conversation agreed that if civil behaviour was so important in shaping a perfect gentleman, even the smallest departure from the code of courtesy could be taken as supercilious behaviour and thus cause serious rupture between gentlemen.<sup>31</sup> Della Casa carefully listed all the particular actions which might give offence to other people. He insisted that not only 'rude behaviours' but even rude 'fashions' indicated that 'they doe esteeme them but light'. But it was above all speech-acts which had this undesired effect, and della Casa focused his main attention on the gentleness of our speech.<sup>32</sup> Guazzo agreed. Unlike in rhetoric, in civil conversation a gentleman had to be extremely careful and always to remember that 'he which wisheth to be well spoken of by others,

must take heede he speake not ill of others'. Guazzo drew the conclusion 'that it is better to slip with the foote, then with the tongue' (p. 55v).

The worst of these uncivil rogues were of course those who were telling lies.<sup>33</sup> According to Castiglione, lying was the source of the worst mischief in a courtier. He therefore advised his reader to 'take heede he purchase not the name of a lyar, nor of a vaine person'. Moreover, the courtier should even avoid telling true but extraordinary stories (pp. 149, 296). The courtier must never be 'yll tonged' or utter words which 'may offende, where his entent was to please' (p. 121). Similarly, della Casa strongly advised against lying, and Guazzo also warned of those 'ill tonged forgers, whose naughtinesse is such, that they will accuse you to have done or sayd that which you never thought' (p. 30r). One must even avoid speaking 'of things which are not easily beleevd' (p. 71v).

In his duelling manual, Vincentio Saviolo insisted that a gentleman must abstain from everything which might tarnish 'his woorthye calling', and should thus 'embrace myldnes and curtesie'. But the gentleman should also 'be in minde magnanimous', which implied courtesy towards his equals but awareness of his own worth as well. What this amounted to in practice is well brought out by Saviolo's subsequent discussion of practical situations, where even the smallest deviation from the code of courtesy might occasion insult. Even 'to stare and looke [at] men passing by' could breed 'such an offence unto some men so marked, that they cannot take it in good part, and therefore it is verie dangerous'. Most importantly, in 'the companye of honorable Gentlemen' it was crucial 'to have a great regarde of their tung, to the end they say nothing which maye be evil taken or mis-consted'.<sup>34</sup>

The fact that gentlemen were required both to be pleasing and agreeable and to avoid lying entailed, as Edward Muir has pointed out in the Italian context, that 'it became discourteous to be truthful' whilst at the same time accusing someone of lying was by far the most serious insult.<sup>35</sup> How was the gentleman expected to respond to insults? The only efficient means, it was widely agreed, was to issue a challenge to a duel. When one gentleman had shown signs or uttered words of discourtesy to another gentleman he had in effect insulted him and thus questioned his status as a gentleman. A challenge was thus the only possible way out of this situation for the insulted gentleman, because that would be the only way to demonstrate his courage and valour, to display his genteel character and thus to restore his tarnished reputation as a gentleman.

The notion of honour underlying duelling was thus not only horizontal but also reflexive. This meant that a gentleman's honour was diminished or destroyed altogether unless he responded with an appropriate counterattack. The reflexive character of honour was well brought out by Castiglione who averred that 'the fame of a gentleman that carieth weapon, yf it once take a foile in any litle point through dastardlines or any other reproche,

doeth evermore continue shameful in the worlde and full of ignoraunce'. Gentlemen had to do something about defending their honour. Castiglione was seeking such a 'courage of spirite ... in our Courtyer' that he would 'suffer not the leaste thyng in the worlde to passe that maie burthen them' (pp. 42–3, 38).

Guazzo also concurred that honour was reflexive. Reputation went before everything else – including even life. It was 'a greater offence to take awaie ones good name, which refresheth the soule, than to defraude one of foode, which sustaineth the bodie'. But if this was indeed so, it followed that a gentleman had to safeguard his reputation, irrespective whether his reputation was based on sincerely virtuous character or on pure dissimulation and hypocrisy. As Guazzo concluded, 'we cannot abide to be il spoken of our selves, whether it be rightfullie or wrongfullie' (pp. 27r–v).

The concept of reflexive honour emerged even more clearly in Romei's account. According to his definition, honour was lost as soon as a man lost the good opinion of the world. Every discourtesy was a clear indication that a gentleman was not being treated as he might expect. His reputation or status as a gentleman was, in other words, questioned. When this happened the only means of retaining the good opinion and thus one's status as a gentleman was a counterattack. As Romei's interlocutors agreed, he was 'amongest men dishonourable, who with his proper valour, makes no shew of being touched with an injurie'. If one wanted to 'be an honorable man' he must preserve 'the opinion of the world'; and the only way to do this in case of an injury was an appropriate counterattack (p. 99).

Castiglione exhorted the courtier to be skilfull in arms, which would stand him in good stead in 'variaunces betwene one gentleman and an other, whereupon ensueth a combat'. The courtier was advised not to run rashly to duels because it was both dangerous and unbecoming. Recourse to the duel was, however, necessary for a courtier 'to save his estimation'. As soon as the courtier thought it would be too late to pull out of a controversy 'without burdeyn', he must be ready to issue a challenge and be 'utterlye resolved with hymselfe' in the actual fight as well (p. 47).

In della Casa's scheme of things it was a failure in performing ceremonies for duty which prompted insults and thus gave rise to challenges and duels. As soon as a gentleman failed to carry out his courteous duty, duels could be provoked. According to della Casa, 'many times it chaunceth, that men come to daggers drawing, even for this occasion alone, that one man hath not done the other, that worship and honour uppon the way, that he ought'. It was in order to avoid these situations that we always say to everyone who 'is not a man of very base calling' 'You' rather than 'Thou', because by using the latter 'wee disgrace him and offer him outrage and wronge: and by suche speach, seeme to make no better reconing of him, then of a knave and a clowne' (pp. 40–8).

Guazzo put forward a similar analysis in outlining his theory of civil conversation. Whilst all the affronts to God could easily be ignored, 'we cannot be quiet when either we our selves or our friends are injured either in word or deede' (p. 24r). These situations were exceptionally common in princely courts, where 'oftentimes Princes being desirous to trie out the truth, have graunted their servaunts the combat one against the other'. There were thus public duels of honour, but there were also private duels, where the sole aim was to deliver a gentleman from an accusation of ungentlemanly behaviour and to clear his tarnished reputation. 'And I knowe', Guazzo affirmed, 'when upon like occasion certaine Gentlemen have conveied themselues into some close place, where because the one would not live with the name of an evill speaker, & the other of a false accuser, they have made an end of their lives and their quarrels both together' (pp. 29r-v).

Philibert opened his discussion of duelling by claiming that gentlemen and courtiers were accustomed to 'blade out their brawles manfully by armes', a habit 'not only to be excused, but rather to be commended'. Although courtiers were inclined to resort to arms in various situations, it was most commonly done to 'defend their persons, or their honour' (pp. 48-9). While courtly philosophy turned a blind eye to many other offences, insults touching our reputation required an immediate response. Because the courtier 'never regarde but the superficial part of any thing, and that which sheweth it selfe unto us', he was bound to challenge anyone who touched his exterior (p. 49). But it followed that the inward life was, if not wholly negligible, at least much less important to the courtier; it was something which did not pertain to his philosophy at all. Therefore, matters 'touching loyaltie in worde, or humanitie in deede towarde oure equalles or inferiours, it is nothing so requisite in our justice as in the Auncientes' (p. 51). Honour, reputation and duels, in other words, only appertained to questions touching exteriors, appearances and courtesies. But as well as being an efficient way of maintaining one's reputation, the duel was also a way to conceal one's faults. Challenges, Philibert asserted, were issued either by those who were inclined to 'defend their persons, or their honour', or by those who wanted to 'have ever suche pretectes, or likely cloakes, under which the truth of their faultes and contentions lyeth hidden, and is couched so cunningly, that wee see them not' (p. 49).

According to Robson, the challenge should be given circumspectedly rather than directly: 'I will quarell with no body, but if any body have any quarell to mee, I have businesse into sutche a place, sutche a day, at sutche an hower: I wil have but my selfe and my man, or but my selfe and my freinde, there hee may finde mee if hee dare' (pp. 20-2). Robson emphasized that every offence and injury led to a duel. They were requited by giving the other 'reprochefull names for it, as the Lie, or knave', in which case it was necessary not only to reply 'with like woordes' but also to

'counte the wrong mine: and either offer the first blowe ... or els challenge him into the field' (pp. 23–4).<sup>36</sup>

Duelling was thus an integral part of the novel theory of civility or civil courtesy. According to its principles, a challenge was a polite response to an uncouth word or act which had degraded gentlemanly courtesy, and offered the only means to restore this courtesy. In *Romeo and Juliet* Tybalt was not only 'a duellist' but also 'the courageous captain of compliments'.<sup>37</sup> When the notorious duellist of Lord Herbert of Cherbury discussed in his autobiography 'the discreet civility which is to be observed in communication either with friends or strangers', he recommended '*Guazzo de la Civile Conversation* and *Galeteus de Moribus* [i.e. Della Casa's *Galateo*]'.<sup>38</sup>

Even though many Englishmen rapidly embraced this new Italian theory of civility, their opponents were scarcely less quick to trace the ideological origin of duelling. The critics of duelling, in other words, not only castigated this new social custom; above all, they questioned its underlying theory. First, they were quick to point out that duelling was neither ancient nor homebred.<sup>39</sup> Lodowick Bryskett wrote that 'this matter of the lie giving and taking [i.e. duelling], is growne of late among us',<sup>40</sup> and Thomas Churchyard claimed that duelling was something which 'our old Fathers' had not taught to us; indeed it was scarcely known at all 'till our youth beganne to travell straunge Countreys'.<sup>41</sup> When James VI and I and his ministers became alarmed about duels in the 1610s, this same view acted as the basis for their explanation of their increased frequency. Duels were imported from the Continent, and it was only the soft spot the English had for novel and strange things which might account for this menacing development. In his proclamation 'against private Challenges and Combats', James VI and I declared that all those who properly understood these matters 'must acknowledge that this bravery, was first borne and bred in Forraine parts; but after convaied over into this Island, as many other hurtfull and unlawfull Wares are oftentimes in close packs, that never had the Seale of the places from whence they were brought to warrant them'.<sup>42</sup>

As well as insisting that duelling was a recent import from Italy and France, many critics also emphasized that it was the most menacing consequence of the novel but utterly misleading theory of civility. The travel writer Fynes Moryson wholeheartedly agreed with those who thought that the Italians were the masters of refined manners. He declared: 'By sweetnes of language, and singular Art in seasoning their talke and behaviour with great ostentation of Courtesy, they make their Conversation sweete and pleasing to all men, easily gaying the good will of those with whome they live.' But, as anyone even modestly acquainted with the theory of civil conversation well knew, this courtesy was far from being thoroughly sincere. Indeed, Moryson pointed out that the Italians were 'the greatest dissemblers in the world'. It followed that 'no trust is to be reposed in their wordes, the

flattering tounge having small acquaintance with a sincere heart, espetically among the Italyans, who will offer Curtesyes freely, and presse the acceptance vehemently, only to squeeze out Complement on both sydes, they neyther meaning to performe them, nor yet dareing to accept them, because in that case they would repute the Acceptor ignorant and uncivill'.<sup>43</sup>

Closely related to the Italians' total command of civil courtesy was their profound knowledge of the points of honour. They could, Moryson wrote disparagingly, 'excellently dispute of honour and like vertues'. It was no surprise therefore that the Italians were 'most impatient of any the least reproch or injury'. But because the Council of Trent had prohibited duelling and because their princes were 'severely punishing all quarrells', the Italians, instead of duels 'upon equall tearmes with [an] Adversarye', had now to resort to murder.<sup>44</sup>

Another early seventeenth-century travel writer, Thomas Palmer, concurred. According to him, 'the civilitie of that Countrey' was mixed with several 'inconveniencies and corruptions'. On the one hand, Italian civility only concerned the appearance; on the other hand, it was coupled with extreme sensitivity to insults. Paraphrasing William Thomas, Palmer described the Italian: 'in conversation hee be not offensive, but obedient and humble to his superiour, to his equall observant, to his inferior gentill and courteous, amiable to strangers and swimming in complements and loving tearmes'. But 'the least occasion dissolveth auncient bonds of love'; their 'civill offices' were exceptionally 'unsteadie and inconstant'. Most importantly, even the smallest insult could end in a duel. Palmer was convinced that 'the civilitie that is in them cannot brooke uncivilitie proffered, without risentment in the highest nature'.<sup>45</sup> Palmer contrasted this with the civility and manners which he found in 'the Court of *England*'. Mainly because of 'the puritie of Religion (which is the best Civilian)' the English court was 'perfect in civility & good manners'.<sup>46</sup>

In *The Magnetic Lady* Ben Jonson called duelling 'the courtliest kind of quarrel',<sup>47</sup> and in *The Alchemist* he also parodied the duelling code of the courtesy theory. When Druggier observed that:

... to carry quarrels,  
As gallants do, and manage 'em, by line,

Face replied that there was:

... a table,  
With mathematical demonstrations,  
Touching the art of quarrels.<sup>48</sup>

It was, of course, the new theory of civility and duelling on which Shakespeare heaped ridicule in *As You Like It*. Throughout the play the

court is closely associated with both civility and duels. When Touchstone presented himself as a courtier he listed his accomplishments:

... I have trod a measure, I have flattered a lady, I have been politic with my friend, smooth with mine enemy, I have undone three tailors, I have had four quarrels, and like to have fought one.<sup>49</sup>

But Touchstone also linked duelling directly with courtesy manuals and noted that:

... we quarrel in print, by the book, as  
you have books for good manners ...(5. 4. 81–2)

If the Italian theory of civility and duelling was often criticized, its fascination with giving the lie was found utterly ridiculous. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare offered his famous mockery of the degrees of the lie. More generally, many critics maintained that the absurd nature of giving the lie became readily obvious, owing to the fact that the whole theory of civility implied nothing so much as constant lying. Walter Raleigh pointed out that most of the men 'who present death on the points of their swords to all that give' the lie to them, 'use nothing so much in their conversation and course of life, as to speak and swear falsely'. Above all, they continuously used 'complimental lies', which formed an integral part of polite conversation. 'Nay', Raleigh asked, 'what is the profession of love that men make nowadays? what is the vowing of their service, and of all they have, used in their ordinary compliments, and, in effect, to every man whom they bid but good-morrow, or salute, other than a courteous and courtlike kind of lying?' Complimentary lies were such a great fashion that he who failed to use them was 'accounted either dull or cynical'.<sup>50</sup>

To accept the theory of civil courtesy and thus to take trifling incidents as serious insults was ridiculous enough, but to take a lie given as the most serious insult of all was downright ludicrous. Raleigh pointed out that, on the one hand, he who gives the lie to a man who had actually lied 'doth him no wrong at all, neither ought it to be more heinously taken, than to tell him, that he hath broken any promise which he hath otherwise made'. If, on the other hand, there had been no lie, and yet the lie is given, then the giver 'doth therein give the lie directly to himself'. To feel deeply insulted in such a situation was utterly ridiculous. 'Of course', Raleigh acknowledged, 'it is an extreme rudeness to tax any man in public with an untruth ... but all that is rude ought not to be civilized with death'.<sup>51</sup>

## Notes

1. David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1985), p. 626. I owe this reference to my student Mikko Tolonen.
2. Mervyn James, *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 308–415.
3. Richard C. McCoy, *The Rites of Knighthood: the Literature and Politics of Elizabethan Chivalry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), esp. p. 58. See also G. M. Pinciss, 'The Old Honor and the New Courtesy: "1 Henry IV"', *Shakespeare Survey*, 31 (1978), 85–91; Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Indian Summer of English Chivalry* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1960), pp. 13–14; Arthur B. Ferguson *The Chivalric Tradition of Renaissance England* (Washington DC.: Folger Shakespeare Library; London: Associated University Presses, 1986), 96–7, pp. 111–12.
4. Cynthia Herrup, 'To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon': Gender and Honour in the Castlehaven Story', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6 (1996), 137–59; Faramerz Dabhoiwala, 'The Construction of Honour, Reputation and Status in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6 (1996), 201–13; Elizabeth Foyster, 'Male Honour, Social Control and Wife Beating in Late Stuart England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th series, 6 (1996), 215–23; Laura Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6 (1996), 225–34; Felicity Heal & Clives Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 5, 18–19. For an excellent recent summary see R. Malcolm Smuts, *Culture and Power in England, 1565–1685* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 8–17, which perceptively avoids the dichotomy between medieval honour culture and early modern politeness culture. For a recent critique of James's analysis of the Tudor north see William Palmer, 'Scenes from Provincial Life: History, Honour, and Meaning in the Tudor North', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53 (2000), 425–48.
5. John Guy, 'Introduction: the 1590s: the Second Reign of Elizabeth I', in John Guy, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–19, p. 7.
6. Felicity Heal, 'Reputation and Honour in Court and Country: Lady Elizabeth Russel and Sir Thomas Hoby', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6 (1996), 161–77, p. 176.
7. Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 236–7.
8. John Adamson, 'Introduction: The Making of the Ancien-Régime Court 1500–1700', in John Adamson, ed., *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics and Culture under the Ancien Régime 1500–1750* (London: Seven Dials, 2000), 7–41, pp. 20–1.
9. For recent studies see Francesco Erspamer, *La Biblioteca di don Ferrante. Duello e Onore nella Cultura del Cinquecento* (Roma, 1982); Edward Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta and Factions in Friuli during the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993); Edward Muir, 'The Double Binds of Manly Revenge in Renaissance Italy', in Richard C. Trexler, ed., *Gender Rhetorics. Postures of Dominance and Submission in History, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 113 (1994), 65–82; Donald Weinstein, 'Fighting or Flying? Verbal Duelling in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Italy', in Trevor Dean and K. J. P. Lowe, eds, *Crime*,

- Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 204–20; David Quint, 'Duelling and Civility in Sixteenth Century Italy', *I Tatti Studies*, 7 (1997), 231–78.
10. William Thomas, *The Historie of Italie* (London, 1549), sigs. A2r, A3v–4r. For a short account of Thomas and his debt to Renaissance Italy see Peter S. Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 40–4. Donaldson does not discuss *The Historie of Italie*.
  11. See also Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary* (London, 1617), part III, pp. 25–6.
  12. [Anon.], *The Booke of Honor and Armes* (London, 1590), sig. A3r, see also p. 39.
  13. Dilwyn Knox, 'Disciplina the Monastic and Clerical Origins of European Civility', in John Monfasani and Ronald G. Musto, eds, *Renaissance Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Eugene F. Rice, Jr.* (New York: Ithaca Press, 1991), 107–35; Dilwyn Knox, 'Erasmus's *De civilitate* and the Religious Origins of Civility in Protestant Europe', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 86 (1995), 7–55.
  14. For a general survey of courtesy and civility in early modern England see Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*.
  15. Gabriel Harvey, *Letter-book, AD 1573–1580*, ed. E. J. L. Scott, Camden Society, 2nd series, XXXIII, (London: Nichols and Sons, 1884), pp. 78–9. This letter is normally dated between 1575 and 1580, but the inclusion of Robson's tract narrows the first date to 1578. Robson's tract states that it was printed 'primo Januarij 1577', that is, in 1578. Both Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: the Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 26, and Daniel Javitch, 'The Philosopher of the Court: A French Satire Misunderstood', *Comparative Literature*, 23 (1971), 97–124, pp. 113, 123 and n. 25, seem to take Robson's tract as a piece of 'an avant-garde continental literature' rather than as an English adaptation of it.
  16. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, pp. 107–11, 121–2.
  17. Baldessare Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, ed. Virginia Cox (London: Dent, 1994), p. 119. All references to the *Courtier* are to this edition.
  18. Philibert de Vienne, *The Philosopher of the Court*, trans. George North (London, 1575), pp. 95, 98, 108–10. All references to *The Philosopher of the Court* are to this edition.
  19. Giovanni della Casa, *Galateo of Maister John Della Casa. Or rather, a treatise of the manners and behauiours*, trans. Robert Peterson (London, 1576), pp. 2, 3–4. All references to *Galateo* are to this edition.
  20. Stefano Guazzo, *The Civile Conversation*, trans. George Pettie and Bartholomew Young (London, 1586), fol. 54r. All references to *Civile Conversation* are to this edition. See also Martin Ingram, 'Sexual Manners: the Other Face of Civility in Early Modern England', in Peter Burke, Brian Harrison and Paul Slack, eds, *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 86–109, p. 91.
  21. Cited in Ingram, 'Sexual Manners', p. 93; see also Knox, 'Erasmus' *De civilitate*', pp. 19–28.
  22. John Martin, 'Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: the Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe', *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 1309–1342, esp. pp. 1314, 1333, contains an interesting discussion of this issue.
  23. James VI and I, *Letters of King James VI & I*, ed. G. P. V. Akrigg (Berkeley, 1984), p. 199.
  24. Michael Curtin, 'A Question of Manners: Status and Gender in Etiquette and Courtesy', *Journal of Modern History*, 57 (1985), 395–423.

25. Jacques Revel, 'The Uses of Civility', in Roger Chartier, ed., *A History of Private Life, vol. 3: Passions of the Renaissance* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 167–205, p. 192.
26. Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 119–20.
27. See also Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: the Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 77; David M. Posner, *The Performance of Nobility in Early Modern European Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 17.
28. S[imon] R[obson], *The Courte of Civill Courtesie* (London, 1577), title-page. All references to the *Courte of Civill Courtesie* are to this edition.
29. See Frank Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago University Press, 1994), pp. 54–71.
30. Frank Whigham, 'Interpretation at Court: Courtesy and the Performer-Audience Dialectic', *New Literary History*, 14 (1983), 623–39, pp. 625, 627–8; Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege*.
31. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, p. 110.
32. Della Casa, *Galateo*, pp. 5–7, 20, 22, 57–64.
33. For a wide-ranging discussion of lying and truth-telling in early modern genteel society see Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), chap. 3.
34. Vincetio Saviolo, *Vincetio Saviolo his Practise* (London, 1595), sigs. P2v, P3v. For doubts about Saviolo's authorship see Sergio Rossi, 'Vincetio Saviolo his Practise (1595): A Problem of Authorship', in Edward Chaney and Peter Mack, eds, *England and the Continental Renaissance. Essays in Honour of J. B. Trapp* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1990), pp. 164–75; Sydney Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 100–1. For the importance of eye contact in general see Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, pp. 89–90.
35. Muir, 'The Double Binds', pp. 80–1; Muir, *Ritual*, pp. 121–2, 141–4.
36. Cf. in general F. R. Bryson, *The Point of Honor in Sixteenth-Century Italy: An Aspect of the Life of the Gentleman* (New York: Publications of the Institute of French Studies, Columbia University, 1935), p. 48. Robson gave no advice on how to achieve this. The only possibility seems to have been to reply to an insult with a blow rather than a challenge. It was not possible, Robson stated, simply to return the lie.
37. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York, London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997), 2. 3. 17–21. When Shakespeare parodied Saviolo's treatise in *As You Like It*, he specifically linked it with 'books for good manners', 5. 4. 82. For Saviolo's influence on *Romeo and Juliet* see Sergio Rossi 'Duelling in the Italian Manner: the Case of *Romeo and Juliet*', in Michele Marrapodi et al., eds, *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*, (rev. edn., Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 112–24.
38. *The Autobiography of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury*, ed. Will H. Dircks (London, 1888), p. 52.
39. For more detailed documentation see my *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness and Honour* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), chap. 2, and 'Francis Bacon, the Earl of Northampton, and the Jacobean Anti-Duelling Campaign', *Historical Journal*, 44 (2001), 1–28.
40. Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life* (London, 1606), p. 65. All references to *Discourse of Civill Life* are to this edition.

41. Thomas Churchyard, *Churchyards Challenge* (London, 1593), pp. 59–60. See also e.g. John Norden, *The Mirror of Honor* (London, 1597), pp. 24–5; Thomas Nashe, *Have with you to Saffron-walden, or Gabriell Harveys hunt is up* (London, 1596), in Thomas Nashe, *The Works* vol. III, p. 21; Robert Greene, *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (London, 1592), sigs. B2v, B3v–4r.
42. *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, eds James F. Larkin & Paul L. Hughes (2 vols., Oxford, 1973), vol. I, p. 307; [Henry Howard, the Earl of Northampton], *A publication of his majesties edict, and severe censure against private combats and combatants* (London, 1613), p. 13; Francis Bacon, *The charge of Sir Francis Bacon knight, his Maiesties Attourney generall, touching duells* (London, 1614), p. 10.
43. *Shakespeare's Europe: A Survey of the Condition of Europe, at the End of the Sixteenth Century. Being Unpublished Chapters of Fynes Moryson's Itinerary (1617)*, ed. Charles Hughes (rev. edn., New York, 1967), pp. 415, 408.
44. *Shakespeare's Europe*, pp. 404, 402. See in general, Thomas Churchyard, *A Generall Rehearsall of Warres* (London, [1579]), sig. O4v–P1r.
45. Thomas Palmer, *An essay of the meanes how to make our travailes, into forraine countries, the more profitable and honourable* (London, 1606), pp. 42, 64–5.
46. Palmer, *An essay*, pp. 43–4.
47. Ben Jonson, *The Magnetic Lady*, 3. 4. 127, quoted from *The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. G. A. Wilkes (4 vols., Oxford University Press, 1982).
48. Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, 2. 6. 63–4, 66–8.
49. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 5. 4. 44–7.
50. Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* [1614], in Walter Raleigh, *The Works* (Oxford, 1829), vol. IV, pp. 459–60.
51. Raleigh, *The History of the World*, in *Works*, vol. IV, pp. 459–60, see also p. 465. Raleigh had been reprimanded twice for duelling in 1580, Paul Hammer, "'Absolute and Sovereign Mistress of her Grace"? Queen Elizabeth I and her Favourites, 1581–1592', in J. H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss, eds, *The World of the Favourite* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 38–53, p. 46.