CONTENTS

Introduction

CIVILITY, WE ARE TOLD, is in crisis. In an increasingly polarised world, the ability to live together in civil society with a modicum of cordiality appears to be receding. Common courtesy is in decline, as is the willingness to interact with those outside our own cohort and engage with views that contradict our own. Outrage and anger dominate discourse on social media. In public debate, speakers regularly hurl accusations of incivility in the teeth of those with whom they disagree.[1] Others argue that civility itself is the problem, deeply implicated as it is in the history of Western colonialism and social injustice.[2] Some critics claim that civility is inevitably linked to white supremacy and is an expression of structural racism. Civility, they allege, serves only to perpetuate everyday discrimination. It is a mode of violence, used to mask 'the ugly acts of white supremacy, ableism, misogyny, or compulsory heterosexuality'. Civility, they declare, should be jettisoned. Instead, marginalized groups should be granted the dignity and equality that are their inalienable human rights, inherent in their humanity.[3]

Current debates about civility play out a tension that has been at the heart of the discourse and practice of civility throughout history. Civility, this book argues, is radically ambiguous: it can relate either to social distinction or mutual respect, partisan interests or the wider community. What is often overlooked is that the debate about civility encapsulates what Charles Taylor has defined as the greatest conflict in modernity—the diverging demands of particularity and

1. For a sample of recent work on the crisis of civility, see Boatright et al., *Crisis of Civility?*, and Hudson, *Soul of Civility*. For an incisive discussion that turns to early modern debates to shed light on our current predicament, see Bejan, *Mere Civility*.

2. See, for instance, Simpson, *Engaging Violence*, and King, *Civil Vengeance*.

3. Itagaki, 'Long Con of Civility', 1185. Also see Zamalin, *Against Civility*.

FIGURE 1. The art of *sprezzatura*. Giovanni Battista Moroni, *The Knight in Black* (ca. 1567). Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan.

universality, self-interest and community, or tribalism and the common good. It is a conflict that defines our world today as do few others.[4]

In this connection, why does literature matter? The premise of this book is that the early modern theatre in England played a pivotal role in shaping these debates. The drama of Shakespeare's time offers a prism through which to scrutinize aspects of civility from a variety of perspectives. At the most mundane level, the early modern theatre, a hub of literary and social activity, served as a conduit of civility and purveyed the latest styles and fashions even as it mocked them. But the plays also shed a light on the deep ambivalences within civility by testing the precepts of civility against scenarios that, however fictitious, comment on real life. Crucially, literature reveals the confusion and complexity of human life—and undermines our conviction of moral rectitude. Moreover, in the face of virulent antitheatrical attacks, the drama of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Middleton developed into an extraordinarily self-conscious medium, reflecting on its own status as fiction and on the notion of theatricality itself, in the sense of both performance and pretence. It is an ideal tool to gauge the role social performance and fictions play in human lives.

This book argues that in its exploration of social theatricality, the early modern theatre, in a range of plays from city comedies to tragedies, puts forward a number of remarkable propositions. It indicates that for all the tensions with which civility is fraught, pretence is an inescapable element in social life. As members of civil society, we are always role players. This does not mean that the plays offer a blithe endorsement of rank hypocrisy or a defence of untrammelled opportunism. Instead, they query our hankering after moral purity. Grappling with the vexed issue of dissimulation, lies, and social performance, they question the idea of a clear-cut boundary between sincerity and dissembling, truth and lies. Perhaps, they suggest, what is decisive is the use to which our play-acting is put: rampant self-interest or the common good—the notion that there is a common purpose we share. As a corollary, in a world riven by antagonism, an ironic pretence of mutual respect might be indispensable to facilitate an engagement with other members of society. At the same time, anticipating insights later articulated by Hobbes, the plays intimate that civil

4. See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 101. In the recent past, a number of thinkers have voiced their concern about the rise of solipsistic concepts of identity, amongst others, Sen, *Identity and Violence*; Lilla, *Once and Future Liberal*; and Appiah, *Lies That Bind*. I use the term 'self-interest' broadly to refer to any form of behaviour that serves our own interests, not specifically in the sense of economic advantage.

society is built around narratives, stories we create and that shape our ends. While some of these have a deleterious effect on the social fabric, some beliefs are indispensable to foster our shared stake in social life. The concept of the common good might be a fiction, but it is one that is crucial for human society.

It is undoubtedly the case that throughout history, the rhetoric of civility has been pressed into service by powerful groups to entrench hierarchies and repress dissenting opinions. However, what critics of civility fail to acknowledge is the wider meaning of civility as bound up with a community and a shared notion of the common good, or 'common weal', as early moderns put it. It is assumed that civility is merely a matter of manners or etiquette. What has largely faded from awareness are the conjoined implications of the term 'civility': as relating to good manners as well as to the civil community. As philosopher Cheshire Calhoun has pointed out, at the nub of civility is the idea of mutual respect, according to others precisely the same dignity and inalienable rights as human beings which we claim for ourselves—and on which the critics of civility rightly insist. Manners are only the conventional form we use to express our respect for each other. Civility is a matter of performance, a display of reciprocal esteem. It is a mode of communication which conveys mutual respect precisely in order to enable a dialogue with other members of society, people who are not part of our circle of family and friends and with whom we might have very little in common.[5] Like every form of language, civility is open to abuse: it has been consistently appropriated as a marker of social prestige and wielded as a weapon of exclusion. But norms are not graven in stone; they have been contested throughout history.

The idea that civility is a form of communication would come as no surprise to early moderns, for whom rhetoric manuals frequently double as courtesy books. Civility was the rhetoric of behaviour with which members of society signalled reciprocal esteem through civil courtesies, presented themselves as men and women governed by the virtue of restraint, themselves worthy of esteem, and aimed to create goodwill by accommodating themselves to others. As early modern historians have shown, a concern with civility, often subsumed under terms such as 'honesty' or 'good neighbourhood', was by no

5. Calhoun, 'Virtue of Civility'.

means restricted to the aristocracy and gentry.[6] Admittedly, this is the impression evoked by the genre of courtesy literature, in the business of purveying social distinction as a commodity. It is in the most thoughtful literary texts of the time that we find an engagement with both the ideational as well as the dark side of civility: a way of living together in mutuality grounded in the sense of a shared purpose, or the instrumentalisation of social norms as a means of debarring outsiders.

Needless to say, civility did not originate in early modern Europe, nor even in Europe. Rules of conduct and social norms are to be found in every age and culture, as are codifications of ideal behaviour.[7] The guidelines for social interaction delineated by Confucius in the fifth century BCE have left an indelible mark on East Asian culture, while *Cyropaedia*, one of the earliest examples of the advice genre of 'mirror for princes', compiled by the Greek writer Xenophon around 370 BCE, presents Cyrus the Great, sovereign of Persia in the sixth century BCE, as the model of virtues such as self-restraint and decorum. Asoka, the Buddhist ruler of the Mauryan Empire in the third century BCE, a state that stretched from present-day Afghanistan to South India, formulated a series of precepts of good behaviour that he had inscribed in the vernacular on stone tablets, rocks, and pillars which were erected throughout the length and breadth of the realm, thirty-three of which survive to the present day.[8] The tenets set out in the inscriptions, outlining his notion of *dharma* or duty, in which consideration for others plays a central role, bear a remarkable affinity to the principles formulated by Stoic philosopher Panaetius a century later and transmitted to us by Cicero in his *De officiis* ('On Duties')—a text from which all European conceptions of civility derive.[9]

Equally striking, as Peter Burke notes, is the fact that throughout the ages and in widely divergent cultures, refined manners have been adopted as a

6. See, for instance, Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility*, and Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*. On civility in civic societies, such as trade associations and guilds, and in more informal settings, such as alehouses, see Withington, 171–201.

7. Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility*, 20.

8. See Sen, *Argumentative Indian*, 15–16.

9. The influence of Buddhist ideas on Greek culture is evidenced by the thriving Buddhist community established by Indian merchants in Alexandria in the second century BCE, impelling the governor to lament that 'the Greeks stole their philosophy from the barbarians'. See Zubrzycki, *Shortest History of India*, 52–53. And as William Dalrymple has recently shown, in the first century BCE the greatest trading partner of the Roman Empire was India. See his *Golden Road*, 53–74.

social strategy by elites or by those who aspired to elite status, be it the 'magnanimous man' of Aristotle or the ideal gentleman in Confucius's teachings.[10] Civility has been consistently entangled with elitist privilege. The impulse at stake is pithily summed up in the slogan 'manners makyth man'. This was the adage chosen by William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester and Chancellor of England in the late fourteenth century, to be appended to his coat of arms as well as to serve as the motto for Winchester College and New College, Oxford, both of which he founded.[11] To be sure, at the time 'manners' would have referred to moral comportment rather than to refined forms of behaviour, although the two concepts were closely entwined. The adage reflects the exciting ferment of thought emerging with the birth of humanism in Italy and specifically, the discussion centred on what constituted true nobility. In his *Convivio* (ca. 1304–7), Dante, inspired both by classical ideas and by Boethius, made the claim that it was not birth or wealth that defined an aristocrat. True nobility consisted in virtue. The idea that virtue alone was the title to rule became axiomatic for generations of humanists. Wykeham himself was a self-made man who rose up the echelons of political and ecclesiastical power. Significantly, at a time when most mottos were in Latin or French, Wykeham devised one in English. The maxim neatly sums up the meritocratic impulse that underlies humanist political thought, but also hints at less high-minded ideas—the assumption that cultivated behaviour is the key to social elevation and that being adept at creating a good impression is the most important skill that one acquired through schooling.

While actual social mobility in this period might have been limited in scope, broad swathes of early modern English society seem to have shared the fantasy of climbing the social ladder.[12] This meant that acquiring polished manners as a form of cultural capital was widely regarded as desirable.[13] Social performance, however, implies awareness of an audience: since everyone was performing, everyone was watching everyone else. It is also inevitably shadowed by anxiety, the suspicion that one's presentation was not quite up to the

10. Burke, *Fortunes of the* Courtier, 154–55.

11. In the following I am indebted to Griffith, 'Language and Meaning of the College Motto'.

12. Based on the sale of land, Lawrence Stone identifies an unprecedented surge in economic mobility between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. See his 'Social Mobility in England'.

13. The idea of 'cultural capital', a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu for apparently insignificant details of dress, bearing, and manners that nonetheless confer social prestige, is discussed in his *Distinction*.

scrutiny of one's peers. These undercurrents in social life are investigated by playwrights in a series of scenarios. The metatheatricality with which early modern drama is permeated makes it ideally suited to anatomize social spectatorship, ironically pointing to the startling resonances between a fictional arena in which all characters are busy observing one another and the surveillance—and self-surveillance—that characterise social life. Furthermore, it suggests that a measure of detachment from our roles might be the way to live together amicably.

The remarkable self-consciousness of early modern drama, its propensity to reflect on its own status as fiction, was not only a result of a preoccupation with social performance and spectatorship. The theatre of the time was mired in contentious discussions about the role of illusion and dissimulation. Antitheatrical writers fulminated against the stage as catering to a slew of sins. The illusions it staged served to seduce spectators to indulge in lust and idleness and most perniciously, gratified their vanity and pride, undermining their humility before God. The Aristotelian notion of mimesis encompassed both imitative practice and representations.[14] In the light of a widespread Calvinist suspicion of all products of the human imagination, some plays probe the very nature of fictions. Attacks on the theatre as based on a tissue of lies are a staple of moral discourse, harking back to Plato's disdain for art as merely an imitation of an imitation, a poor reflection of the truth, and, frequently, a distortion of the truth. They appealed to the senses and catered to the lower passions, he argued.[15] Following St Augustine, who for his part was strongly influenced by Plato's critique of images as at a third remove from the truth, many Calvinist reformers insist that fictions serve, at best, merely frivolous ends, pandering to our pride and self-regard instead of providing a conduit towards the divine.[16] Others point to the Bible as a storehouse of literary forms and tropes to be emulated in the quest for the divine.[17] Both schools of thought propagate

14. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b.

15. For Plato's view on art, see especially the *Republic*, books 3 and 10. No doubt the close link between fictions and lies stems from Plato's disapproval of fictions in the *Republic*, which found a new lease of life in the revival of Augustinianism in the Reformation. As scholar F. M. Cornford pointed out in his edition, *The Republic of Plato* (1941), the term Plato favours, *pseudos*, is far wider than the term 'lie' and applies to all works of the imagination. See Dombrowski, 'Plato's "Noble Lie"', 568.

16. On Augustine's debt to Plato, see Smith, 'Staging the Incarnation'.

17. For many of these thoughts I am indebted to Kahn, *Trouble with Literature*.

a cult of sincerity, stressing the Augustinian injunction to turn one's gaze inward to gain access to the truth.

It is undeniable that the discourse of civility is haunted by dissimulation as its dark double. Some plays, however, suggest that sincerity might be a myth.[18] Proposing that the individual good and the common good are tied up with each other, they indicate that in human relations, there might be no escape from performance. They reveal how in different spheres of life, we play a range of often radically contradictory roles.[19] What I show is that in a number of plays, the writers implicitly offer a defence of role-playing in social life as a variety of dissimulation that draws on the Ciceronian definition of irony as a mode of urbane pretence—'being mock-serious in your whole manner of speaking, while thinking something different from what you are saying'.[20] By holding up its own medium to question, the theatre creates a sense of ironic distance to the roles we play and our immutable conviction of certainty. In a world roiled by religious conflict, in which increasingly rigid group loyalties spurred deep hostility to other members of society, the plays suggest that a pretence of respect in mutual awareness of its status as a performative practice might fulfil a valuable function in maintaining a fragile framework of comity.

These ideas are indebted to the early modern revitalization of rhetoric, which vividly highlighted the ambivalence inherent not only in language but in concepts and values. Similarly, despite the miasma of scandal that surrounded Machiavelli's name, his thought circulated widely. Machiavelli had hollowed out the foundation of normative values, insisting that in political life, qualities such as generosity or fidelity to one's word were not inherently virtuous, but contingent on the effect they created.[21] The most reflective

18. Sincerity, Erving Goffman suggested, might simply be the term we use for 'individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance'. See Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 28.

19. Ludwig Wittgenstein would formulate the idea of separate language games that govern our lives in his *Philosophical Investigations*; Erving Goffman elaborated similar ideas using the concept of 'frames' in his *Frame Analysis*.

20. Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 2.269. All further references to cited sources are given in parentheses. Cicero distinguishes between a narrower concept of irony as saying something different from what one means (a concept subsequently expanded upon by Quintilian) and Socratian *dissimulatio* ('dissimulation'), a term he uses to render the Greek *eirôneia*. On irony, see especially Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, and Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Also see chapter 5.

21. On Machiavelli and rhetoric, see Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric*, and most recently Skinner, 'Machiavelli on Misunderstanding Princely Virtue'.

playwrights of the period go further: they explore the notion that dissimulation might in fact bear an ethical charge. Recently philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has made the case for the value of make-believe in our moral and political life. He argues that acting as if others are rational agents while being aware that this is not the case can serve a tactical purpose in civil society and might even motivate our behaviour towards the good.[22] The plays discussed in this book are less sanguine about the effect of pretence in shaping the self. Instead, they posit the use of dissimulation as a means to live together in society.[23] At the same time, they point to the role of fictions in social life.

In civil society, fictions play a crucial part. We impose meaning on the world in the form of belief and values. As Hobbes would point out, civil society itself is an artefact, a fiction in which we jointly acquiesce. The ideal of a common endeavour and the idea that our interests are indissolubly linked to those of our fellow beings are nothing but fictions that we collectively agree to believe in. In its insistence on its own nature as fabrication, the drama of the time hints that many of the beliefs a society claims as immutable truths might be constructions too. Nonetheless, some ideals might serve a vital function in underpinning our communal lives. It is in fictions such as the notion of a shared human bond that civil society is grounded.

The Origins of Renaissance Civility

At the root of European ideas of civility lies the notion of decorum articulated by Cicero in his *De officiis*, a book whose influence remained salient until far into the Age of Enlightenment.[24] In medieval Europe, rules of good behaviour did not, as is generally believed, originate at court, but were first formulated as a guide to regulate communal life in monasteries.[25] The best-known of these works are the fourth-century adaptation of Cicero's *De officiis* by St Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, and the sixth-century *Rule of Saint Benedict*. At the royal courts, courtesy literature as a genre emerged in the twelfth century.[26] The

22. See Appiah, *As If*. Appiah makes it clear that stressing the role of enabling fictions in political and social life does not mean endorsing a Platonic 'noble lie' imposed by the rulers of a given society (*Rep*. 414b–415c). In a just society, beliefs would be grounded in the shared reason of all members of society and would be open to deliberation.

23. See Bybee, *How Civility Works*, to which I am greatly indebted.

24. The text will be discussed in detail in chapter 1.

25. See Knox, '*Disciplina*', and 'Erasmus' *De civilitate*'.

26. See Gillingham, 'From *Civilitas* to Civility', and Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*.

influential treatise *Urbanus Magnus* by Daniel of Beccles is believed to be one of the first courtesy books to appear in England. In the thirteenth century, courtesy texts, often in the form of poems, circulated in Anglo-Norman, the language of the elite; versions in English appeared only in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These writings disseminate the ideals of courtesy that were inculcated into members of the aristocracy. They often centre on rituals in the noble household, above all during communal meals.[27]

The Renaissance concept of civility was decisively shaped by the humanist polymath Erasmus. His little treatise, *De civilitate morum puerilium* ('On good manners for children'), became one of the first bestsellers; it is hard to overstate its print popularity, with twelve editions in 1530 alone, and more than thirty editions in the first six years of its publication. Published by Johann Froben in Basel, its influence was rapidly felt throughout Europe. In 1531 it was translated into High German, in 1537 into French and Czech. Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish translations followed. In 1532, two years after its appearance, a English-Latin version by Robert Whittington was published, entitled *A lytell booke of good maners for children*.[28] Eighty editions, translations, and adaptations appeared in the sixteenth century. Shorn of references to Catholicism, it became a standard pedagogical text in Protestant schools; purged of the name of Erasmus, whose works had been placed on the Index, it was used in Catholic schools throughout Europe. The book spawned a spate of epigones, directed at children or at adults. The dissemination of civility was galvanized by the spread of literacy and the burgeoning print market. A second French translation of Erasmus's text in 1558, published by Robert Grandjon, even introduced a new typeface later known as the *lettre de civilité*.[29]

Many of the precepts set out in *De civilitate*—as in other early modern treatises of civility—are taken verbatim from medieval manuals of courtesy. As John Gillingham points out, 'In essence the ideas in *De Civilitate* were medieval commonplaces'.[30] Nonetheless, Erasmus introduced a radically new dimension in the history of civility. While his ideas on education bear the

27. See Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 68–74.

28. Brian McGregor, 'Introductory Note', in Erasmus, *On Good Manners for Boys*, 272. In the early modern period the term 'manners' referred predominantly either to mores and habitual conduct or to morals, although increasingly the current meaning of polite social behaviour gained prevalence. See *OED*, s.v. 'manner, n.'.

29. Chartier, 'From Texts to Manners', 76–77.

30. Gillingham, 'From *Civilitas* to Civility', 278.

stamp of his broadly rational Christianity, they were also imbued with the legacy of civic humanism, a term, attributed to historian Hans Baron, to describe the revival of classical notions of civic engagement in fifteenth-century Italy.[31] For Erasmus, the minutiae of everyday life are inextricably bound up with the community of citizens at large. Keen to evade the aristocratic connotations of medieval *courtoisie*, he draws on the Ciceronian ideal of a civil society (*societas civilis*), a community which reconciled individual interest with the common good or the well-being of the community as a whole.[32]

It is true that for Cicero, the community of citizens was tantamount to the Roman polity (the *res publica*)—the common good was congruent with the good of Rome. But it was by no means always the case that civil society was aligned with the state and its interests.[33] Long before eighteenth-century philosophers formulated a theory of civil society, Anna Bryson argues, the early modern period, informed by the ideas of civic humanism, saw the emergence of a sense of commonality that undergirded all social relations, a notion that was promulgated in manuals of civility.[34] The broad purview of civil manners they outline is epitomized in the term 'civil conversation', defined by Stefano Guazzo in his *Civile Conversation* (1574) as courteous commerce with 'all sortes of persons of what place, or of what calling soever they are'.[35] Only later would Hegel formulate a definition of civil society as a network of social relations that constituted a realm of social life between the state and the family.[36]

De civilitate is part of Erasmus's larger agenda to inculcate virtue into the elite by means of a rigorous regime of education. In northern Europe, it was Erasmus who spearheaded the movement whose watchword was the notion

31. See Baron, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*.

32. Cicero, *De oratore* 2.68, *De re publica* 1.49. Although in the Renaissance the latter was available only in fragments, Cicero's ideas were well-known from other sources, such as Augustine's *City of God*.

33. For a history of the concept of 'civil society', see Ehrenberg, *Civil Society*. The humanist debate about the 'common weal' or 'commonwealth', a conflicted term that could define the common good as identical with the good either of the polity or of the commonalty, runs through Tudor political discourse about the commonwealth, as exemplified in the divergence between Thomas Starkey's Ciceronian views, articulated in his *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset* (1529–32), and the work of Sir Thomas Smith, notably his *De Republica Anglorum* (1565, pub. 1583). On the concept of the commonwealth, see Early Modern Research Group, 'Commonwealth'.

34. See Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 43–74.

35. Guazzo, *Civile Conversation*, vol. 1, 1.56.

36. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosphie des Rechts*, §§182–256, pp. 142–80.

of true nobility (*vera nobilitas*), the insistence that virtue, not birth, was decisive in defining nobility. Like so many other radical humanist ideas, these views were appropriated with alacrity by the ruling classes, who set out to acquire civil manners as a mode of signalling their virtue. If the humanists failed dramatically in their goal of indoctrinating their noble charges with virtue, their campaign to make education a sine qua non in elite circles was a spectacular success, with the nobility and gentry flocking to universities to hone the skills expected of a gentleman.[37] The belief that virtue was achieved, not innate, became a truism; noble status, like virtue, was not a birthright, but needed to be displayed in one's actions, demeanour, carriage, and gestures.

In Middle English, 'civility' referred to citizenship and civil order, to a body politic, or, alternatively, to secular office. In the course of the sixteenth century, the signification of 'civility' as relating to polite behaviour emerged in a variety of European vernaculars.[38] The earlier term 'courtesy', with its connotations of chivalric courtliness, continued to be in circulation, and throughout the early modern period 'civil' and 'courteous' were used interchangeably, although in the seventeenth century 'civility' became the more frequently used term. Sir Thomas Elyot's Latin-English *Dictionary* of 1538 lists both 'courteysy' and 'civilitie' as synonyms for *civilitas*, as does John Florio for *civilità* in his Italian-English dictionary, *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598). A sixteenth-century courtesy book plays it safe by opting for the title *The Courte of Civill Courtesie* (1577).[39] The word 'politeness' as a synonym for good manners became widely current only in the eighteenth century.[40]

Inevitably, 'civility' was linked to the conduct of a gentleman: one of the earliest English dictionaries, Robert Cawdrey's 1604 *Table Alphabeticall*, defines 'civilitie' as 'honest in conversation, or gentle in behaviour', neatly encapsulating the nexus between civility, honour, and gentility.[41] In the early

37. The seminal work in this field is Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. Also see Brett and Tully, *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*.

38. *OED*, s.v. 'civility, n.'.

39. Elyot, *The Dictionary of Syr Thomas Eliot knyght*, D2v; Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes*, G1v; R[obson], *The Courte of Civill Courtesie*.

40. See Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility*, 2–7, 15–17, and Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*, 186–88. For a discussion of a similar trajectory of the term *civilité* in France, see Chartier, 'From Texts to Manners'.

41. Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabeticall*, C3r. In citing early modern texts, u, v, i, and j have been normalized and contractions have been expanded. The term 'honest' is derived from 'honour'. *OED*, s.v. 'honest, adj. and adv.', 2.a.

modern era, the term also took on the wider connotations of a highly developed culture, as opposed to the backward manner of life of ostensibly more barbarous nations. The word *civilisation* emerged in French only in the 1750s and in English at the end of the seventeenth century, and subsequently replaced 'civility' for a culturally advanced way of living. But an enduring feature of the European discourse of civility was the opposition between what were regarded as cultured societies and barbaric peoples. A legacy of the ancient Greek concept of civility, which was defined in contrast to barbarism, and transposed to the medieval conflict between allegedly civilized Christian nations and a barbarous Islam, this distinction played a crucial role in encounters with non-European nations. In his *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors* (2009), Ian Smith has meticulously traced the root of the notion of barbarism to the Greek exaltation of rhetoric and a culture of debate as the main marker of Hellenic identity. The fifth-century conflict with Persia, he argues, led to the emergence of a vision of Greek civilization as defined against inferior barbarian cultures which lacked the political system and linguistic skills that the Greeks boasted. As Keith Thomas has shown in his magisterial work, *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England* (2018), the putative superiority of Western manners and civilization of European societies was used to justify the colonisation of large parts of the world.

Rhetoric, Theatricality, Print

In this book, the focus is on a different set of oppositions that shapes civility—the divergence between commonality and a shared purpose on the one hand, and unbridled individualism or rigorous partisan interests on the other. Erasmus might have set the course for the early modern concept of civility, but equally influential for the Renaissance culture of manners was Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528). The book is an exquisite portrait of an Arcadian haven of elegance and grace that never quite existed. It is a guidebook for the aspiring courtier, although book 4 veers into the exhortative idiom of a 'mirror for princes'. Written for an aristocracy in crisis, embattled by the expanding power of the centralized nation-state and the innovations in the technology of warfare which increasingly made its military role irrelevant, the text is a survival manual for the elite. Style, not birth, is the critical factor, it suggests; of crucial importance is the notion of *sprezzatura*, the air of nonchalance that Castiglione urges his peers to display in everything they say and do. Casual ease became the byword for the training of a gentleman in the coming centuries, as exemplified

in Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son* (1774). Locke recommends a graceful carriage that should appear to be 'without care and without thought' and stresses that 'the manner of doing is of more consequence than the thing done'.[42] For Chesterfield, noble identity is defined by the possession of an intangible quality, a *je ne sçais quoi*, that effectively barred entrance to those who were considered lacking in this discipline.[43] Together, the *Courtier* and *De civilitate* epitomize the conflict within the concept of early modern civility with which this book is concerned.

Influenced by Cicero and Quintilian, Castiglione formulates a rhetoric of social life. The rise of civility in the early modern period was closely connected to the Renaissance resurgence of rhetoric.[44] The classical commonplace that rhetoric was the impetus behind civilisation was frequently cited by Renaissance theorists.[45] The roots of the humanist revival of rhetoric lie in thirteenth-century epistolary manuals (the *ars dictaminis*), collections of model letters and rhetorical guidelines, which developed into mirrors for princes, dispensing advice about virtuous conduct to rulers and members of the governing class.[46] Ancient rhetoric, like ancient thought, was rooted in the philosophical notion of a cosmos governed by reason and harmony in which human nature participated, invoked by Cicero in his speaker Crassus's remark that 'all the universe above and below us is a unity and is bound together by a single, natural force and harmony' (3.20).[47] It was a vision that was largely shared by all philosophical schools, even if it was most forcefully articulated in Stoic thought. For ancients, there was a correlation between the ideal self and the larger rational order, reflected in an intrinsic link between external features and one's moral character. One's exterior was thought to denote one's personality: a slovenly demeanour and a careless diction and delivery revealed flaws of the mind. As Seneca puts it, 'Style is the garb of thought'.[48] He devotes Epistle 114 to expanding this notion, castigating a degenerate style of speech

42. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, sec. 93.

43. Lord Chesterfield urges his son to acquire 'the pleasing *je ne sçais quoi*, which everybody feels, though nobody can describe'. See his *Letters*, 72.

44. See Peltonen, 'Hypocrisy, Dissimulation, and Education'.

45. See Cicero, *De inventione*, 1.2.2; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 2.16.9.

46. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 1:28–41.

47. Even philosophical schools which rejected this idea, such as Epicureanism, continued to define themselves in relation to it and uphold the value of reason. See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 124–26. Also see Kraye, 'Moral Philosophy'.

48. Seneca, *Ep.* 115.2, in *Epistles 93–124*.

that he identifies in Roman society. The classical premise for regulating one's manners and discourse was to shape one's character to align it with the universal rational order. Not only did comportment disclose one's inner self—discipline of the body was a means of moulding the mind. These ideas were adopted wholesale into Christian thought. In Renaissance Europe, Stephen Greenblatt has famously identified an increased propensity towards self-fashioning with an eye to seizing opportunities for self-advancement in every sphere. Rhetorical handbooks as well as courtesy manuals proffered theatrical advice as to how to stage the performance of a desired self.[49]

Renaissance rhetoricians were as concerned with conversational speech (*sermo*) as with oratory in the pulpit and the law courts. One of the most prolific contributors to Renaissance rhetoric was Erasmus. His textbook *De copia* was the most printed rhetoric written in the Renaissance and ran to 168 editions between 1512 and 1580. His epistolary manual, *De conscribendis epistolis*, appeared in 90 editions between 1521 and 1692. Peter Mack argues that Erasmus inaugurated a fundamentally new approach to educational letter writing, shifting the emphasis from following a set of rules to the relationship between writer and addressee. In a manual dedicated largely to behavioural advice, Erasmus underlines the importance of accommodating oneself to the recipient of the letter.[50]

There are close convergences not only between decorous behaviour and rhetoric, but also between rhetoric and acting. Alongside Cicero's work, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* was regarded as one of the most important classical texts. Quintilian devotes most of book 11 of the *Institutio oratoria* to discussing the means of achieving eloquence in both speech and body language. *Actio* or delivery, he claims, serves all three goals of rhetoric: to persuade, to please, and to move the audience. Even a mediocre speech delivered effectively will carry more weight than an excellent speech unaccompanied by the appropriate tone of voice or gestures. With meticulous care Quintilian takes the reader through all the elements involved in the deportment of the orator: carriage of the head, neck, shoulders, and arms, expression of the face, gestures of the body, and proper stance. He even gives elaborate instructions as to how the orator should wear the toga. How the orator dresses denotes his standing and should always convey distinction. Quintilian draws frequent analogies to stage practitioners, dissecting the acting styles of famous stage players. At moments his text segues

49. See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.

50. Mack, *History of Renaissance Rhetoric*, 76, 90–96, 245–46.

into an acting manual. He observes that in the course of a speech, 'it is quite proper for the fold [of the toga] to slip, apparently accidentally, off the shoulder', calling attention to the management of dress as a factor in enhancing one's performance. At the end of an oration, disordered clothing contributes a touch of veracity to one's display of passion, he asserts, and adds facetiously, 'Personally, I think that dishevelled hair has some emotional impact'.[51]

It is important to remember that rhetorical training in the early modern age was profoundly theatrical. In a landmark study, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom* (2012), Lynn Enterline points out that humanist schoolmasters reshaped Latin teaching to place emphasis on imitation rather than rule learning. This involved mimicking the schoolmaster's facial expressions and gestures as much as his words, and exercises in which students demonstrated their own skill at delivery. School theatricals were regularly performed to offer further opportunities for the practice of declamation. Grammar schools were laboratories in which a humanist education was intended to engrain the norms of gentlemanly conduct, in the same way as Quintilian's programme of education was meant to mould the future generation of the Roman elite. As Enterline writes, 'Acquiring socially sanctioned habits of speech, movement, and affect in such a disciplinary setting means that a scholar learned to adopt the verbal and corporal behavior of others and also learned to monitor his own performance while imitating those examples'.[52] The popular theatre was indebted to the rhetorical culture absorbed by a host of students who went on to become playwrights, although, as she argues, they frequently set out to undermine many of the ideological precepts drilled into them in the classroom.

A decisive factor in the dissemination of both rhetoric and civility was the print market. Ideas on civility are to be found in works as diverse as books of moral philosophy, treatises on nobility, conversation manuals, educational primers, epistolary guides, and books of table talk. Much of courtesy literature was regarded as ephemera and is rarely mentioned in library or auction catalogues, although a few records of the most prestigious works survive.[53] Peter Burke has meticulously put together a list of readers of Castiglione's *Courtier* before 1700, including those who allude to his book without attribution.[54] The account book of William Cavendish, future Earl of Devonshire and employer

51. Quintilian, *Orator's Education*, 11.3.144, 148.
52. Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*, 40.
53. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 264.
54. See Burke, *Fortunes of the* Courtier, 163–78.

of Hobbes as tutor for his son, lists binding costs for Guazzo's *Civile Conversation* and notes the purchase of a copy of the *Courtier*.[55] Courtesy books were of interest to aspirants of the merchant and professional class as much as to noblemen. The early modern period saw a fascination with self-help books of every stripe. If religious writings claimed the lion's share of the print market, conduct manuals, together with histories and romances, were among the most frequently printed genres of secular writing in the sixteenth century.[56] As Markku Peltonen points out, the early modern culture of civility was in part a product of the marketplace of print.[57] Admittedly, market share is not the only way of assessing the influence of these texts. Courtesy texts, like other self-help texts, were appropriated, adapted, excerpted, assimilated, or modified in numerous ways, usually without attribution. Widely known texts such as Giovanni Della Casa's *Galateo* (1558) were appended (unattributed) to other writings, often aimed at a less prestigious sector of the market, as was the case with Walter Darell's *A Short discourse of the life of Servingmen* (1578). Another example is Eustache De Refuge's *Traicté de la cour, ou instruction des courtisans* (1616, translated into English in 1622), part of which appeared anonymously under the title *Arcana Aulica: or Walsingham's Manual of Prudential Maxims for the States-Man And Courtier* in 1652. To market the text the publisher insinuates that it had been penned by the Elizabethan statesman Sir Francis Walsingham, a bid to capitalise on the latter's reputation for political sagacity.

The Historical Matrix of Early Modern Civility

As Norbert Elias has shown in the foundational study of the history of manners, *The Civilizing Process* (1939), the notion of civility acquired a particular urgency in the early modern era. While many of his ideas, written under the influence of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), are no longer in common currency, his important insight that the Renaissance culture of civility evolved in response to the denser web of human relations at court and in metropolitan centres remains invaluable. With the expansion of the nation-state in Europe, the dispersed power bases of feudal nobles were significantly weakened. Power was concentrated at the court of the ruler, where the nobility

55. Willes, *In the Shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral*, 55–56.

56. Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*, 135. On the print market, see Halasz, *Marketplace of Print*, and Farmer and Lesser, 'What Is Print Popularity?'

57. Peltonen, *Duel in Early Modern England*, 5.

converged. The centralized states of Europe arrogated a monopoly of violence to themselves, Elias argues, compelling the aristocracy to find means of coexisting in close social spaces without recourse to direct aggression.[58] The fluctuation of status at court made it expedient to defer to all members of court society. But it was the growth of urbanisation which led to an increase in human interdependence on all levels of society and raised the stakes for civility in social intercourse. Self-restraint and the need to avoid offence to others became of vital importance as a means to manage the tensions between various social groups. Manners lubricated relations between all ranks of society, not merely among peers.

At the same time, an aristocracy in crisis was under pressure to find a new self-definition for its role in society. Suave manners became a mark of gentility and served to demonstrate a gentleman's claim to inclusion in the ruling class. Nobility had to be performed and, in a highly volatile social world, needed to be incessantly reiterated.[59] In contrast to earlier generations of the nobility, a premium was laid on education, of which manners were regarded as a part. Affability and a polished social demeanour were also indispensable resources in social advancement. It became imperative to cultivate the art of pleasing and charm those with leverage to help the courtier gain preferment.

In the wake of the dissolution of monasteries, England experienced an explosion in the number of gentry. There was an unprecedented turnover in the sale of land, an index of the rise in social mobility which lasted until the advent of the Civil War. Other factors contributed to the changes in the social fabric too, including the steep demand for administrators in state service, economic growth for those in commerce, and the wide-scale spread of education, at the level of grammar schools as well as the universities and Inns of Court, leading to a sharp increase in graduates vying for the prestigious positions on offer.[60] The definition of a gentleman expanded to include a wide range of individuals, from students to members of the professions. In addition, the sale of titles under James I, gleefully mocked in the theatre, fuelled the inflation in

58. For a deeply sceptical view of Elias's theory and its legacy, see Carroll, *Enmity and Violence in Early Modern Europe*, who argues that far from defusing aggression, Renaissance civility and its corollary, a heightened quest for status, served only to exacerbate violence among the aristocracy.

59. See Posner, *Performance of Nobility*.

60. There is a rich vein of historical writing on society in early modern England. See, inter alia, Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*; Wrightson, *English Society*; Thomas, *Ends of Life*; and Withington, *Society in Early Modern England*.

membership of the gentry. The mass medium of the theatre catered to a shared dream of rising in status. Whatever the realities of their lives, it is true that in the metropolis, week for week large numbers of spectators flocked to see plays that dramatized the theme of social aspiration from a seemingly inexhaustible variety of angles.

Treatises of the court such as Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* may have been written as an attempt to secure the boundaries of an elite club and exclude interlopers; one of the interlocutors in the dialogue, Federico Fregoso, devises the game of defining the ideal courtier around which the book is structured 'in order to put down the many fools who in their presumption and ineptitude think to gain the name of good courtier'.[61] However, once in print, manuals of manners were accessible to a far broader segment of society than their writers might have envisaged and were avidly consumed by a newly literate public hungry for works of self-improvement.[62] In England, the cachet of Italian culture meant that at least until the end of the sixteenth century, these texts were mainly translations from Italian originals, although later on French texts took precedence.[63] (One early homegrown product, *The Courte of Civill Courtesie*, attempts to palm itself off on the reader as the translation of a text 'written by a Noble and grave personage of Italy', one Bengalassa del Mont. Prisacchi Retta. At least one reader swallowed the bait, as is attested by a letter written by Gabriel Harvey in the mid-1570s.)[64] The profusion of translations of classical writings or contemporary works in Italian and French into the vernacular was the fruit of a deeply nationalist project to enrich the culture and improve the mores of the inhabitants of England.[65] In the prefatory letter to his translation of Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, Sir Thomas Hoby, the diplomat and scholar who belonged to the circle around the Cambridge humanist John Cheke, urges his fellow *literati* to undertake the labour of translation to help uplift the nation so that, as he laments, 'we alone of the worlde maye not bee

61. Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 1.12. In chapter 1 I draw on the acclaimed Singleton translation in preference to Hoby's version.

62. See Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege*.

63. Alistair Fox describes the upsurge in the number of books translated and adapted from the Italian from the 1560s to the 1590s in *The English Renaissance*, 18–37.

64. R[obson], *The Courte of Civill Courtesie*, A2v. Gabriel Harvey lists it among other well-known courtesy books. See Harvey, *Letter-Book of Gabriel Harvey*, 78–79.

65. On the reception of Italian courtesy books in England, see esp. Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England*; Burke, *Fortunes of the* Courtier; Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*; Richards, *Rhetoric and Courtliness*; Shrank, 'Masters of Civility'; and Partridge, '"Absolute Castilio"?'

styll counted barbarous in oure tunge, as in time out of minde we have bene in our maners'.[66] By contrast, George Pettie, who in 1581 is responsible for 'Englishing' *La civil conversatione* (1574) by Stefano Guazzo, defends England as 'the civilest Countrey in the worlde'. In a curiously timeless comment, he blames the bad opinion of the English on the uncouth behaviour of his countrymen abroad. They also slander their homeland, inexplicably reporting that 'our Countrey is barbarous, our maners rude, and our people uncivile'. England, he insists, is as cultured in its manners and lifestyle as every other nation in Europe.[67] Nonetheless, he is keen to make one of the most influential works on civility available to his compatriots.

While men of letters like Sir Thomas Hoby were fired by the ambition to expand the minds of their fellow countrymen and worried about the stigma of barbarism that clung to both the language and manners of the English, John Keper, the probable translator of Annibale Romei's *Discorsi* (1585), a dialogue set at the court of Ferrara that is closely modelled on Castiglione's *Courtier*, was beset by a different anxiety. In his own epistle to the reader, he acknowledges that making privileged knowledge accessible to all might be a double-edged sword. He cites critical voices who argue that it would be detrimental to the social order to have the 'vulgar sort' enlightened of their ignorance: 'high wisedome, and excellent workes, should be concealed from common sight'.[68] There is a price to be paid for providing the great unwashed with access to the savoir-faire of the elite—it paves the way for social upstarts to encroach on the preserve of privilege. Manners, he insinuates, have turned into a commodity that can be procured on the marketplace of print. Enabling spectators to ape the conduct of their betters was also one of the accusations levelled at the public stage by social critics, and no doubt contributed powerfully to the appeal of the theatre, where the lifestyle of the elite was retailed to an audience of status seekers in the form of commercial entertainment. Keper articulates the crux at the heart of civility: the conflict between manners as an exclusionary device, intended to distinguish an elitist in-group from outsiders, and manners as a technique of promoting mutuality and communal life. This issue is linked to the question of whether civil behaviour is meant solely to serve the self-promotion of an individual or that of a clique, or whether it contributes to the notion of a shared purpose in society.

66. *The courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio*, B1r.
67. Pettie's Preface to the Readers, *Civile Conversation*, vol. 1, 10–11.
68. Romei, *The Courtiers Academie*, A3r.

The potent brew of ideas that shaped the early modern theatre was also formative for the Renaissance culture of civility. Cicero's *De officiis*, which dominated both the medieval and the early modern eras, remained a vital source of inspiration for thinkers and statemen: with a nod to Pliny, one courtesy writer notes that Lord Burghley 'to his dying day would always carry it about him, either in his bosom or pocket'.[69] By the end of the sixteenth century, however, in the face of the rise of absolutism throughout Europe, Ciceronianism found itself under attack on a number of fronts. Disillusion with early humanism prepared the ground for the rise of Tacitism, with its dark view of political life as based on mendacity and manipulation. The influence of Tacitean ideas, often in conjunction with Neostoicism, was formative in writings by thinkers such as Lipsius and Bacon, but also left its trace on courtesy writings and on the drama of the era. Dissimulation was advocated as the new face of prudence. Court manuals dispense cynical nuggets of advice as to how to navigate the treacherous swamp of court life, often delivered with a disingenuous gloss of disapproval, as in the adage recycled by Eustache de Refuge about the common court practice to 'put out our legge to make a man fall, thereby to binde and obliege him to us, in succouring and lifting him up'.[70] In the theatre, plays such as *Hamlet* and *Sejanus* depict a world of incessant spying and Machiavellian intrigue.

At the same time, the period experienced a resuscitation of Augustianism, in Calvinist culture but also in Counter-Reformation thought. Augustine's stringent denunciation of lying, influenced by Plato's strictures against falsehood in any form, and his scathing exposure of the self-love with which exemplars of classical virtue were riddled were significant for the emergence of the culture of sincerity and the debate about pretence that was staged in the theatre. The question of civil behaviour was by no means uncontested in religious writings. Nevertheless, most divines in the Elizabethan and Jacobean era, whether Puritan in leaning or staunch supporters of the established Church, accepted the importance of a courteous comportment towards others.[71] In his popular guide to a Christian life, *Of Domesticall Duties*, Puritan William Gouge

69. Peacham, *The Complete Gentleman*, 57, drawing on the Elder Pliny's tribute to *De officiis* as a volume 'worth having in one's hands every day, nay, even learning by heart', in his *Natural History*, 15. I am grateful to Rhodri Lewis for drawing my attention to this reference.

70. Refuge, *A Treatise of the Court*, V1r.

71. This changed with the appearance of the Quakers, who rejected civility on religious grounds. See Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility*, 311–18.

grapples with godly objections to civility which point to the rift between manners and morals. He concedes that there is a kernel of truth in arguments that civil conduct is often only a matter of feigning: 'many that have not a sparke of Gods feare in their hearts, are able to carry themselves in their outward behaviour very orderly and mannerly'. Still, he advocates a form of Christian decorum, since 'it beseemeth Christians to *doe all things decently*', and urges parents to teach their children good manners.[72] While stressing the value of deferential manners towards one's superiors, divines such as William Perkins insist that courtesy reflect sincere feelings: 'Right curtesie is with an honest heart', he claims.[73] And the antitheatricalist William Rankins, while lambasting players, who, like flatterers, 'séeme to be that they are not, and are that they séeme not to be', is careful to distinguish between true civility and flattery. Satan, he maintains, uses the 'visarde of humaine [civil] curtesie' to entice us to plays, but in reality, 'flattery and humaine curtesie be two contraries'.[74] On the other side of the religious spectrum, Church of England minister Nehemiah Rogers, friend of Archbishop Laud, emphatically rejects the common belief among 'men of the world' that religion 'makes men clownish [rustic]'. On the contrary, 'God hath his Ethicks, a doctrine of behaviour, in his word', he declares, 'whereby hee teacheth us how to carry our selves wisely and civilly towards all'. Rogers berates those who refuse to greet others and insists that greetings and common salutations are due even to an unbeliever.[75]

Organisation of the Book

In the study of early modern English literature, civility is usually discussed in connection with courtly writings such as Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. A notable exception is *Shakespeare's Comic Commonwealths* by Camille Wells Slights, which looks at Shakespeare's comedies. However, her interest lies in one pole of civility, social interaction in a community, rather than in Renaissance manners.[76]

72. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 2M1v–2r, emphasis original.

73. *Works of William Perkins*, 2F2r.

74. Rankins, *A Mirrour of Monsters*, D2v–3r, E1v–2r. Like a number of turncoat antitheatrical writers, Rankins was probably a hack writer who tried his hand at writing plays himself. See Hill, '"He Hath Changed His Coppy"'.

75. Rogers, *Christian Curtesie*, E4v–F2r.

76. For an attempt to read *Love's Labour's Lost* in conjunction with Castiglione's *Courtier*, see Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter*, 15–51; for a look at *Much Ado About Nothing* through the lens of the culture of civility, see Ghose, *Much Ado About Nothing*.

In this book I look at drama staged at the public theatre as well as in hall playhouses. The focus is on pre-Caroline drama, where the distinctions between the theatrical sites are less decisive than in the period from the 1630s onwards.[77] The role of the theatre as an agent of civility in the Caroline period is patent at a time when plays bear titles such as Shirley's *Love Tricks, or The School of Complement* or Richard Brome's *The New Academy*, both of which exploit the vogue for academies for manners. This book argues that the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, too, played a decisive part in the culture of civility. A striking difference between sixteenth-century Italian courtesy books and the English tradition is the sharper focus on the gentlemanly ideal of service to the commonwealth and a marked lack of interest in the discourse of love. While Hoby's translation of the *Courtier*, which grew out of an initial rendering of book 3, the section on the Court Lady, at the request of 'a Gentlewoman of the Courte', was advertised on its title page as 'very necessary and profitable for yonge Gentilmen and Gentlewomen abiding in Court, Palaice or Place', most Elizabethan and Jacobean manuals tend to concentrate on the skills required to forge the image of gentleman.[78] By contrast, the important role of women in the culture of civility is represented in Caroline drama, where it coincided with a renewed interest in Neoplatonism in the late Stuart court under the influence of Queen Henrietta Maria. Nonetheless, the civility of women is reflected in a number of the plays discussed in this book. Female wit in particular plays a central role in the theatre.[79]

The approach taken in the book is not chronological but thematic. Each chapter addresses a different aspect of early modern civility. Reading key courtesy texts alongside a selection of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays provides an insight into how prescriptive norms are translated into the stuff of fiction. What the plays reveal is the slippage between ideal and practice—the contradictions and conflicts that emerge when abstract ethical precepts are set against the variety and complexity of human nature.

The first chapter juxtaposes Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* with Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Famous for coining the concept of *sprezzatura* for a performance of nonchalant ease, which became the hallmark of the gentleman in the centuries to come, Castiglione fabricates an ideal society at the

77. See Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 85–94.

78. *The courtyer*, Blr. Hoby was probably commissioned to translate book 3 of the *Courtier* by Elizabeth, Marchioness of Northampton. See Burke, *Fortunes of the* Courtier, 149.

79. See Withington, 'Tumbled into the Dirt'.

court of Urbino, suffused with laughter, civility, and mutual esteem. The Shakespearean version of Urbino is Belmont, an Arcadian enclave peopled by individuals of style and grace. But in Belmont, as at Urbino, the performance of mutual regard is reserved exclusively for a coterie of cultivated people. Both the *Courtier* and *The Merchant of Venice* are deeply preoccupied with the vexed relation between ethics and aesthetics and the role fictions play in shaping our lives. The play strips away its dazzling veneer of civility to show us a set of careless rich people who retreat back into their money and whose notions of the law ignore the larger connotations of justice and the human bond, a cultural fiction that posits that our interests are inevitably bound up with those of other human beings. The play also reveals unpleasant truths about ourselves as spectators and our craving for a world of glamour that elides the sordid reality on which it is built.

Chapter 2 looks at manners and the early modern market. In a society in the throes of a dream of upward mobility, a variety of treatises and courtesy books discuss the question of how to define a gentleman. Gentlemanly identity, it emerges, is not innate but fluctuates in value and requires constant performance. In Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, civility is governed by the logic of the market. The motif of ceaseless scrutiny of others reflects a world of ruthless self-interest in which everyone is in competition with one another for enhanced social prestige. In city comedy, teeming with impostors, tricksters, and witty women, personhood is refashioned at will, catering to audience fantasies of re-creating oneself in the metropolis. A phenomenon that represents the radical ambivalence of civility is the duel. Throughout Europe, the Renaissance cult of civility and a fierce struggle for status fuelled a rage for duelling among the elite. Thomas Middleton's *A Fair Quarrel*, cowritten with William Rowley, turns on the themes of honour and the duel and pits a notion of civility as a relationship of mutuality against civility as an obsessive quest for individual self-advancement.

Two works which comment ironically on the Renaissance culture of civility are Philibert de Vienne's *The Philosopher of the Court* (1547) and Della Casa's *Galateo* (1558). In the third chapter, these texts, together with Stefano Guazzo's *Civile Conversation*, are discussed alongside Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Philibert's satirical view of Castiglione's *Courtier* is in fact a veiled attack on Ciceronian decorum, which is regarded as opening the way for hypocrisy and falsehood, while Della Casa's work is permeated with anxiety about the close link between civility and lying. *Coriolanus* explores the themes of civility, deceit, and role-playing, portraying a self-righteous protagonist who insists on

authentic selfhood and who passionately rejects pretence. The play echoes St Augustine's excoriation of classical ethics as based on a web of lies and his denunciation of classical role models as in thrall to self-delusion. Shakespeare implies that Augustine was right: Coriolanus's dream of radical autonomy is a myth, premised on lying to himself and others. *Coriolanus* does not, however, follow Augustine in advocating an inward turn as a solution to mendacity. On the contrary, it suggests that we are ineluctably social, and that role-playing might be impossible to disentangle from social life. In human interaction, the play intimates, a measure of pretence is inescapable. What is key is the roles we choose to play and the end they serve.

The fourth chapter discusses a number of writings from late sixteenth-century Europe that explore the dark sides of civility: duplicity, mutual surveillance, and sycophancy. A close look at works by political theorists such as Lipsius and Bacon, at a court manual, Lorenzo Ducci's *Ars Aulica*, and at Thomas Wright's treatise *The Passions of the Mind in General* (1604) reveals a widespread concern with concealing one's passions and an intense scrutiny of the self and others for personal gain, or alternatively, for reasons of state. Dramatized in Ben Jonson's tragedy, *Sejanus*, the pervasive culture of spying and paranoia is mirrored in metatheatrical moments in the play. *Sejanus* offers a terrifying vision of a civil society in ruins, in which public discourse is flooded with lies and mutual mistrust flourishes. Influenced not only by Tacitus but also by the anatomy of tyranny in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*, the play dissects the withering of communal bonds and the eradication of debate—which is precisely the climate that facilitates a repressive regime. Fragments of friendship are all the play offers to shore against the ruins.

The final chapter focuses on wit, civility, and the art of jesting. Wit encapsulates many of the paradoxes of civility. On the one hand, humour is an instrument that can be wielded to exclude members of society. On the other hand, it can serve as a social lubricant and forge a sense of communal cohesion. After a brief survey of classical theories of wit, the chapter looks at the discussion of jesting in Renaissance treatises, in particular Pontano's *De sermone* and Castiglione's *Courtier*. While courtesy manuals promote a skill at sharp-witted repartee as a means to garner social cachet and simultaneously advise their readers to rein in their wit, Castiglione devotes a large section of book 2 to bouts of verbal one-upmanship. Evading conflict, he indicates, might not be conducive to civility—agonistic jesting, a channelised mode of aggression, can cement social bonds too. The theatre, meanwhile, was thronged with witty women as well as urbane men-about-town. Jonson's *Epicene* and Shakespeare's

The Merry Wives of Windsor show how wit can be deployed either as a tool of power or to shore up commonality. Concomitantly, both plays send up the culture of civility itself, mocking a raft of social climbers and the passion for duelling in early modern England. *Epicene* dissects the wits too, whose brilliance masks delusions of grandeur, and unsettles our own complacency in the bargain. Both *Epicene* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* explore the relationship between the theatre and social performance, probing the idea of whether dissimulation may at times serve an ethical purpose.

Civility and Its Discontents

Civility is not glamorous. It is not the stirring stuff of ideals, as is, for instance, the fight for social justice. It offers little scope for moral purity, so cherished in the current climate. It is not even included in the standard roll call of moral virtues.[80] Civility is a strategic mode of behaviour that is deployed to specific ends. Like verbal rhetoric, the rhetoric of conduct is an art of persuasion—which implies persuading others of our own worth, a goal which is achieved only by conveying our own esteem for them. Like rhetoric, civility can be used for widely divergent purposes—in the interests of self-aggrandisement and to promote narrow group loyalties or to foster the common good. Once again, the notion of contributing to the 'common good' is not an exalted vision as is evoked, for instance, by the term the 'greater good', which conjures up the (somewhat queasy) idea of sacrifice of individual concerns for the benefit of a majority. The 'common good' merely denotes the well-being of all members of a community. What it points to is the idea that we all have a stake in a society of which we are a part, that there is a common endeavour we share. Put mundanely, it would be captured in the phrase 'we're in this together'.[81] Civility is based on the entirely pragmatic assumption that since we have certain needs in common, individual interests are closely allied to the interests of other people; self-serving motives may well be conducive to the common good, as Hobbes has famously argued. In truth, self-serving motives are always at work; even the striving for ideal selves is inevitably tinged by human vanity, as Hume would later point out. At the core of civility is the notion that we are always

80. Calhoun, 'Virtue of Civility', 251.

81. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'Remarks by the President at a Campaign Event in Roanoke, Virginia' (13 July 2012), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/07/13/remarks-president-campaign-event-roanoke-virginia.

bound up in relations with other members of society—that we exist only in interaction with one another. What civility does not imply is the evasion of conflict, or timorous acquiescence and self-censorship in the face of those who are most vocal in crying offence over every difference of opinion. In social interaction, conflict is a constant. Civility might in fact pave the way for engagement between antagonists by establishing a baseline mutual respect, however feigned.

Written at a time of seismic change, early modern drama was intensely alert to political and social developments of the time. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time when repressive religious and political regimes forced persecuted segments of society to disguise their true beliefs. Labelled as 'the age of dissimulation' by historian Perez Zagorin, it saw a virulent debate about lying, feigning, and pretence.[82] Compelled to justify its own medium, the theatre embarked on an intense interrogation of the practice of make-believe.

As this book argues, some plays moot the idea that there might be a continuum rather than a categorical divide between lying and telling the truth—that, as Hannah Arendt once pointed out, lying, deception, and the ability to imagine a different world and change it accordingly all stem from the same source: the human imagination.[83] Instead of insisting on moral absolutes, it might be more helpful to distinguish between the different contexts in which dissimulation is practised and the effect it achieves. In the case of interaction with other members of civil society, different paradigms apply than in our relations to those with whom we share bonds of intimacy. A look at literature, particularly drama as aware of its artifice as early modern drama, is illuminating in exploring the role of fictions in social life and in reasserting the compelling need for shared fictions, beliefs that we jointly agree to endorse as truths. The crux lies in avoiding the morass of a post-truth belief that truth is entirely subjective while admitting that human truths, like human beings, are always defined in relation to each other.

Manners are the minutiae of everyday life, but as Erving Goffman rather fulsomely puts it, 'The gestures which we sometimes call empty are perhaps in fact the fullest things of all'.[84] This may be overstating the case. Civility is a

82. See Zagorin, *Ways of Lying*. Also see Andrew Hadfield's masterly *Lying in Early Modern English Culture*.

83. Arendt, 'Lying in Politics', 2.

84. Goffman, 'Nature of Deference and Demeanour', 91.

matter not of noble sentiments but of self-regarding acts which can nonetheless contribute to the common good for the simple reason that they acknowledge a shared realm of experience and mutual interdependence. True reciprocal esteem in the Rawlsian sense might be deeply desirable. But in real life, entire parts of society harbour nothing but disdain, if not revulsion, towards other members of the same community. In its incessant self-awareness, the early modern theatre trains a spotlight on our own inexorable sense of moral certitude and suggests it is based on delusion. It puts forward the idea that dissimulation in the sphere of social life might serve a useful purpose if it promotes debate and a modicum of trust. What the plays intimate is that in the final analysis, the question of how to distinguish the pretence of respect for others from sincere feelings is entirely irrelevant. As they suggest, we are defined by what we do rather than who we are.

INDEX

Page numbers in *italics* refer to illustrations.