

RHETORIC AND
COURTLINESS IN EARLY
MODERN LITERATURE

JENNIFER RICHARDS

University of Newcastle upon Tyne



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Jennifer Richards 2003

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Adobe Garamond 11/12.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 82470 2 hardback

Contents

| | |
|--|---------|
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | page vi |
| Introduction | I |
| 1. Types of honesty: civil and domestical conversation | 20 |
| 2. From rhetoric to conversation: reading for Cicero in <i>The Book of the Courtier</i> | 43 |
| 3. Honest rivalries: Tudor humanism and linguistic and social reform | 65 |
| 4. Honest speakers: sociable commerce and civil conversation | 87 |
| 5. A commonwealth of letters: Harvey and Spenser in dialogue | 113 |
| 6. A new poet, a new social economy: homosociality in <i>The Shepheardes Calender</i> | 139 |
| Conclusion | 168 |
| Notes | 171 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 195 |
| <i>Index</i> | 208 |

Types of honesty: civil and domestical conversation

Advice on conduct had been given for centuries. ‘Social prescriptions concerning cleanliness, sobriety of dress and demeanour, ritual at table, and respectful conduct to superiors’, writes Anna Bryson, ‘were written into monastic Rules’ from the twelfth century. More detailed lists, she adds, survive in vernacular treatises in England from at least the fifteenth century.¹ Treatises such as *Urbanitatis* (c. 1460) advise their readers to keep themselves ‘Fro spettyng & sneyng’ and to ‘Be privy of voydance’ (or discreet when farting).² Much of this advice found its way into sixteenth-century Italian treatises, for example, Giovanni della Casa’s *Galateo*. Some sixteenth-century English books of manners are clearly modelled on medieval conduct books, suggesting, as Bryson argues, that there was ‘no sharp chronological break’.³ Thus, Hugh Rhodes, a Gentleman of the Chapel under Edward VI – and a ‘regular sobersides’ according to his Victorian editor – is the author of the compilation *The Boke of Nurture, or Schoole of Good Maners: for Men, Servants, and Children, with Stans puer ad mensam*.⁴ Its first text is reminiscent of John Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* (c. 1450); it also expands the popular *Stans puer ad mensam*, attributed to John Lydgate. Rhodes’s treatise is of uncertain date; it was probably written as early as 1530, and it was reprinted several times, including in 1577. In it, Rhodes predictably reminds the reader not to scratch his head at the table, not to spit across the table and to ‘Belche thou neare to no mans face / with a corrupt fumositye’.⁵

Even so, Rhodes’s treatise is uncharacteristic of sixteenth-century conduct books. It is distinctly ‘medieval’ in conception; it offers young pages advice on the table manners and rituals of dining in the great hall. Sixteenth-century conduct books, in contrast, ‘tend to be more varied, more ambitious, and more discursive’.⁶ They describe the conduct proper to a variety of situations and interlocutors. More importantly, several of the influential texts were written in dialogue form, thereby signalling a new preoccupation with polite conversation. The page boy is advised in *Stans puer ad mensam*

to 'kepe honestly silence'.⁷ In the *Boke of Nurture* Rhodes also advises him to be circumspect in speaking, and always to recognise his lord's precedence:

Talke not to thy soveraygne deare
no tyme when he doth drinke;
When he speaketh, give audyence,
and from him doe not shrynke . . .

To prate in thy maysters presence,
it is no humanitye;
But to speake when he talketh to thee
is good curtesye.⁸

Stefano Guazzo's *Civile Conversation* could not be more different. This treatise signals a shift in emphasis from the honest silence of the page in the company of his lord in the great hall, to the chatty conviviality of friends in a more private and intimate space.⁹ Indeed, Guazzo is very specific about the location of his 'civil conversation'; it takes place in a 'little closet' in his house (I. 15).

Social historians have drawn our attention to the changing uses of space in the country houses of the gentry in this period as attitudes to public entertainment shifted. Felicity Heal, for example, discovers in noble households of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a gradual 'growth of individual chambers' which 'witness an impulse towards privacy'.¹⁰ This impulse would be gradually realised in the sixteenth century. Thus, Alice T. Friedman describes as typical of Tudor aristocratic house-planning an 'increase in the size and number of spaces (rooms, terraces, gardens) provided for socialising and polite entertainment', the gradual isolation of the manor house from the village community and the provision for 'diversification of private spaces and service areas – including private studies, muniment rooms, and storage rooms'. Many of these architectural changes, she suggests, were prompted by 'improvements in business technique'. Thus, small rooms became repositories for the documents needed for 'increased control of both property and tenants'.¹¹ This archival function is true also of that one room which has attracted critical interest in recent years, the 'closet', a space set aside for private devotion and study. The closet has much to tell us about attitudes to privacy in the sixteenth century. As Alan Stewart argues, the closet is not only a place for the solitary reader; it is also 'a secret non-public transactive space between two men behind a locked door', a space, that is, where companions might engage in the open secret of plotting their careers or making business plans. John Dee mapped the north-west passage with companions in his closet. Sir William More's closet at Losely

Hall was also used for business. Its contents include classical treatises, recent poets, chronicles, books of geometry, almanacs, dictionaries, books of proverbs and prognostications. These are 'working papers', argues Stewart, 'a resource of useful reference information with which to cross-reference and to plan'.¹²

Guazzo's 'little closet' is a meeting place for two friends and, in this sense, it confirms Stewart's description of the room as a 'nonpublic transactive space'. Yet, if we are to understand what is going on in Guazzo's imaginary closet we will need to adapt Stewart's model. Like the actual closets which Stewart describes, this fictive space contains 'a few small bookes'; however, as Guazzo explains, they are 'rather for a shewe then for studie' (1. 15). Later, in book I, the leading speaker Anniball notices that the closet is decorated with 'diverse pleasant pictures' which 'doth mervellously recreate our mindes, and ministreth occasion of witty talke' (1. 55). These details suggest a different use of this space. Guazzo's closet is not a place for secret negotiations, but a transitional space in which a negotiation between solitary and public selves takes place. It is also a space in which classical learning is practised rather than discussed. That is, this closet is a place for 'witty talke' or conversation after the fashion suggested in Cicero's *De officiis*, an activity which is represented by Guazzo as a remedy for the ills of solitary study.

Civile Conversation opens with Guazzo telling us how he discovered that his brother William 'was become so weake, leane, and falne away, by the harde handling of a very long quartane Ague' (1. 14). William is visited by a neighbour, the physician Anniball, who discovers that the young man is suffering from an excess of scholarly seclusion. He has cut himself off from the world, partly from a distaste for company, but partly, too, because he aspires to the 'name of a simple scholler, [rather] then of an ignorant Courtier' (1. 38). This is because William believes that scholars 'are favoured and honoured amongst other learned men, who take for plainnesse of manners and gentlenesse of minde, that which the common sorte calleth foolishnesse' (1. 37). In the course of their conversation Anniball enables William to experience how (as Cicero also argues), 'man, being a compagnable creature, loveth naturally the conversation of other men', and he persuades him of the need for the skills of an 'ignorant Courtier' (1. 20).¹³ In its final book, William is deemed skilled enough to proceed into a larger group, and Anniball describes the conduct proper to a banquet. This treatise could not be further from Rhodes's *The Boke of Nurture*. The public behaviour of William is determined in an intimate friendship with another man, a relationship which is built on – and maintained by – conversation.

Guazzo clearly attributes to conversation the power of self-transformation. Not only do we watch William becoming sociable (and more tolerant) as he converses with Anniball, but in the course of this dialogue, conventional ideas about social interaction are tested and modified.

One idea which is examined closely is the virtue of 'honesty', a virtue which serves as a glue to all social relationships. In the course of his conversation with Anniball, William will learn to appreciate the greater honesty of the dissimulative courtier rather than the anti-social simplicity of the 'scholler'. For the scholar only maintains his simple lifestyle by removing himself from the rough and tumble of daily social interaction, whereas the courtier attempts to balance honestly – or decorously – personal aspirations with social duty. In this chapter I want to explore how the character Anniball makes William honest and sociable in *Civile Conversation*, and also how, in the attempt, the concept of 'honesty' is defined in such a way as to make plain the potential of others. I will also explore, however, how seemingly honest conversation can equally disguise the power dynamic of intimate relationships, especially between a husband and wife. 'Honesty' remains the crucial term here: how we define it will affect profoundly the way in which we imagine people should relate to one another.

Conversation is a difficult speech form to analyse. Until recently, linguists have tended to focus on the isolated 'speech act' rather than the notoriously unruly, interactive process of conversing.¹⁴ For early modern critics, however, there is another problem: how do you analyse a speech act which does not survive in textual form? Or, as Peter Burke argues in *The Art of Conversation*: how do you reconstruct 'speech from writing'?¹⁵ One way around this problem is to apply to literary dialogues or letters models developed by recent conversation analysts. Burke explores the correspondence between the advice on conversation in the courtesy books and the theory of conversation developed by the philosopher H. P. Grice.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in her fascinating study of *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue* Lynne Magnusson applies the universal rules of politeness developed by the linguist Stephen Levinson and the anthropologist Penelope Brown from their analysis of modern English, Tamil and Tzeltal to early modern familiar letters.¹⁷

However, there are problems with this approach, as Burke recognises.¹⁸ First, the desire to develop rules for conversation shifts attention away from this speech-form's resistance to rule-making. Cicero, the main source for early modern reflections on the art of conversation, is very cautious about providing rules. As we will see in chapter 2, his rhetorical manual *De oratore*

explores the relationship between the arts of conversation and oratory, and yet no exposition of conversation is offered. We understand it only in the experience of the form of the text itself. The later *De officiis* offers nine rules, and these are worth quoting in full because they will provide our most formal guide to the speech form:

Conversation, then, in which the Socratics are the best models, should have these qualities. (1) It should be easy and not in the least dogmatic; (2) it should have the spice of wit. (3) And the one who engages in conversation should not debar others from participating in it, as if he were entering upon a private monopoly; but, as in other things, so in a general conversation he should think it not unfair for each to have his turn. (4) He should observe, first and foremost, what the subject of conversation is. If it is grave, he should treat it with seriousness; if humorous, with wit. (5) And above all, he should be on the watch that his conversation shall not betray some defect in his character . . . The subjects of conversation are usually affairs of the home or politics or the practice of the professions and learning. (6) Accordingly, if the talk begins to drift off to other channels, pains should be taken to bring it back again to the matter in hand – but with due consideration for the company present; for we are not all interested in the same things at all times or in the same degree. (7) We must observe, too, how far the conversation is agreeable and, as it had a reason for beginning, so there must be a point at which to close it tactfully.

(8) But as we have a most excellent rule for every phase of life, to avoid exhibitions of passion, that is, mental excitement that is excessive and uncontrolled by reason; so our conversation ought to be free from such emotions: let there be no exhibition of anger or inordinate desire, of indolence or indifference, or anything of the kind. (9) We must also take the greatest care to show courtesy and consideration toward those with whom we converse. (I. 134–36)

Cicero offers this curtailed advice in compensation for the scarcity of manuals dealing with conversation. There are ‘none who make conversation a subject of study’, he complains, ‘whereas pupils throng about the rhetoricians everywhere. And yet the same rules that we have for words and sentences in rhetoric will apply also to conversation’ (I. 132). Although Cicero claims not to know why this is the case, several of the rules he isolates do offer some kind of explanation. The emphasis is on the need to be tactful, to be easy and familiar, to accommodate oneself to others, and to avoid being prescriptive. Conversation requires the exercise of a decorum which is not readily explained.

Secondly, recent models make it more difficult for us to understand what was perceived to be the social use of conversation in the late sixteenth century. Brown and Levinson enable Magnusson to expose the complex interplay between ‘positionality’ and style in early modern letters and to

demonstrate what we have long suspected, that ‘discourse inscribes power relations’.¹⁹ However, they do not help us to understand the attempt to reconceive ‘society’ which underpins interest in conversation in the period or, indeed, how the emphasis on familiarity in early modern conversation theory is used to challenge the confident assertion of social difference. Linguistic gestures of self-deprecation on Brown and Levinson’s model function as examples of ‘negative politeness’ in the style of the ‘cringing’ servility often attributed by Westerners to “‘oriental” politeness’.²⁰ Negative politeness typically includes speech acts which seek to please the hearer (‘May it please you’), verbs of ‘weak force’ (‘beseech’, ‘pray’, ‘entreat’), indirection and self-deprecation, and it seeks to reproduce ‘existing hierarchical arrangements’.²¹ In literary representations of conversation, though, gestures which might appear ‘negative’ and distancing can create a leveling familiarity. What is important about the self-deprecating gesture of pretending ignorance in the courtesy books is that it is often employed ‘ideally’ by a senior interlocutor who understands the limits of his social authority and who wants to bring out the potential of a junior companion. When it is used by a junior interlocutor (for example, by a courtier to his prince as we will see in chapter 2) it is imagined to offer an affective means of tempering a potentially tyrannical companion.

In the sixteenth century the dialogue form might follow one of several models: Socratic, Ciceronian or Lucianic. The two forms which influence the writing of the courtesy books, the Socratic (or Platonic) and Ciceronian, are documentary; they depict real people in real settings. As Virginia Cox explains, in the Socratic dialogue the speakers are ‘midwives’ to the truth, whereas the Ciceronian dialogue is concerned with ‘the individual, the concrete, the historically verifiable’.²² The Socratic dialogues – as recorded by Plato – usually involve a process of cross-examination to refute the argument of an opponent by drawing out its contradictions. The method is described brilliantly by Mary Margaret McCabe:

Socrates insistently questions his interlocutors about what they are doing and why. He asks because he wants to know and because he claims to be ignorant himself. Ironically he commends his interlocutor’s expertise and then, by careful analysis, shows his interlocutors to be in an even worse cognitive case. For when the interlocutor defines some ethical notion Socrates elicits from him a whole collection of sincere beliefs and assumptions, and then shows that those beliefs are inconsistent with the proposed definition. This, famously, results in dismay, irritation, even apoplectic horror on the part of the interlocutor.

You may see why they gave Socrates hemlock. His methods are not only maddening for his victims; they also seem pretty destructive.²³

By contrast, the Ciceronian form involves discussion between equals and, as several critics note, it feels much more like a conversation than the Socratic dialogue.²⁴

Plato's dialogues are conversational. As McCabe argues, they proceed 'by question and answer, person to person, live and face to face'. However, they are also confrontational; Socrates aims to unravel, even to destroy, the beliefs of an opponent.²⁵ This is in contrast to the relaxed style of Ciceronian conversation. In this form speakers tend to recognise that an opponent has something useful to say. One way of illustrating the difference between the two styles is to consider the way in which Cicero's speakers use Socratic irony, the 'pretended ignorance' named in *De oratore* as *dissimulatio* and employed by Antonius, one of two leading speakers in this dialogue about the ideal orator. As we will see in chapter 2, Antonius does not feign ignorance in a round-about attempt to destroy the beliefs of his audience. Rather, this rhetorical gesture prompts his auditors to recognise a truism of which Cicero is sure they are already vaguely aware: that an orator must practise his skills, and that there is no better form of practice than by engaging in everyday talk or conversation, just as Antonius is doing at that very moment.

Cicero's preoccupation with conversation surfaces again in *De officiis*, his late philosophical treatise which explores the relationship between the apparently antithetical concepts of moral goodness (*honestas*) and profit (*utilitas*); his argument is that nothing is profitable or expedient that is not also honest. 'Honestas' has four categories or virtues: wisdom, justice, fortitude and decorum or propriety (which includes temperance) (1. 93).²⁶ It is closely related to decorum: 'what is proper is morally right', Cicero explains, 'and what is morally right is proper' (1. 94).²⁷ This relationship, though, is hard to grasp partly because Cicero's idea of decorum proves rather slippery. By way of explanation Cicero argues that poets observe decorum 'when every word or action is in accord with each individual character'; he then explains that the philosopher is concerned with what is decorous or proper for humanity. '[T]o us', he explains, 'Nature has assigned the rôles of steadfastness, temperance, self-control, and considerateness of others; Nature also teaches us not to be careless in our behaviour towards our fellow men' (1. 97–8). On this definition, decorum includes a show of 'reverence' to others, 'considerateness', self-control of the passions *and* attention to one's dress and deportment (1. 99, 102, 126–7). It also includes conversation.

Conversation is discussed under this fourth category. There is a clear correspondence between Cicero's description of decorum and the practice

of conversation described at 1. 34–6; several rules (especially 1, 4, 7, and 9) correspond to his conception of decorum as pleasing behaviour. For him – and, as we will see, the courtesy authors who follow his example – conversation is honest when it conforms to these rules. But it is also honest *and* profitable in a broader sense because it enables a ‘man’ to fulfil the role ‘he’ has been assigned by ‘Nature’: to be sociable. It is not difficult to recognise how the polite refusal to teach an auditor how to speak is ‘honest’ or morally right because it creates the conditions for conversation. That is, such a gesture invites an auditor to become a speaker; once engaged in conversation ‘he’ can realise his capacity to be social (a capacity that remains buried while ‘he’ remains in the role of auditor).

This discussion may seem academic to us because Cicero’s idea of ‘honestas’ or moral goodness does not fit with our own notion of honesty. How readily would we define ‘honestie’ with the Tudor scholar Thomas Wilson as ‘to set furthe the body with handsome apparell’?²⁸ Any standard modern English dictionary will explain the term ‘honest’ as ‘sincere, truthful, candid’, not lying or stealing, and trustworthy. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this is a meaning it has carried since at least the fifteenth century.²⁹ Recent social historians have emphasised the importance of this sense of honesty to the creation of successful social relationships. In *A Social History of Truth* (1994) Steven Shapin explains how a ‘world-known-in-common is built up through acts of trust, and its properties are decided through the civil conversations of trusting individuals’. Civility and good manners, he explains, rest on the assumption that our conversation is ‘reliably oriented towards and about the realities upon which we report’.³⁰

However, it is easy to forget, as William Empson so painstakingly demonstrated in *The Structure of Complex Words* half a century ago, that ‘honest’ is also one of the most muddled of words. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records a variety of early meanings from ‘Held in honour’ (1a) to ‘a vague epithet of appreciation or praise, especially as used in a patronising way to an inferior’ (1c). As Empson reminds us, its meaning of ‘telling the truth’, which acquired prominence in the sixteenth century, co-existed alongside a quite different, slang meaning, ‘hearty’.³¹ Its meaning was yet further complicated in the sixteenth century by attempts to translate and understand Cicero’s ‘honestas’. In 1538 Thomas Elyot’s Latin-English dictionary explained Latin ‘honestas’ with a single word, ‘honestie’. By 1565, however, Thomas Cooper distinguishes between the noun and adjective (honestus); the latter he translates in various ways, including ‘of good reputation’, ‘good’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘comely’. He also offers almost two columns of Latin examples, some of which are drawn from *De officiis*.³² Cooper’s translation

of 'honestus' as 'comely' (the Elizabethan term for decorous) is consonant with Cicero's definition. However, it would take a number of courtesy books to explore the fullness of its meaning. What these books make apparent is that it is sometimes also 'honest' *not* to tell the truth in order to sustain mutual trust between interlocutors; they do so by exploring 'honesty' in its aspect as decorum – the concept which Cicero understood in *De officiis* was in some sense unteachable. This is why the form of the conversational courtesy books matters. This meaning of 'honesty' as decorous self-restraint and accommodation only emerges *in* conversation. Treatises which discuss the term straightforwardly lose its association with 'decorum'; this association is also lost to those critics who approach the dialogic courtesy books as straightforward didactic treatises rather than as literary texts. In such readings we arrive too quickly at the modern definition of 'honesty' as truth-telling or straight-talking, and so overlook a discourse which was alert to the process of negotiation.

Attending to the way in which the meaning of 'honesty' is produced in conversation will also make apparent how the process of negotiation envisaged accepts that the expression of disagreement or dissenting views is civil rather than uncivil. That is, the style of argument of treatises like the *Courtier*, and (to a lesser degree) *Civile Conversation*, offers a model of interaction predicated on the honest rivalry described by Cicero in *De amicitia*, a treatise written in the same year as *De officiis* (44 BC). *De amicitia* contributed many commonplaces to the debate about male friendship in the sixteenth century, several of which we will meet later in this book; these include the argument that 'friendship cannot exist except among good men' (5. 18) and that friendship 'springs rather from nature than from need' (8. 27).³³ *De amicitia* also introduced the idea that true friends 'vie' with each other 'in a rivalry of virtue [honesta certatio]' (9. 32). Cicero supposes that friendship exists between men of the same degree, but the argument of *De amicitia* recognises its existence between men at different stages in their life and education. What is important about this idea in the sixteenth century is that it provides a clear counter-argument to that of *Stans puer ad mensam* which advises only that the page boy 'kepe honestly silence' and speaks circumspectly in his lord's presence. As we will see in chapter 3, in the context of the English debates about 'honesty' from the 1540s, this idea of virtuous or honest rivalry provides a model of interaction between individuals of different estates.

In the following section I will explore what Guazzo means when he describes civil conversation as 'an honest commendable and vertuous kinde of living in the world' in *Civile Conversation* (i. 56), and also how he

explores the difficult concept of decorum. That is, I want to show how the meaning of honesty as decorous self-restraint emerges gradually in the course of the conversation, enabling William to abandon his attachment to the unsociable and unchallenged authority of the 'simple' scholar. I also want to show how William's conversation with Anniball exemplifies an honest rivalry between friends. Anniball's self-restraint, represented in his refusal to teach William, draws his younger friend into conversation, and thus enables him to realise his 'honesty' or virtue; in effect, William is being encouraged to be more tolerant within a wider social mix. It is important, though, that we also recognise the gendering of honesty in Guazzo's treatise. The honesty of Rhodes's page survives as proper conduct for wives: silence, obedience and chastity. In the final section of this chapter, I will explore a source for this type of honesty, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. I will also consider the overlap between these distinct definitions so as to understand the way in which Guazzo's aspirations for conversation between closeted men is compromised by the conversations which take place in the larger domestic sphere of the household.

CIVIL CONVERSATION

There are many kinds of dialogue in the sixteenth century and, obviously, not all of them are civil conversations. In this book the term 'civil conversation' describes texts written as dialogues which engage with some aspect of Cicero's theory and practice of conversation.³⁴ Of the several courtesy books only Castiglione's the *Courtier* is strictly in imitation of Cicero's dialogue style. Guazzo's *Civile Conversation* is more typical in adopting the Socratic form. It involves only two disputants: a leading interlocutor Anniball Magnocavalli, and a straw man, Guazzo's younger brother, William. However, *Civile Conversation* disseminates Cicero's idea of conversation explicitly – Anniball both quotes from and paraphrases passages from *De officiis* – and implicitly, by exploring a conversation in action.

Not all books interested in civil conversation are written as dialogues. For example, Richard Pritchard's *The schoole of honest and vertuous lyfe* (1579) provides 'pettie Scholars' (boys at the 'petty' or junior grammar school) with a summary of book I of *De officiis*, and a straightforward list of precepts for conversation. 'If a man be spurred to speake', Pritchard tells his pupils, 'let him have speche of thinges fit for the place, time and company'. The speaker is to 'interrupt none in their talke, nor correct it', and he is 'to kepe that which is a meane and measurable order in our talke'. In the chapter entitled 'Observations in mutuall talke or communication', four further

rules are given: 'Carpe not', 'Bee not an oppen accuser of the common people, or coyner of lyes', 'Search not after the secreates of other men', and give 'salutation fittinge' to a superior. Pritchard adds advice suitable to the socially awkward young male audience his book addresses:

frame the state of thy body, that you stand upright, not reeling this way nor that way, not ytching, nor rubbingge, nor favouringe on legge, more one than another, not bytinge or smacking thy lippes, not scratching thy head, nor pickinge thy eares, not lowringe thy lookes, nor glauncinge thine eyes too and fro, not sad nor fierce, but meeke and merry, showinge good disposition and nature, to bee habitant and graciously grafted in thee.³⁵

Treatises aimed at adult aristocratic readers follow much the same format. Book 5 of *Institution of a Noble Man* (1607) by the Scot James Cleland offers advice on 'Civil Conversation', much of which is already familiar to us: 'take diligently heede not to make your selves slaves or subject unto any certaine particulare humors'; it 'is great wisdom for a man to accommodate himselfe and to frame his manners apt and meete for al honest companie'; 'Salutation is the first point of curtesie in our private conversation'.³⁶ Cleland's text does experiment with form. Some chapters are arranged in parallel columns so that the reader may (with some difficulty) contrast opposites, 'virtue' and 'vice' (pp. 164–6) and 'friend' and 'flatterer' (pp. 193–6). But it does not attempt to show us how a civil conversation might work, with the result that the critical potential of this speech form is unexplored.

Civile Conversation is quite different, for it allows the rules of conversation to emerge from its representation of the speech form. In this treatise, meaning is produced *in* conversation so, for example, familiar concepts like 'honesty' gradually take on a different resonance as the dialogue progresses. Once Anniball has persuaded William that conversation is beneficial, it falls to him to explain the manner it should take. William worries that there are too many kinds of conversation to study, whereupon Anniball reassuringly explains that he intends to 'set a part al other sorts, and propose for this purpose the civile conversation'. When William then asks 'What meane you by that woord, Civile?' we fall upon our only definition of civil conversation. Anniball explains that the term 'Civile' applies to those who live in the country as well towns:

so I will that civile conversation appertaine not onely to men inhabiting cities, but to all sortes of persons of what place, or of what calling soever they be.

Too bee shorte, my meaning is, that civile conversation is an honest commendable and vertuous kinde of living in the world. (I. 56)

This definition, however, is too general to be really useful. Part of the problem lies with the word 'honest'. We may think that we know what

Anniball means. Indeed, later in book 1 he will define an ‘honest man’ as someone who ‘plainly telleth the trueth’ (1. 96). No surprises here. But no definition is ever as straightforward as it seems in this meandering text. A moment later Anniball admits that ‘I denie not, but that it is commendable to coyne a lye at some time, and in some place, so that it tende to some honest ende’ (1. 97). And we will find that his account of civil conversation is full of such honest lies, for example, when he advises ‘that wee ought not to interrupt him which speaketh, but rather with a certaine modestie to take sometime that which he saieth, for newes, though everie one knewe it before’ (2. 150–1). Indeed, Anniball also uses the word ‘honest’ in more than one sense. In the example below, where he is explaining to William how he behaved when placed in the company of unfamiliar people from whom he could not withdraw for fear of being accused of ‘too muche gravitie, or too litle courtesie’, ‘honesty’ is equivalent to humouring others.

And though at the first I was in my dumps, yet afterwarde I went away well pleased and joyful: seeing that I had so well framed my selfe to the humours of others, and that I had got my selfe honestly away being verie well thought of by the companie when I was gone. (1. 22)

That is, Guazzo is adapting Cicero’s idea of ‘honestas’. For Anniball, a man is honest when he humours his companions. By the same token, ‘civile conversation is an honest commendable and vertuous kinde of living’ because it requires a man to ‘submit’ himself ‘to the common opinion of al men’ (2. 115), and to refrain from mocking others less fortunate than himself (2. 160). ‘Honesty’ also encompasses the governing trope of civil conversation, the feigned ignorance (*sprezzatura*) which Anniball employs to draw William into a conversation. This pretence is honest because it prompts William to be ‘true’ to himself, realising his talent for sociability. Thus, when Anniball explains that he ‘make[s] account to speake to persons of weake capacitie’, endeavouring in conversation ‘to present them with such things as are not out of their reach’, William modestly imagines himself included and his self-deprecating response reveals his capacity to engage in civil conversation: ‘Your discourses shall so much the better content mee’, he offers, ‘by how much the more they shalbe familiar, and suche as are meete for the weakenesse of my understanding’ (2. 116).

Anniball pretends ignorance because he is teaching William something he already knows. Despite his ostentatious hostility to the dissembling tactics of the ‘ignorant Courtier’, William unknowingly deploys the same rhetorical gesture at the beginning of the dialogue. ‘Thinke not, I beseech you, that I enter into the lystes against you, like a subtile Logician’, he offers at the beginning of book 1, ‘for I never learned the places from

whence argumentes are drawn, and that which I say, is rather of mine owne opinion, then by any judgement or learning: but my desire is to give you occasion to give me some light of your knowledge, being willing rather to understande, then to withstande' (1. 23). Anniball, however, recognises William's capacity to be a civil gentleman. 'You have swarved nothing at all in this discourse from the dutie of a perfect Courtier', he responds, 'whose propertie it is to do all things with carefull diligence, and skilfull art: mary yet so that the art is hidden, and the whole seemeth to be doone by chaunce, that he may thereby be had in more admiration' (1. 27). In the course of the dialogue William is being taught to recognise both his ready possession of the skills of a conversationalist, and the value of behaving like an 'ignorant Courtier'.

This is, of course, why Guazzo dramatises a civil conversation (rather than providing a list of rules). He wants the reader to appreciate the dynamic, constitutive property of conversing, as well as 'his' own talent for sociability. It is not only the meaning of 'honesty' which is being shaped in the course of the conversation. William's sense of his own (and others) aspirations is also being fashioned in this rivalrous interaction with Anniball. Recognising this aim should influence the way we read *Civile Conversation*, which holds out all kinds of possibilities for the socially aspiring male reader. There has been a tendency to describe *Civile Conversation* as an elitist text which mystifies the source of nobility. Indeed, in book 2, which explores the appropriate forms of interaction between a variety of different men, there is also a much stronger emphasis on social difference. For example, when Anniball declares that 'wee are so much the more esteemed of, by howe muche our Civilitie differeth from the nature and fashions of the vulgar sorte'. Even so, Anniball is challenged by William, who notes that his friend has contradicted himself. Anniball then explains that he means his friend 'to proceede in common talke simply and plainly, according as the truth of the matter shal require', and offers this unexpected proof:

if you consider how in Villages, Hamlets, and fields, you shall finde many men, who though they leade their life farre distant from the graces and the Muses (as the proverb is) and come stamping in with their high clouted shooes, yet are of good understanding, whereof they give sufficient testimonie by their wise and discreete talke: you cannot denie, but that nature hath given and sowed in us certaine seedes of Rhetorike and Philosophie. (2. 123)

Anniball *is* contradictory. In book 1 he happily declares that he is 'verie glad our discourses are rather familiar and pleasaunt, then affected and grave' and he warns William that he will use many proverbs 'which verie Artificers

have in their mouth, and comptes, which are used to bee told by the fire side' (1. 24). This interest in the speech of artificers or artisans is not lost in book 2, despite the new-found attachment to linguistic decorum. When Anniball advises William to build up a store of delightful phrases in book 2, he identifies one useful source, common talk. Thus, William is asked to remember 'that there is not any so fond, or so barren in his speach, but that sometime he saith something worthie of memorie'. As he adds, 'flowers of speache growe up chiefly in the learned, yet you see that nature maketh some of them to florish even amongst the common sort, unknowing unto them: and you shall see artificers, and others of low estate, to apply fitly to their purpose in due time and place, Sentences, pleasant Jestes, Fables, Allegories, Similitudes, Proverbes, Comptes, and other delightfull speache' (2. 136). In fact, in book 2 Anniball will define 'nobility' in such a way as not to preclude social advancement.³⁷

This contradictory manner of argument signals an author who is not so much divided in his attitude to 'nobility', but rather struggling to find a style which can adequately demonstrate how the nobility of a speaker might be realised in the act of conversing civilly.³⁸ Because of its form, this treatise can 'honestly' uphold contradictory arguments: Anniball's insistence that a gentleman should distinguish his speech from that of country clowns does not negate his later argument that a clown can be a gentleman, or conversely, that a gentleman can be a clown (2. 175). This emphasis is in contrast to Cleland's monologic discussion of the same topic in the early seventeenth century (he advises the nobleman to be 'plyable to al sorts of people', but also that to 'converse with inferiours, as your conversation breedeth contempt, so it argueth a base mind'). Indeed, Cleland's argument – that a nobleman should 'put a distinction betweene [his] discourses and a *Scythians*, a *Barbarians*, or a *Gothes*. For it is a pitty when a Noble man is better distinguished from a Clowne by his golden laces, then by his good language' – is never challenged or modified in the progress of the book.³⁹ Cleland's treatise fully deserves the designation 'elitist', Guazzo's does not.

DOMESTICAL CONVERSATION

I do not want to suggest, however, that this courtesy book is successful in its provision of an 'honest' critique, that is, a critique which makes transparent power within social exchange. Or to argue that it expresses genuine rivalry. One of the paradoxes of mid-century courtesy books like Guazzo's is that civil conversation is discussed as a means of breaking down traditional social barriers and of reinforcing difference. This paradoxical opening and

closing of the possibility for interaction seems to be repeated in the form of the treatise itself. Written as a dialogue, Guazzo's treatise aims to illustrate the opportunities civil conversation offers for self-improvement. But, this intention is thwarted. Its dialogue can seem laboured and artificial. This is partly because it explores the Ciceronian idea of conversation in the form of a Socratic dialogue. William is evidently a straw man. He merely draws out the authoritative views of Anniball (Guazzo) so that his teaching can be delivered in a non-didactic and engaging fashion.

This is perhaps the price to be paid for using the dialogue form more inclusively as a pedagogic tool. The *Courtier* is an 'elitist' treatise in one sense; it is set in the small Urbino court and its nobly born interlocutors describe the behaviour suitable for aristocrats in other Italian courts. All the same, Castiglione's dialogue feels more inclusive. One of its finest contributions to the informal Ciceronian dialogue form, as Virginia Cox notes, is the 'elimination of any divide between older and younger speakers'. This is facilitated by the character of Gaspare Pallavicino, the Urbino court's perpetual sceptic and its youngest speaker. The social world of *Civile Conversation* may be broader. William is being taught a sociability suitable for the 'market' of the world; he is expected to be able to speak civilly with other men from a range of different social backgrounds and in a variety of contexts. Yet, *Civile Conversation* illustrates the appetite for the more conservative Socratic form, in which a young pupil (William) is enlightened gradually by his venerable master (Anniball), that characterises the Italian dialogue after the Council of Trent in the 1560s and the English use of dialogue more generally. 'In a culture which was turning, increasingly, towards "monological" modes of argumentation', writes Cox of mid-sixteenth century Italy, 'Plato supplied a stylishly oblique but still markedly hierarchical model for the dialogue, more in keeping with the spirit of the times than a Ciceronian debate between equals.'⁴⁰

This does not mean, though, that Guazzo, or the English courtesy writers who use the same form did not have laudable aspirations. In Guazzo's treatise Anniball sets out to make William, a solitary and rather arrogant young man, sensitive to the feelings of others. Its dialogue form enables a searching exploration of the principles of sociability: how to live with others in such a way as to maximise the benefits for all. The fact that Guazzo cannot answer this question reassuringly should not preclude a study of his attempt. But we would do well, all the same, to understand the limits of this dialogue. Why does it feel so coercive? Or rather, why does it feel so intent on what we might now call the 'interpellation' of the reader?⁴¹

This is a difficult question to answer because the discussion in *Civile Conversation* in particular is relatively inclusive. Castiglione pays little attention to men of rank lower than the aristocratic Urbino courtiers in the *Courtier*, aside from advising that a nobleman shouldn't wrestle with them if he thinks there's any chance he might lose. In contrast, Guazzo excludes from civil conversation only those at the bottom of the social estates, labourers (2. 174–5). Elsewhere in this dialogue he positively includes that ill-defined social category of 'clowns' and he mentions approvingly the king who saluted a common prostitute.⁴² Like Castiglione, Guazzo includes women, a detail which, as Helen Hackett notes, modern commentators of the courtesy books often overlook.⁴³ In book 4, where Anniball recalls a conversation which took place in mixed company at a banquet, the gentlewomen take a leading role: one of them is elected as the convenor of the discussion in place of the visiting prince. However, *Civile Conversation* also explores the kind of conversation which should take place between a husband and wife in book 3, and in so doing, it follows the example of Xenophon's study of household duties, *Oeconomicus*, which offers a rather different response to the question, what makes a good and honest man?⁴⁴ In this influential treatise, the 'honesty' of a gentleman is defined as the proper ordering of his conduct and speech which aims to secure the 'honesty' – or chastity, obedience *and* silence – of his wife.

Guazzo's attention to domestical conversation in book 3 starts promisingly enough. After the uncertain opening up of this topic at the end of book 2 (William misunderstands Anniball's reference to conversation between the two sexes as an allusion to sexual intercourse (2. 234)), Guazzo proceeds in the third book to develop a defence of the humane treatment of wives. Indeed, the family is integral to the safekeeping of a civil society. Men who beat their wives, or treat them like 'kitchinstuffes' or slaves are roundly berated while the praises of a loving husband are sung (3. 6; 3. 23). The first half of the book explains how one should choose and then 'love' a wife. Or rather, how a young wife should 'be framed to the pleasure of her husbande' (3. 20). This sounds much like the treatment which William receives in books 1 and 2, but, as we will see, it is not.

It is impossible to read such defences of women generously. In 1977 Kathleen M. Davies made a stand against those social historians who were arguing for a new ideal of family life in the seventeenth century in which marriage was based 'for the first time . . . on mutual respect and love'. The suggestion that books on domestical relations such as Richard Whytforde's *A Werke for Housholders* (?1531), William Gouge's *Of Domestical Duties* (1622) or John Dod and Robert Cleaver's *A Godlie Forme of Household*

Government (1612) represent a new departure in the conception of family life is misleading, she argues, because they are mostly concerned with the subordination of the wife to the husband.⁴⁵ In this respect they represent a reworking of ideas found in pre-Reformation moral literature, not a new development. More recently, Lorna Hutson has contributed to this argument in a different way, finding novelty in the emerging perception of the domestic sphere as an arena for the development of a skill crucial to the acquisition of a distinctive, elite ‘masculinity’, the art of persuasion. Treatises like the popular *Oeconomicus*, translated in 1532 by Gentian Hervet as *Xenophon’s treatise of house holde*, taught aspiring governors how, as Cicero argues in *De officiis*, to ‘win the affectionate co-operation of our fellows and enlist it in our service’ (2. 20).⁴⁶

Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, as Hutson notes, was to provide the basis for a defence of commercial activity in the sixteenth century, although it has long been neglected by economic historians because it offers an ‘art of husbandry’ or housekeeping, rather than a study of the economy *per se*. Yet, such indifference overlooks the important contribution that this text made, along with *De officiis*, to the defence of profit making as desirable in a period suspicious of usurious activity. *Oeconomicus* can be credited as a source for the division of labour in the household literature of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. As Hutson advises, however, it can also be credited with helping to redefine elite masculinity as a skill in ‘the economics of using and ordering a discourse’, a skill which might be used literally to one’s profit at home and in the public sphere. Its further usefulness, she suggests, lies in its ability to displace the ethical dilemma integral to profit seeking into the domestic sphere through a fiction of willing cooperation.⁴⁷

There is already an interesting relationship between *De officiis* and *Oeconomicus*, as Hutson notes.⁴⁸ Not only did Cicero translate *Oeconomicus* from Greek to Latin when he was a schoolboy, as he reminds us at the end of book 2, but he also refers the reader to this text as a source for the ethics of enterprise. It ‘is a duty’, observes Cicero, ‘to make money, but only by honourable means; it is a duty also to save it and increase it by care and thrift’. ‘These principles’, he explains, ‘Xenophon, a pupil of Socrates, has set forth most happily in his book entitled “*Oeconomicus*”’ (2. 87). *Oeconomicus* was written in the 4th century BC, in part, its modern translator Sarah B. Pomeroy suggests, to tackle the problem of reduced Athenian agricultural production following the Peloponnesian War.⁴⁹ Xenophon aims to persuade landowners that farming is both a public service and a means to personal profit. To do so he invents a series of fictional dialogues. The first and main dialogue about *oikonomia* – the

art of household management – is between Socrates and a gentleman companion named Critobulus. Socrates claims not to be able to teach this skill because he does not own a household, and therefore does not practise it. Instead, he reports a conversation he had with a gentleman landowner and householder called Ischomachus (the second dialogue). Ischomachus in turn teaches Socrates about *oikonomia* by reporting a conversation he had with his unnamed wife about her household duties (the third dialogue). As Hutson's careful reading of Hervet's 1532 translation makes apparent, the teaching of *oikonomia* is embodied in a series of displacements or sideways moves enacted in the various conversations. That is, *oikonomia* is never really defined. Instead, as the dialogue moves forwards so the signifying possibilities of this term seem to expand. It is the art of ordering one's household (or managing one's wife to order one's household); it is also an art of farming, and an art of military strategy and imperial government. These displacements enable us to understand that *oikonomia*, which begins modestly at home, underpins the art of government.⁵⁰ They also alert us to its rhetorical dimension: its use of displacement – represented in Socrates' original refusal to teach Ischomachus – to make others feel as if they are becoming independent agents even as they are being enlisted to serve one's interests.

Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is used by Hutson to unmask such strategies of apparent kindness or civility which, according to Cicero in *De officiis*, should underpin the pleasant and courteous communication between individuals in society. However, Xenophon and Cicero are very different thinkers, and domestical and civil conversation are opposing as well as contiguous discourses. It is inevitable that Cicero and Xenophon were elided in the minds of many Elizabethans; it is also true that Cicero translated and wrote admiringly of Xenophon. Yet, these 'Socratic' thinkers are also writing in distinct cultures almost four hundred years apart. Civil and domestical discourses *are* different, insists Lena Cowen Orlin: 'the Renaissance concept of domestic virtue which succeeds the moral philosophy of friendship and beneficence' in the seventeenth century, 'is one lodged in the realization of its philosophical opposite, individual oeconomic interest'.⁵¹ This difference can be located in the conflicting, though overlapping, accounts of honest, elite masculine conduct which Xenophon and Cicero provide. This double legacy is present (unconsciously) in *Civile Conversation* as well as in Thomas Pritchard's *The schoole of honest and vertuous lyfe*. The latter advises that there are two ways to become wise according to Socrates: 'the one to huysht rather than to speake: the other, for to learne how to speake'.⁵² It is visibly in contestation in the battle waged over the

meaning of 'honesty' between the sixteenth-century courtesy books and the husbandry books inspired by *Oeconomicus*: when the landowner 'Cono' defends the 'honesty' of his lifestyle in Barnabe Googe's translation of Conrad Heresbach's *Foure Bookes of Husbandry*, he is explicitly favouring the orderly gentleman-husband of *Oeconomicus* over Castiglione's or Guazzo's Ciceronian courtier.⁵³

The uneasy conversation between the 'honest' courtier and the 'honest' husbandman is explored in chapter 4. In this chapter, however, I want to describe the distinctive 'honesty' or decorum of Xenophon's landowner Ischomachus as he appears in Hervet's translation. *Oeconomicus* is a study of 'the duetie, and the propre office, of the ordrynge of an house' (sig. A2r). This topic is explored, though, in a conversation which answers the question: what makes 'a good and honest man' (Hervet's translation of Xenophon's *kalos te kagathos*, a true or decent gentleman). This translation of *kalos* as 'honest' is not surprising. The Greek adjective means decent, beautiful and good. As Helen North notes, it was translated by the Romans as *honestas* (decorum). It is in fact a source for Cicero's conception of decorum as affable speech and behaviour *and* comely appearance.⁵⁴ In *Oeconomicus*, however, Xenophon defines *kalos* as a moral quality only. Socrates tells Critobulus that he searched unsuccessfully for 'a good and honest man' in the company of handsome men. Frustrated in his search, he seeks one who is reputed to be 'good and honest' by reputation only, and discovers Ischomachus. In the reported conversation between Ischomachus and Socrates that follows we discover that the adjective *kalos* applies to the landowner who has persuaded his wife and slaves (*servants* in Hervet) to serve his interests.

One of the paradoxes of Ischomachus's lifestyle is that he is a rich and busy man who still has the time to sit around chatting to Socrates in the stoa (the church porch in Hervet). This freedom to converse with one's friends 'man-to-man' is a marker of Ischomachus's gentility *and* moral goodness; he has ordered his affairs well enough to create time for such conversations. More importantly, his orderly conversation with Socrates is the key to his success, for it allows him to demonstrate the rhetorical skill which enables him to govern others – wife and slaves or servants – by persuading them to manage his affairs willingly and so free his time. Ischomachus is 'a good and honest man' because he has taught his wife by conversing with her 'to have a good wyll towarde us, and to love us... [and] to sette her good wyll and her good mynde to encrease our house' (sig. E1r). This process is illustrated in the reported dialogue between the newly married husband, Ischomachus, and his wife. The dialogue is Socratic in style; Ischomachus

poses questions to his wife rather than simply telling her what is right and wrong. Yet, he also discreetly reverses the role of questioner and answerer, employing a form of questioning familiar to the Elizabethans as *rogatio*: to ‘ask questions, or . . . enquire of others and set forth our own opinion’.⁵⁵ Ischomachus tells us that when his wife was domesticated sufficiently to hold a conversation he questioned her thus:

Tell me good bedfelowe, did ye ever cast in your mi[n]de, for what cause I have taken you, and your father and mother delivered you unto me? I trowe ye knowe well inoughe, that I toke you not for nede, that I had of a bedfelowe to lye with me, for I myghte have had inowe at my commandment. But when I had considered in my mynde . . . that hit were well done, to fynde out a good one to be parte taker both of our house, and of our childre[n] I chose you afore all other, and your father and mother like wise chose me. (sigs. C6r-C6v)

He then explains that his wife ‘answered here unto after this maner. Wherein can I helpe you?’ (sig. D7r).⁵⁶ And so the conversation proceeds. Only when the wife is finally able to answer a question on her own can she be said to be conversant *and* domesticated.⁵⁷ The lesson is completed when Ischomachus asks her how she would feel about tending to sick slaves or servants: ‘By my feyth, sayde my wyfe, hit is a verye gracious and a kynde dede. For whan they be ones holpen, and eased they wyll cunne us very good thanke, and be the more lovyng and feythfull unto us’. In this answer the wife expresses both obedience to her husband and knowledge of how to cultivate obedience in her husband’s servants through the exercise of kindness. She has learned her lesson well. Ischomachus is satisfied: ‘me thoughte . . . that hit was an answeere of a good and an honeste wyfe’ (sig. D2r).

Some readers of book 3 of *Civil Conversation* may be initially impressed by Guazzo’s inclusion of women.⁵⁸ ‘[A]s the cheefe conversation commeth by meane of mariage, for that Cities cannot be without families, nor families without Husband and Wife’, he writes encouragingly at the opening of this book, ‘there is no conversation more agreeable to nature, than that of the male and the female’ (3. 3). Yet, Guazzo is not exactly extending the benefits of civility to women in the same way that he does to men of ‘ungentle’ birth in book 2. The conversation Guazzo anticipates between husband and wife is really a dialogue of the male *to* the female, or of a husband *to* his wife. The casual banter between men and women in Castiglione’s treatise has no place in book 3 (although Guazzo does approximate it in the banquet scene of book 4). The limits of domestical conversation are soon apparent when Anniball alludes to the Pauline injunction that women should be silent and obedient (3. 25). This creates a real dilemma: how can a wife be ‘civilised’