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Savage Madness Meets with Comic Folly: The Cases of Orlando and Philaster

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The dominant early modern view of the place of humour in civil society is the moralistic one—namely, that it has no place. As Giovanni Della Casa puts it in his courtesy book, *Galateo*, as translated into English by Robert Peterson in 1576: “No man should, for other mens pleasures, dishonest & dishonour him self. It is an arte for a Juggler & jester to vse: it doth not become a gentleman to do so” (p. 71). And generally in the English drama, if clowns are allowed to mingle with kings, they are finally segregated and variously disposed of, as Falstaff is by Prince Hal: “How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!”; “Reply not to me with a fool-born jest” (Shakespeare, *2H4*, V.v.48, 55). In this paper, however, I wish to draw attention to contrary examples, which point up the way wild or savage impulses may be defused and channelled by contact with humour. This is the case in *As You Like It* when Orlando violently intrudes on the forest banquet, demanding food, and Jaques puts him down with scornfully humorous retorts. In Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Philaster*, the Country Fellow who embodies the traditional clown function gets the better of the distracted and dangerous Prince, so that the ridicule he automatically attracts is refracted onto his social superior. In both cases, the effect is to defend the potential existence of civility even within a natural setting.

This cannot be taken for granted simply as a function of the pastoral tradition. As the sixteenth century ran on, the norms of civility came to be identified with city-based values and the orderliness of urban life, if also increasingly with “the qualities of the minde”, in the words of Stefano Guazzo, whose *Ciuile conuersation* (1574, trans. 1581) was influential in making the concept of “civility” into a criterion of individual social comportment, as well as of political order.¹ Even Edmund Spenser, in the Elizabethan pastoral romance *par excellence*, designated the “princes hall” as the locale where

That vertue should be plentifully found,
Which of all goodly manners is the ground,
And roote of ciuill conuersation. (*The Faerie Queene*, IV.i.1)

Yet Guazzo, writing from a different point of view and aiming at a wider audience, maintained that civility could be found in the countryside, in “gentlemen” and in those who “ought to be put in the midst betweene gentlemen and clownes”.²

By addressing the complex tensions in the plays in question between the pull of pastoral and the socialising claims made for civility by Guazzo, my reading will comment on the particular incivilities displayed by Orlando and Philaster, and paradoxically redeem incivility from the stereotype of a rustic, boorish condition to be abjected. On the contrary, we may here be witnessing a development of Montaigne’s recuperation of the Cannibals, to the extent that certain characters, in response to their exclusion from their “rightful” places in civil society, are shown to tap a well-spring of natural energy that functions productively in support of a comic ending. Both plays finally present such incivility as being necessary to challenge confining and flawed social structures, but also as being in need of humorous deflation.

To turn first to Orlando’s brutal incursion into the forest of Arden in Act Two, Scene Seven, the response of the banished forest dwellers resounds with a plethora of terms related to breeding, civil behaviour and manners. These terms are actually introduced by Duke Senior’s more reasoned moralising discourse, but it is Jaques’ repartee that serves as a catalyst to induce Orlando’s transformation. The melodramatically inflated “Forbear and eat no more” (II.vii.88) is

1 Guazzo is cited from Hale, p. 366.

2 Hale, p. 366, also makes the contrast with Spenser.

punctured by Jaques' quip, "Why, I have ate none yet" (89). And when Orlando acts like what Jaques will shortly call the "soldier", "sudden and quick in quarrel" (150, 152), his cynical interlocutor drily asks his fellow onlooker, "Of what kind should this cock come of?" (91). Finally, in response to Orlando's exaggerated threat (the exaggeration may be measured by the parody of the divine injunction in Genesis), "He dies that touches any of this fruit" (99), Jaques puts his finger upon Orlando's irrational loss of self-control by punning on the homonym "reason/raisin": "An you will not be answered with reason, I must die" (101).

Even more clearly because Orlando never directly replies to Jaques, the latter's pointed humour seems to make him malleable enough to allow the Duke to temper his violent behaviour:

Art thou thus boldened, man, by thy distress?
 Or else a rude despiser of good manners,
 That in civility thou seem'st so empty?
Orlando. You touched my vein at first. . . . (92-95)

The Duke's tactful way of dealing with the angry young man results in Orlando's chastened humility and engenders a reversion from the desperate famished fugitive who demands food only for himself ("I almost die for food—and let me have it" [105]) back to the caring "gentle master" (II.iii.2) of old Adam:

Then but forbear your food a little while,
 Whiles like a doe I go to find my fawn,
 And give it food. . . .

 . . . Till he be first sufficed,
 Oppressed with two weak evils, age and hunger,
 I will not touch a bit. (128-34)

Most fundamentally, Duke Senior's polite welcoming attitude jolts Orlando out of his preconceived idea that "all things had been savage here" (108).

In the next forest scene (III.ii), Shakespeare pursues the handy-dandy question of civil and uncivil conduct in contrasting contexts through the exchanges between the self-styled representative of court humour and the natural representative of the down-to-earth. To Touchstone's syllogistic reasoning about good manners existing only at court, the shepherd Corin retorts, "Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour

of the country is most mockable at the court” (III.ii.43-46). Touchstone’s ridicule is thereby appropriated, persuasively relativised, and turned back upon him.

He finds easier prey in the person of William, whom he is able to crush with his dexterous application (parodic, of course) of the sort of courtly quarrelling techniques that he describes while waiting for Rosalind’s magical revelation: “we quarrel in print, by the book, as you have books for good manners” (V.iv.89-90). His technique consists in aligning civil and uncivil ways of expressing various concepts, relegating William to the uncivilised status of “clown”:

Therefore, you clown, abandon (which is in the vulgar, “leave”) the society (which in the boorish is “company”) of this female (which in the common is “woman”). (V.i.47-50)

Given that William is glaringly incapable of defending himself against the double-talk onslaught (or perhaps even understanding it), and that Touchstone’s sophisticated exercise in ridicule serves the typically animal behaviour of laying claim to his female, it becomes an obvious irony that the savagery in the encounter belongs to him, while his initial designation by Rosalind as a “*clownish fool*” (I.iii.127, italics mine) tends to take on social as well as technical significance.

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Beaumont and Fletcher’s “Country Fellow” (as the Second Quarto [1622] stage directions call him³) appears in Act Four during the hunting scene and muses about his hopes of getting a glimpse of the King. His speech mannerisms conform to the convention of rustic clownishness and to the naïveté of his preoccupations: his greatest fear is that he will miss seeing the King and therefore not be able to give an account to his sisters. He is dazzled by the “people better horsed than myself” (IV.v.78), stunned by the noise and bustle of the hunt around him: “These Kings had need of good brains, this whooping is able to put a mean man out of his wits” (79-81). Such an ambiance is not necessarily suggestive of “civil conversation” or living “civilly . . . in respect of the qualities of the minde” (to cite Guazzo again), and in fact the question of where civility lies is blurred. All of a sudden, he finds himself projected upon a stage of chivalric romance, almost like Rafe in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, when he espies Philaster—“There’s a courtier with his sword drawn” (81)—then sees him about to strike Arethusa:

3 My edition of reference is that of Gurr.

“by this hand, upon a woman, I think” (81-82). He immediately has recourse to the vocabulary of the chivalric saviour of the damsel in distress, as he intervenes with, “Hold, dastard, strike a woman?” (86), though too late to prevent the foul blow. But the contrast is sustained between the courtly language—what he calls the “rhetoric”—of Philaster and Arethusa and his own homely speech (“God ’uds me” [92]). He is actually condemned as “ill-bred” (90) by the woman he is trying to save and rebuked for interrupting the “private sports” and “recreations” (91) of the courtly couple. Yet he persists in claiming that his virtue makes him a match for Philaster: “I can lay it on if you touch the woman” (97-98). As for Philaster himself, he is absurdly out of control in a maddened state of jealous rage, totally blind to his transgression of all the norms of civil behaviour. His courtly discourse gives way to insulting terms such as “Slave” (99) and “boor”, even as he begins to intuit that “The gods take part against me” (103). He is already on the road to recovering his former right-minded “civil” self, to restraining and redeploying his native magnanimity.

To return briefly to the “Country Fellow”, once the rogue Prince has fled, he turns to Arethusa, wounded though he is, and claims the reward of a kiss. It is at this stage that we might question his true identity, which fluctuates between the more rustic “Country Fellow” of the Second Quarto and what the First Quarto (1620) terms a “Countrey Gallant”⁴—an expression that retains a trace of the chivalric romance tradition. What is more, the woodcut of the scene on the title page of the 1620 text (absent from the Second Quarto) actually labels him a “Cuntrie Gentellman” and seems to dress him accordingly.⁵ It is as if we have here a mobile signifier corresponding to the potential for acquiring civility which Guazzo, in *Civile Conversation*, allows to “gentlemen in the countryside” and to “those who ought to be put in the midst between gentlemen and clownes”.

Within the same scene, the Country Fellow is also used as a foil to bring out different aspects of the incivility of Pharamond, the Spanish prince betrothed to Arethusa. Despite the King’s attempt to overlook his glaring faults, Pharamond has already discredited himself, both in his speech, beginning with his initial self-displaying monologue (“This speech calls him Spaniard, being nothing but a large inventory of his own commendations” [I.i.156-57], Cleremont observes), and in his sexual intemperance. Not only does he try to persuade a horrified

4 See the note to IV.v.74 SD by Gurr, who, however, follows Turner in stating erroneously that the woodcut figure is also designated as a “Countrey Gallant”.

5 See Gurr, ed., p. ii.

Arethusa to sleep with him before the marriage is solemnised, but he takes up with the lustful Megra, whose preference for him over Philaster confirms her position as an emblem of physical incivility within the Sicilian court. The King works hard to make her a scapegoat for Pharamond's transgression, hence that of his court at large, and threatens her with the treatment reserved for common prostitutes, a sort of royal carting that will purge what he sarcastically terms her "courtesies" (II.iv.141):

... all the Court, shall hoot thee through the Court,
Fling rotten oranges, make ribald rhymes,
And sear thy name with candles upon walls. (144-46)

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The foil function of the Country Fellow depends on his retaining his rustic character, and this he does in an overtly comic way. When he finds out that Arethusa is the princess, he falls back into his initial mode of royal-watcher ("Then I have seen something yet" [IV.v.123]), and his rueful last words confirm it:

Country Fellow. I pray you, friend, let me see the King.
² *Woodman.* That you shall, and receive thanks.
Country Fellow. If I get clear of this, I'll go to see no more gay sights. (144-46)

This in itself is a deft commentary on the shoddy quality of the "civile conversation" that he has been drawn into. The foiling itself consists most basically in the contrast between his aptness for action and Pharamond's extravagant empty threats against the fugitive Philaster. The Country Fellow's language is a homely accompaniment to his bold deed, expressed so as to remind us of his paternal inheritance, which apparently included the right to carry a sword, if only an old-fashioned broadsword: "I made my father's old fox fly about his ears" (IV.v.129-30), he tells Pharamond. Over against this is set the swaggering bluster of the foreign pretender to the status of warrior-prince. "How will you have me kill him?" (131), he asks Arethusa (having just learnt that Philaster has been seriously wounded), then goes on to boast, "By this hand, I'll leave never a piece of him bigger than a nut, and bring him all to you in my hat" (133-34). Praising oneself, of course, runs directly counter to a standard precept for courtly behaviour, and Count Lodovico in Book I of Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* might well be commenting directly

on the difference between the Country Fellow and Pharamond when he defines the ideal behaviour of the “gentleman-at-arms” (p. 57):

the man we are seeking should be fierce, rough and always to the fore, in the presence of the enemy; but anywhere else he should be kind, modest, reticent and anxious above all to avoid ostentation or the kind of outrageous self-glorification by which a man always arouses loathing and disgust among those who have to listen to him. (pp. 58-59)

The “loathing and disgust” that Pharamond inspires in the mob of Citizens become part of a carnivalesque process in which ridicule is the catalyst that enables all the characters to find their rightful places—that is, in the play’s own terms, to find themselves. The Captain, first described by the Messenger to the King as “an old grey ruffian” (V.iii.116), addressed by Pharamond as “you rude slave” (V.iv.22), and indeed full of uncivil threats and bluster, nevertheless holds a tight rein over his “brave myrmidons” (1). When Pharamond asks him whether he knows what he is doing, he answers in no uncertain terms:

My pretty Prince of puppets, we do know, and give your Greatness warning that you talk no more such bug’s words or that soldered crown shall be scratched with a musket; dear Prince Pippin, down with your noble blood or as I live I’ll have you coddled. (23-27)

Like the Country Fellow, the Captain dares to challenge the Prince to single combat, and the reminiscence of that scene is confirmed by the comic exchange between Pharamond and one of the citizens, who puts a premium on seeing a rare sight:

Pharamond. You will not see me murdered, wicked villains?

1 Citizen. Yes, indeed will we sir, we have not see one for a great while. (34-36)

In this scene, too, a parodic discourse of chivalric romance is attached to the Citizens, whom the Captain calls his “donsels” (55) and puts in service to Philaster under the name of “My royal Rosicleer” (78), the hero of the popular romance *The Mirror of Knighthood* (Gurr, ed., 78 n.).

Acting as a virtual stage-manager, the Captain controls and directs the surging energy discharged by the mob, who call for bits and pieces of Pharamond’s body (“I’ll have a leg, that’s certain”; “I’ll have an arm”; “I’ll have his nose” [58-60]) and are cast by the Spanish prince as “these wild cannibals” (102). In a way recalling Montaigne’s didactic apology, these supposed savages, untouched by the niceties of civilisation, are the instruments through which the Captain’s educative process

brings Pharamond to self-knowledge, notably the knowledge that his pretence to princely civility is a sham. The Captain observes the change in him through his fear, when Pharamond says, now addressing the mob respectfully,

O, spare me, gentlemen.

Captain. Hold, hold; the man begins to fear and know himself. (44-45)

As for Philaster himself, hailed by the Captain as “the King of courtesy” (132), his former excesses are now counterpointed by his urging of the mob to restraint in the name of his return to his true identity (“Hold and be satisfied. I am myself” [88]), as he mediates the proper relation between inferior and superior: “I am what I do desire to be, your friend; / I am what I was born to be, your Prince” (97-98). We are reminded of the educative process by his subsequent momentary relapse into excessive passion, when he gets things wrong again and supposes Arethusa and Bellario to be guilty after all; at this point, “*He offers to stab himself*” (V.v.131 SD) and actually needs to be restrained by the King (“Stay him” [132]). And it is the King himself, in resigning his falsely appropriated kingdom, who learns most profoundly of all and earns the right to enunciate the conventional lesson concerning civility on everyone’s behalf:

Let Princes learn

By this to rule the passions of their blood,
For what heaven wills can never be withstood. (223-25)

Nevertheless, Beaumont and Fletcher’s play, like *As You Like It*, has demonstrated the catalytic value of forms of incivility, including ridicule. When, in Act Three, Scene One, Philaster, addressing the Lords who urge him to rebellion, replies that they show “too much courtesy” (III.i.53), and that the time is not yet right for him to act—another manifestation of his mastery of civil principles, this time of a civic nature—he exposes the limits of his own control: the political situation will finally need to be taken out of his hands by the epitome of incivility, a citizen rebellion. In the same scene, he at first allows his “zeal to truth” to make him “unmannerly” (86), when he indignantly refutes the accusation against Arethusa. And while he is about to commit his major error of judgement by believing Dion’s false testimony, the emotional overreaction, the breaking down of the restraint he had earlier shown on the political level, is not necessarily an error in itself. Or at least it is a productive one, like comic errors generally. For it signals a necessary step in precipitating a crisis that, dangerous

as it is, ultimately conduces to the happy ending. The lords, who introduce the scene by terming Pharamond “born a slave / In that which should be his most noble part, / His mind” (13-15), wonder at Philaster’s unaccustomed display of “ill-tempered” and “extreme impatient” (121, 134) behaviour, but they put it down to “his virtue and his noble mind” (135). They thereby draw attention to the potential value of righteous anger and loss of control in a good cause. Ruling the passions of the blood may be the goal—the play harps on the concept of “taming”, and the central conflict is resolved when Philaster declares Pharamond “tame enough” (V.iv.122)—but the dramatic action positively thrives on and revels in those passions. Such is the double process mediated by the insistent and recurrent discourse of civility in both *Philaster* and *As You Like It*.

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