concealing our relationship to political violence behind the veil of an idealized fantasy of community without force? Hobbes's remark may have been more than a little polemical, but it asks us to think about the choices our communities make every day about who should or should not pay the price to secure a better future for the rest of us. Bejan may admire Williams on the frontier, but she is less comfortable residing with Hobbes on the horrific internal border of the English Civil War.

Ultimately, therefore, all the nuance that Bejan herself demonstrates in *Mere Civility* (and that she discovers in Hobbes) dissolves in the face of a preference not so much for qualitatively "mere" civility as for quantitatively "more" toleration—and it is on these grounds that Bejan finally opts for Williams over Locke or Hobbes. Hobbes is simply not as "tolerant" as Williams (98–99), Bejan explains; more Hobbes means less "free speech." What our world needs, she argues, is not Hobbes's "difference without disagreement" (not, that is to say, regulated difference), but "difference *and* disagreement" (111). This sounds brave enough, until we read the next clause: "difference *and* disagreement," writes Bejan, "so long as we can keep the latter 'civil'" (111). Doesn't this conditional afterthought beg the whole question? Or, more to the point, doesn't it confirm Hobbes's position? Like Locke and, to a lesser but no less significant extent, Roger Williams, Bejan wants to have the cake of "free" expression and eat it too. She wants a public space for "difference" that is not regulated by a Hobbesian sovereign authority, but only as long as "we" can keep it "civil"! But who is this "we" if it is not John Locke's elite cadre of sincere and morally superior "natural" policemen who know the difference between civil and uncivil behavior even before entering a political state? And doesn't her remark remind us that it was Hobbes who insisted on the irreducibility of this appeal to a forceful "we" in the construction of any space for meaningful interrelation?

"Foul Is Fair": Lessons on Civility from Roger Williams and Lady Macbeth

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"Fair is foul, and foul is fair." In *Mere Civility,* Teresa Bejan seeks to upend prevailing accounts of how tolerant societies should manage disagreement and difference. Against recent calls for greater civility in public discourse, Bejan

invokes Roger Williams's vision of "meer civility," according to which members of a pluralist political community might forge civil bonds and construct a deeply tolerant society by adhering to minimal and culturally contingent standards of behavior, all while retaining the freedom to pronounce on contentious questions, even to the point of expressing their contempt for one another and for one anothers' beliefs. Bejan argues that mere civility can "accommodate more and deeper kinds of difference than the alternatives, while sustaining a commitment to fundamental disagreement *despite* its inherent disagreeableness" (14). Foul is fair indeed!

Bejan's account of mere civility forms part of the broader discussion in her excellent book that illuminates important complexities in early modern understandings of toleration that are too often obfuscated by the positing of simplistic dichotomies between tolerant and persecuting societies. The strength of Williams's account, argues Bejan, arises in large measure from its foundation in his understanding that societies marked by persistent and fundamental disagreements among their members cannnot consider developing more robust forms of social engagement and cooperation before first ensuring "the mundane business of un-murderous coexistence" (15).

Of course, Williams is a decidedly unlikely hero for a book whose intended readership is genuinely committed to principles of toleration and inclusivity. He was, in Bejan's own words, "a fundamentalist schismatic and purveyor of religious insult" (144). In keeping with the spirit of Bejan's appeal to an unlikely source for addressing our current crisis of civility, I have chosen to comment on her book with reference to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which was written during Williams's lifetime. In this play, King Duncan's very existence stands in the way of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's vision of a good society (that being, of course, the society foretold to them in which they will rule). So, like good zealots, the Macbeths resolve to kill the king at their earliest convenience. However, what is relevant to our discussion here is that both waver in their resolve when they foresee the obstacles that might prevent them from carrying out the deed.

For Macbeth, the obstacles are culturally specific, conventional duties of civility. Duncan, Macbeth notes, arrives at his castle "in double trust: / First, as I am his kinsman and his subject, / Strong both against the deed; then, as his host, / Who should against his murtherer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself."[1] By contrast, Lady Macbeth worries that her humanity—the "compunctious visitings of Nature"—will prevent her from plunging the knife into Duncan herself.[2] In treading the line between unmurderous coexistence and bloody murder, the Macbeths navigate the complex interplay between conventions of social behavior and human nature that features in all

[1]*Macbeth*, 1.7.12–16. In *Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
[2]*Macbeth*, 1.4.44.

politics, and that figures prominently in Bejan's book. I want to suggest that Bejan's case for mere civility could be strengthened by heeding the wisdom of so unlikely an expert on unmurderous coexistence as Lady Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth understands how the physical proximity of individuals to one another significantly affects the force of the conventions that govern social behavior. In isolation, or among friends, we can imagine, we can even plan, to purposefully and most egregiously violate a social convention toward someone we regard with contempt. However, face to face, we will likely find it far more difficult to refuse an extended hand or to trample on some other engrained habit of social interaction. Likewise, safely ensconced in a radio or television studio, or behind a webcam, individuals might feel liberated from conventions of social behavior that they would find highly constraining were they actually face to face with their interlocutors.

Context plays a prominent role in *Mere Civility* to the extent that Bejan emphasizes Williams's understanding of conventions of civility as culturally specific. However, discussions of context, in the sense of how contemporary meanings of mere civility, or the possibilities for its realization, might be affected by the proximity of interlocutors, or by the media of communication, or by the composition and size of audiences, or by the particular venues of public discourse, are absent from this book. This exclusion is understandable, given that this is essentially a historical study, written to provoke critical reflection on contemporary political problems, rather than prescribe clear solutions to them. However, in carrying this conversation forward—in thinking about ways in which Williams's mere civility might actually apply in our contemporary world—these questions of context become paramount.

In addition to recognizing the effects of proximity on conventions of social behavior, Lady Macbeth also recognizes how, though ingrained in habit and custom, adherence or nonadherence to such customs is deeply conditioned by incentive structures. When Macbeth wavers in his resolve to murder the king, Lady Macbeth knows instinctively that nothing short of calling her husband's manhood into question will suffice to overpower the conventional fetters that he will face the moment he steps into Duncan's bedroom. "What beast was't then, that made you break this enterprise to me? / When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And, to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man."[3] The choice she lays before her husband is crystal clear: By simply refraining from murdering the king, Macbeth will uphold the minimal conventional standards required of a host and a subject. But, in the eyes of his wife, he will be less than a man. Given this choice, Macbeth violates his basic duties of civility as egregiously as possible.

The important point here is that incentives matter. For Roger Williams, the incentive to meet and maintain the bare standards of mere civility lay in maximizing the potential pool of religious converts. Though I agree with Bejan

[3]*Macbeth*, 1.7.47–51.

that this imperative bears similarities to contemporary political imperatives to secure democratic majorities, or pluralities, we must not overstate the case. In polities where political power can be exercised on the basis of less, sometimes significantly less, than a democratic majority, the incentives to maintain the conventions of mere civility appear far less compelling. The American system, for example, seems to establish incentives precisely against maintaining these conventions. While the image of mutually disdaining, yet nevertheless civil, interlocutors might appeal, precisely because of its low-bar moral obligations, recent American experience suggests otherwise. Members of a polarized and factionalized electorate might determine that their best prospects for solidifying an electoral base, and thereby securing sufficient support to gain political power, lie precisely in treating their adversaries as uncivilly as possible.

Bejan is right, I think, in asserting that we ought to "expect theorists to understand reality, first, before moralizing about how to change it" (161). An important dimension of understanding that reality involves identifying the very real effects that factors such as media, political institutions, norms, and conventions have in structuring the contexts of political discourse and the incentives that political actors face. Mere civility promises an honesty in public discourse and a commitment to conversation that strongly appeal. After all, we know how the story ended after Macbeth pronounced, "false face must hide what the false heart doth know."[4] But the utility of Bejan's Williams for confronting our crisis of civility in public discourse will be greatly enhanced if we can identify the contexts and incentives that will either reinforce or undermine our conventions of mere civility. In other words, Roger Williams becomes much more valuable to us if we turn simultaneously to Lady Macbeth.

Civility within Context

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Mere Civility is a wonderful book. It is insightful, elegant, scholarly, and delightful in its roguish rhetoric. I found much to agree with and have myself worried that we have set the civility bar too high. But in entertaining

[4]*Macbeth*, 1.7.83.