

COLONIAL VIRTUE:
THE MOBILITY OF TEMPERANCE
IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND

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KASEY EVANS

Colonial Virtue

The Mobility of Temperance
in Renaissance England

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In memory of Janet Adelman

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COLONIAL VIRTUE:
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Introduction

In the notorious conclusion to book 2 of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Guyon, the Knight of Temperance, destroys the Bower of Bliss in a 'tempest of . . . wrathfulnesse.'¹ Punning on the knight's nominal virtue, this meteorological event represents at least a challenge to, if not an outright repudiation of, Guyon's allegorical identity. Underlying both 'temperance' and 'tempest' is the Latin *tempus*, but these English terms trade in distinct varieties of time.

The English 'temperance' comes from the Latin *temperantia*, or moderation. As the present participle of the verb *temperare*, to moderate, *temperantia* was the word used by Cicero to translate the cardinal virtue that Plato and Aristotle called *sophrosyne* (σωφροσύνη), meaning 'soundmindedness, prudence, moderation, sobriety, self-control.'² The Latin *temperare*, in turn, derives from the Latin noun *tempus*, meaning time (OED s.v. 'temper,' v.). As I will discuss at greater length in chapter 1, this temporal legacy of temperance becomes especially important in the European Renaissance,³ when representations of the virtue begin to emphasize first the postponement of the passions over time, and subsequently, by extension, the industrious control of time itself.

'Tempest,' on the other hand, relies on a different conception of time. Like 'temperance,' the Latin equivalent of 'tempest' (*tempesta*) is derived from *tempus*; but in English, the temporal resonances of 'tempest' imply neither patient delay nor human sovereignty. From the fourteenth century onward, 'tempest' signifies both 'a time, a period, an occasion' (OED 4) and 'a violent commotion or disturbance; a tumult, rush; agitation, perturbation; calamity, misfortune, trouble' (OED 2a and b). 'Tempest' is thus the English equivalent of the Latin

occasio or the Greek *kairos* (καιρός): the climactic moment of passionate crisis and action. While ‘temperance’ entails the management of the *tempus* or *chronos*, the undifferentiated dilatory time of endurance, the ‘tempest’ represents the decisive time of choice, action, and realization, the seizure of a moment that will not pass by again.⁴

The conclusion to book 2 serves as an ideal place to begin this study of temperance in part because of the ambiguity and paradox it seems to enfold. Spenserians disagree about where to locate the failure or crisis engendered by this episode, which displaces an anticipated and decisive victory over the avatars of intemperance. Does crisis lie in the knight himself, who fails to uphold his eponymous virtue, or rather in the fallen reader who balks at temperance’s rigorous and unrelenting exercise?⁵ In my reading, though – and in appreciation of the discursive richness of temperance, which this book is dedicated to exploring – Guyon’s paradoxical, tempestuous destruction of the Bower is an incisive representation of the semantic capaciousness that temperance achieves in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literary, philosophical, and political discourse. This period bears witness to temperance’s discursive and conceptual mobility, and to its acquisition of a rich array of connotations and implications over the course of its migrations. The dissonance of Guyon’s ‘tempest’ therefore attests neither to a lapse in character nor to a failure of readerly rigour, but instead to an expansion of the concept itself into uncharted and challenging territory.

The second reason for this episode’s privileged, epigraphic position in this book concerns the geographical specificity of the Bower. As the critical canon has acknowledged since the early days of New Historicism, the challenges of the Bower are not merely cognitive but political; just so, the mobility of temperance is not merely discursive but geographic. Prompted by the publication of Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, three decades of Spenserians have concurred that the Bower – whatever its aesthetic, allegorical, and meta-poetic implications – is also the ‘faery’ equivalent of an English colony in Ireland and/or the Americas.⁶ Like the tension between tempest and temperance, the colonial context makes Guyon’s destruction of the Bower an apt introduction to this project, which investigates temperance’s dissemination and extension into texts that reflect on the theory and practice of New World colonialism. The ‘mobility of temperance’ that concerns me here, that is to say, is, first: the term’s own migration into new discursive and geographic spaces; and second: the colonial migrations carried on in the *name* of temperance – the

imaginative and literal mobility it enables by providing an ethical rationale for England's New World colonial ventures. Guyon's destruction of the Bower of Bliss represents a compelling consolidation of precisely these concerns. In the colonial context, Guyon's 'tempest' – conduct that would ostensibly violate the mandates of temperance in its classical conception – nevertheless falls under the purview of that very virtue, which migrates during the English Renaissance from the province of the self-disciplining individual humanist into the public arena of political and cultural ambition, competition, and conquest.

The project of this book is to document such migrations, tracing temperance's rhetorical, political, and geographical mobility from the scholarly discourses of classical and humanistic Europe into the political and economic vocabularies of the nascent British Empire – that is to say, the virtue's transatlantic mobility from England into the New World. This commitment to tracking conceptual and geographic movement demands, in turn, a dynamic methodology, which recognizes and analyses the diffusion of temperance beyond the borders of the literary canon. *Colonial Virtue* thus combines an interest in canonical literary works (*The Faerie Queene*, William Shakespeare's *Tempest*, John Donne's sermons) with textual products less commonly subjected to this kind of close reading and discursive analysis: occasional verse (Christopher Brooke's poem about a Powhatan attack on the Jamestown settlement, Joshua Sylvester's verse commentary on the dangers of coffee); political tracts (King James I's *Counterblaste against Tobacco*, economist Gerard Malynes's treatises on international trade); and practical advice manuals (physician Thomas Trapham's book on medicine in Jamaica; merchant Thomas Tryon's polemic on dietary temperance). By taking an expansive approach both to the objects of study and to the signifying potential of this crucial virtue, *Colonial Virtue* aims to advance a comprehensive understanding of temperance in all of its philosophical and political dimensions, and to demonstrate the virtue's pivotal role in shaping early modern debates over the ethics and conduct of English colonialism.

It is this methodological and interpretive breadth that distinguishes *Colonial Virtue* from extant work on temperance in Renaissance literature and culture. Recent work by early modern scholars evinces a growing interest in the virtue of temperance as a meaningful cultural category in Renaissance England. Michael Schoenfeldt's *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (1999) started the conversation by

considering temperance in its physiological dimension: the humoral equilibrium maintained through acts of eating, drinking, and elimination. A riposte to the Foucauldian understanding of discipline as a mechanism of cultural oppression, Schoenfeldt's book argued for temperance as a mechanism of self-fashioning – a democratic and material complement to Latinate humanistic scholarship.⁷ Expanding this purview to include various articulations of *mediocritas*, Joshua Scodel's *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (2002) considered the strategic deployments of the middle way as an aesthetic, ethical, and political ideal in early modern culture.⁸ Combining erudite literary analysis with nuanced historical and political insights, Scodel argued that English Renaissance literature bears witness to a cultural preoccupation with temperance, and other forms of moderation, among the social and intellectual elite, often to ironic or subversive effect. Published almost concurrently, Mary Floyd-Wilson's *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (2003) examined theories of climate, geography, race, and humoral temperament – discourses she collectively terms 'geohumoralism' – to demonstrate the relevance of temperance to Renaissance ethnography, racial ideology, and attendant political discourses.⁹ Applicable not only to individual human subjects but to entire nations and regions of the world, Floyd-Wilson's version of temperance designated an equilibrium among such diverse forces as climatological influence, geographical location, dietary composition, and cultural habit.

While Schoenfeldt, Scodel, and Floyd-Wilson have drawn attention to the various resonances of temperance and its Renaissance cognates, other critics have recognized the term's relevance to English ideology and practice in the early decades of New World colonialism and settlement. In 1986, John Gillies noticed the centrality of the virtue in early English moralizing of the Jamestown settlers, whose intemperance was blamed for their failures of health and productivity.¹⁰ A decade later, Lorna Hutson's persuasive article 'Chivalry for Merchants; or, Knights of Temperance in the Realms of Gold' analysed temperance as a term used by English merchants and humanists to differentiate themselves, ethically and strategically, from the Spanish *conquistadores*.¹¹ Similarly, David T. Read's *Temperate Conquest: Spenser and the Spanish New World* (2000) offers a thorough and incisive reading of Spenser's 'Legend of Temperance' as an apologia for England's late entrance onto the scene of New World colonialism.¹²

Colonial Virtue, in turn, argues that the New World context identified by Gillies, Hutson, and Read has profound implications not only for

literary interpretations of Spenser and chivalric romance more generally, as their arguments show, but also for the scholarly understanding of Renaissance English political ethics. New World colonialism, I argue, is both an occasion for and, in part, a political realization of temperance in its most expansive sense: an ethical imperative on which English poets, sermonists, politicians, economists, physicians, and patriots focused their colonial ambitions and reservations. This book thus aims both to synthesize and to expand the extant body of scholarship on temperance: first by considering another, under-explored dimension of the virtue of temperance – the temporal – which increased temperance’s viability as a political and economic rationale; and second by suggesting a specific historical context – the colonial – in which temperance’s various dimensions converge, and in which the virtue achieves a privileged status as a vital term of ethical contestation.

Finally, in the broadest methodological sense, *Colonial Virtue* aims to bridge the persistent divide between traditional philological and political postcolonial criticism. Grounded in an historically and linguistically nuanced intellectual history of temperance, the book draws on the work of such eminent scholars as Émile Mâle, Rosemond Tuve, Helen North, and Jacques LeGoff: exemplars of the explanatory power of historical and philological criticism.¹³ Simultaneously, in narrating temperance’s evolution into a touchstone for debates about New World colonialism, *Colonial Virtue* puts this intellectual history in conversation with postcolonial critics such as Andrew Hadfield, Willy Maley, Thomas Scanlan, and Shankar Raman.¹⁴ This book also aspires toward a methodology as expansive as its critical influences, including both literary and ‘non-literary’ texts as sites of close reading and linguistic analysis. By thus following the example of critics such as Judith Anderson, Andrea Finkelshtein, and Jonathan Gil Harris, *Colonial Virtue* argues for the value of philological and postcolonial approaches to texts not traditionally considered part of the literary canon.¹⁵ This book thus aims not only to advance a more comprehensive understanding of a particular Renaissance virtue and its politically inflected deployments, but also to model an expansive critical perspective that speaks across scholarly subfields, textual canons, and disciplinary bounds. In *Colonial Virtue*, I hope to chronicle the mobility of a particular concept in Renaissance philosophical, literary, and political discourse, while facilitating, and benefiting from, the mobility of extant scholarly conversations and methodologies.

Colonial Virtue begins by establishing a foundation in classical philosophy, philology, and iconographic history. Chapter 1, entitled ‘Temperance’s Renaissance Transformations,’ briefly surveys the place of temperance in classical Greek and Roman philosophy before turning to the conceptual transformations wrought by late medieval and early modern artists, writers, and philosophers. In readings of various artefacts of medieval and Renaissance visual culture, this introductory chapter chronicles the progressive temporalization of temperance, and, consequently, its entanglement with the values of patience, deferral, efficiency, and profitability. The chapter concludes by turning its attention to political texts concerned with colonial settlement in the New World, in which writers such as Richard Hakluyt and Richard Eburne invoke temperance, along with its subsidiary temporal values, as a warrant for English plantation and a guarantor of its success.

The remainder of the book proceeds in two parts, separated by chronology and textual genre. Part 1, ‘Temperance Explores America,’ comprises two chapters that focus on canonical literary texts: chapter 2 on book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*, and chapter 3 on *The Tempest*. As I will discuss, these texts have received substantial critical attention for their exploration of the ethical implications and consequences of New World colonialism. And yet despite their clear resonances with the colonial New World, Spenser’s poem and Shakespeare’s play are not so much definitive as exploratory in their applications of temperance to the New World context. Part 1 thus considers the way in which these canonical texts extend temperance experimentally into the discursive territory of New World colonialism, and of the pre-capitalist economic practices and ideologies concurrent with early American settlement. Building on the aforementioned interest in temperance as a virtue of temporal control, these literary texts, I argue, explore temperance’s imbrication with such pre-capitalist economic concerns as efficiency, commodification, and primitive accumulation, especially as they influenced England’s early New World ventures. Published before the establishment of any English settlements in the New World, the primary texts I treat in these chapters serve as imaginative explorations of the geographic expansion, economic prosperity, and ethical quandaries that might be produced by temperance’s invocation and exercise in England’s New World endeavours.

Chapter 2, ‘Edmund Spenser’s “Blood Guiltie” Temperance,’ investigates such imaginative explorations in three episodes from book 2 of Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (entitled ‘The Legend of

Temperance'): the deaths and burials of Mortdant and Amavia at the outset of the book, the hero's descent into the Cave of Mammon, and his destruction of the Bower of Bliss. Reading these episodes sequentially, I argue that Guyon replaces his early tendency toward affect and empathy with a rigorously mercantile version of temperance. Destroying the Bower of Bliss in the episode I describe above, I argue, Guyon evinces the affective poverty of this virtue in its newly quantitative guise. In Spenser's view, the temporal and quantitative elements of temperance lead finally to complicity in the forced labour and primitive accumulation of New World colonialism. Temperance, in this context, comes to represent not the moderation but the abandonment of affective generosity on which mercy – both human and divine – depends.

Departing from Spenser's pun on 'tempest' and 'temperance,' chapter 3 – 'Intemperance and "Weak Remembrance" in *The Tempest*' – is grounded in two primary sources: Shakespeare's late romance play and John Florio's 1603 translation of Montaigne's *Essays*, a text cited verbatim in *The Tempest* but nowhere else in the Shakespearean oeuvre. I argue that the play uses the eponymous tempest – alongside other acts of colonial, magical, and political power – to critique New World colonialism on the grounds of its intemperance. Adducing as relevant context not only the cited passage but two Montaigne essays in their entirety – 'On Cannibals' and 'On Liars' – I combine postcolonial and comparativist approaches, arguing that the play represents acts of forgetting by its European characters as constitutive of intemperate colonial rule. Although certain kinds of merciful forgetting are requisite to the play's comedic ending, *The Tempest* nevertheless registers the costs of such narrative harmony by calling attention to the intemperate erasures that facilitate this comic conclusion, which comprises a consolidation of European political and colonial power.

Part 2, 'Temperance Colonizes America,' considers texts produced in the explicit context of England's colonial presence in the New World. These primary texts comprise not imaginative projections about how temperance might participate in new political and economic formations, but critical evaluations of how the virtue signifies in such new contexts. Observing and manipulating temperance's semantic flexibility, the texts considered in this section consider this virtue's entanglement in the realities of English New World colonialism: commodity culture, militant revenge, and ethnographic racism. Part 2 includes primary texts from a variety of genres that would now qualify as 'non-fiction,' including sermons, elegies, health manuals,

and political pamphlets. While such texts constitute less traditional objects of literary analysis than epic-romance poetry and theatrical comedy, my readings aim to demonstrate that, no less than Spenser's and Shakespeare's, these documents continue to experiment with temperance's broad capacity for polysemy, using that virtue both to critique and to defend England's conduct in the New World. Part 1 traced early literary and imaginative experiments in temperance's capacity to represent England's hopes and fears about New World settlement; part 2, building on such precedents, considers texts that take for granted the importance of temperance for understanding, justifying, and governing England's presence and expansion in the New World. These texts use temperance to measure the extent, the potential, and the definition of English prosperity and success in the American context.

Chapter 4, 'John Donne, Christopher Brooke, and Temperate Revenge in 1622 Jamestown,' launches this critical venture into less canonical, but equally politically provocative, terrain. This chapter takes as its primary texts two rhetorical responses to the 22 March 1622 Powhatan attack on the English settlement in Jamestown, Virginia: John Donne's sermon 'To the Honorable, the Virginia Company,' delivered in November; and Christopher Brooke's verse invective 'A Poem on the Late Massacre in Virginia,' most likely published in September of the same year. A study in contrasts, these texts illuminate the rhetorical sea change undergone by temperance during the preceding decades. Donne in fact never names temperance outright in the sermon, which is thus an unlikely candidate for inclusion in this project. But Donne, I argue, uses all of the markers of temperance discourse without using the term, inviting speculation about his careful avoidance of the virtue of temperance *per se*. The sermon offers one explanation for this deliberate side-stepping, I argue, in its denigration of the voracious English appetite for New World commodities. Donne hesitates to identify temperance by name because of temperance's emergent cultural role as a publicly administered commodity, which renders it as susceptible to fetishization as the 'trees, or druggs, or Dyes' whose material allure distracts New World settlers from their missionary charge. Christopher Brooke, on the other hand, evinces no such compunction. An outraged, vitriolic, and racist incitement to vengeance, Brooke's poem simultaneously advocates complete extermination of the native Americans and, bizarrely, classifies his response as an explicitly 'temperate' one. Reviling the settlers' sense of 'security' as vulnerability, Brooke recommends a policy of pre-emptive violence, such that 'fear'd danger' prompts anticipatory

violence even ‘absent anger’ or provocation. In Brooke’s poem, temperance comes to occupy the space of pre-emptive passion – a virtue not of postponement but of prolepsis.

Chapter 5 turns its attention entirely away from literary productions, and toward texts produced explicitly as meditations on colonialism and its economic consequences. Entitled ‘Globalizing Temperance in Seventeenth-Century Economics,’ this chapter tests the rhetorical range of temperance’s discursive diffusion during the early decades of English colonialism. In a two-part analysis – divided by chronology, geography, and field of expertise – this chapter investigates the function of temperance in economic and medical texts, where it paradoxically names both the resistance to and the inevitability of England’s New World colonialism. The first half of the chapter considers two economic tracts produced early in the seventeenth century, exploring the invocation of temperance as an ethical ideal by which to judge the health of the body politic. James I’s famous *Counterblaste to Tobacco* (1603) and Gerard Malynes’s anti-usury treatise *Saint George for England Allegorically Described* (1601) both cite temperance in the service of economic conservatism, decrying England’s appetite for foreign luxury goods. But precisely because temperance has achieved such discursive fluency over the preceding century, I argue, such invocations are counterproductive, for temperance resonates not only in the national context, but internationally, to imply the health and vigour of a global body politic. Despite their fierce attempts to defend a protectionist agenda, both tracts yield their desire for stasis to temperance’s conceptual mobility, acquiescing to the inevitability of continued New World investment. Pursuing temperance along this trajectory of continued and increasing mobility, the second half of chapter 5 focuses on three medical manuals of the 1670s and 1680s. William Hughes, Thomas Trapham, and John Chamberlayne, writing enthusiastically about their experiences as physicians and pharmacological botanists in the New World, invoke temperance in its full discursive range to advocate English colonial settlement and primitive accumulation. Specifically, these writers praise New World commodities such as tea and chocolate as temperate substances, defining the virtue in radically mercantile terms. The temperance praised by Hughes, Trapham, and Chamberlayne is a virtue of temporal control and efficiency, important because it sustains the labour of colonial construction, plantation, and governance. Temperance in this sense opens up to the English writers yet another horizon of discovery – not

of new lands or botanical wonders, but of additional *time*, additional hours of wakefulness in which to labour. As earlier chapters showed, temperance was once adduced as an ethical justification of New World settlement. By the end of the seventeenth century, I demonstrate here, the success of the colonial settlement serves, in turn, as the criterion by which New World commodities are judged to be temperate. Temperance seems to yield its mobility to the colonial project itself; the virtue formerly invoked to defend colonialism becomes subservient to the colonial project, redefined as a mere accessory to the inevitable forward march of English colonial ambition.

The conclusion to *Colonial Virtue* offers a brief reading of Thomas Tryon's popular advice manual *A Discourse of Temperance* (1683) to provide a retrospective vantage on the heyday of temperance's cultural and political importance. By the dawn of the 'long eighteenth century,' England's commitment to New World colonialism was well established in the historical record; apologists no longer needed to rely on the unimpeachable English ideal of temperance to defend a moribund political venture. Recognizing and decrying the colonial appropriation of temperance during the preceding century, Tryon pairs his jeremiad for the decline of this 'most excellent (though most neglected) Virtue in the World' with a committed ideology of anti-imperialism. Giving voice to an 'East Indian Brackmanny' and 'an Ethiopian or Negro-Slave' in fictional dialogues with European colonists, Tryon reassigns temperance to the colonized subjects rather than the European colonizers, and attempts to restore the virtue to what he understands to be its original, ideologically uninflected, sense. Tryon's commentary, I suggest, serves as a valuable, historically proximate cognate for the critical perspective that I aim to provide in *Colonial Virtue*. His bitterly aggrieved sense of temperance's decline serves as a useful measure of how far the virtue migrated during the first century of England's New World colonial endeavours; his call to reinvigorate this faltering virtue testifies to the dénouement of temperance's colonial career. And yet: the fact that even Tryon reassigns temperance not to some other theatre of action, but to the oppressed colonized subject, suggests that temperance may yet prove to play a role in adjudicating political morality in the eighteenth century.

Temperance's career as a colonial watchword has any number of analogues in various eras of political ambition, action, and contestation. A brief survey of recent American political discourse reveals a host of terms that deserve their own rhetorical and intellectual histories: 'globalization,'

'terrorism,' 'national security,' 'stimulus,' 'bipartisan,' 'postpartisan,' and so on. It is against terms like these – whose strategic deployment to various political ends invites suspicions of disingenuousness if not outright doublespeak – that George Orwell rails in the conclusion to 'Politics and the English Language,' where he identifies some of his own bugbears of euphemism and indirection (*jackboot, Achilles' heel, hotbed, melting pot, acid test, veritable inferno*). Orwell would consign these 'worn-out and useless phrase[s] . . . into the dustbin, where [they] belong[.]' Perhaps the history of the term 'temperance' would satisfy Orwell's desire for lexical housecleaning. Formerly saturated with colonial ideology, this once consequential virtue has since been leached of political consequence, retaining only a whiff of quaint and archaic morality in twenty-first century diction. Few would disagree with Orwell that euphemistic tendencies once concealed under the cloak of temperance are well dispensed with. But by recovering the story of temperance's rhetorical mobility, *Colonial Virtue* aims to expose both the motivations and the machinery of such appropriations.

1 Temperance's Renaissance Transformations

One block from my office in the English department at Northwestern University is the Frances Willard House Museum, home and workplace of the eponymous nineteenth-century social reformer from 1865 to 1898.¹ Frances E. Willard served as the president of the Evanston College for Ladies, and subsequently as the first Dean of Women at Northwestern, before committing herself to the Temperance Crusade at both the local and national levels. Co-founder and second president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Willard orated, marched, rallied, and evangelized, on a mission 'to deliver those who are held in slavery by their own appetites and passions.'² That description comes from an admiring letter to Willard written in 1883 by Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose extension of the language of slavery to the temperance movement attests to the social and political urgency attendant on the latter cause. Perceived as coterminous with abolitionism, women's suffrage, and urban poverty reform, temperance commanded both lofty moral authority and political vitality in the nineteenth century, in devoutly Methodist Evanston, Illinois and throughout the United States.

More than a century later, temperance's fortunes seem to have declined. No longer a matter of political urgency, the virtue seems rather to have settled into the role of a quaint ideological relic. Even in Evanston, an intellectually and culturally vibrant suburb of Chicago, the Frances Willard House generates enough interest for only one semi-weekly tour, held on the first and third Sunday of each month. This obsolescence might be readily ascribed to temperance's historically vital, but by now superseded understandings of alcohol's social and physiological effects; of evangelism's usefulness as a tool of social

reform; and of the universal relevance of any given institutionalized religion. To the extent that potential visitors to the Frances Willard House consider the history of temperance prior to the nineteenth century, they might assimilate the concept to simple moderation, or perhaps the Aristotelian mean – certainly among the least sexy bequests of Greco-Roman culture to the contemporary West.

As my introduction suggests, though, nineteenth-century social reform and Prohibition were not the first occasions for temperance's rise to social and political prominence. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English culture, temperance became a term of enormous political, social, and ethical currency – one in whose name writers of different ideological and literary proclivities evaluated both the promise and the peril of England's colonial ventures in the New World. Before temperance moved to the Frances Willard House, its storied history included many other migrations, both discursive – from the scholarly texts of classical and humanistic Europe into the political and economic vocabularies of the nascent British Empire – and geographic – from Continental Europe to England, and then across the Atlantic to colonial America. The chapter that follows offers an intellectual history that seeks to recover the sources and the historical conditions of temperance's Renaissance rise to political relevance, surveying the place of temperance in classical Greek and Roman philosophy, and then turning to the conceptual transformations wrought by late medieval and early modern visual artists, writers, and philosophers. By recovering the process of temperance's radical overdetermination in late medieval and early Renaissance texts – attending especially to the virtue's imbrication with concepts of time and temporality – this chapter reveals temperance as a vital category of not only ethical, but also political and economic evaluation in Renaissance England. By tracing temperance's evolution through a variety of media and discourses – statues, paintings, and raisin barrels, as well as texts from ancient philosophy, medieval theology, and Renaissance exploration – I aim to belie this virtue's ostensible conservatism, and to reveal the political, and especially the colonial, currency it enjoyed in Renaissance Europe, too long obscured from critical attention.

Aristotle in Renaissance England

The philosophical and ethical primacy of the virtue of temperance predates the Renaissance by at least seventeen centuries. In the

Eudemian Ethics, Aristotle identifies temperance with his theory of the mean, defining the virtue as the moderation of the innate human desire for ‘pleasant sensible objects,’ ‘such things as nearly everyone must share in and take pleasure in.’ ‘[I]f temperance is the best disposition concerning [such] things,’ Aristotle explains, ‘the mean state regarding the pleasant sensible objects . . . will be temperance, a mean state between profligacy and insensibility.’³ Although the *Nicomachean Ethics* complicates the matter – restricting the virtue to pleasures shared by animals, and relating it to corporeal health⁴ – this provisional definition attests to temperance’s centrality to Aristotle’s ethical philosophy, since all virtue, according to Aristotle, represents a mean (*mesotes*) between extremes of excess and deficiency.⁵ Courage is the virtuous mean between fearfulness and rashness; justice the virtuous mean between mercy and vengeance; and so on. Identified with moderation and the *mesotes* between extremes, temperance thus provides the foundation, for Aristotle, for all virtuous impulse and activity.

Appropriately for such a philosophical postulate – but ironically given the virtue’s Renaissance transformations, as we will see – Aristotelian temperance comprises a stable and untroubled relationship between the subject and the ‘pleasant sensible objects’ s/he desires. Temperance (*sophrosyne*) is thereby distinguished, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (VII.2), from the ancillary capacity for continence (*enkrateia*), a trait that, although praiseworthy, does not reach the perfection of an ethical virtue. For the temperate individual, the intellect dominates the irrational appetites entirely; indulgence in the vices is no longer tempting. The continent individual, on the other hand, continues to experience the pull of appetitive desires, but resists acting on such impulses by cleaving to rationality. Continence continues the struggle that temperance has already won.

When Renaissance humanists inherit these philosophical concepts, they effect a series of revisions that not only reverse the Aristotelian binary, but further prioritize agonism, efficiency, and quantity – values that are tenuously related even to continence, in its classical instantiation, but that instead assimilate temperance to the demands of nascent mercantilism, primitive accumulation, and colonial endeavour. These additional dimensions accrue to the virtue slowly and unevenly. But even some early modern texts that appear to preserve the Aristotelian distinction between temperance and continence in fact portend the gradual transformation of this cardinal virtue. One such

ostensibly Aristotelian text is Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, reproduced here in Sir Thomas Hoby's 1561 English translation:

And therefore I say unto you, that continencie may be compared to a Capitaine that fighteth manlie, and though his ennemies be stronge and well appointed, yet geveth he them the overthrowe, but for al that not without much a do and daunger. But temperance free from all disquietinge, is like the Capitaine that without resistance overcommeth and reigneth. And havinge in the mynde where she is, not onlie assuaged, but cleane quenched the fire of gredie desire . . . [temperance] maketh him quiet and full of rest, in everie part equall and of good proportion . . . fille[d] . . . with such a cleare caulmenesse, that he is never out of pacience: and becommeth full and wholly most obedient to reason, and readie to tourn unto her all his motions, and folow her where she lust to leade him, without anie resistance, like a tender lambe that renneth, standeth and goith alwaies by the ewes side, and moveth only as he seeth her do. This vertue therefore is most perfect, and is cheeflie requisit in Princis, bicause of it arrise manie other.⁶

Castiglione and his Signore Octaviano follow Aristotle in lauding temperance over continence, because it represents a more 'perfect' conquest of the passions, a more sophisticated state in the evolution of the rational humanistic subject, and an ethical foundation for other virtues. And yet Castiglione's analogies betray a wistful regret about the Aristotelian hierarchy. What courtier would not prefer to be a 'Capitaine that fighteth manlie' than a 'tender lambe' who dotes on the every gesture of his mother the ewe? Indeed, at the outset of the book, Castiglione's nobles identify the very martial prowess that is identified here with continence as the 'principall and true profession of a Courtyer,' who ought 'to bee knowen among other for his hardinesse.' The courtier must excel in 'feates of armes' more than in 'other qualities . . . requisite in a capitaine.'⁷ Despite Castiglione's fidelity to the Aristotelian hierarchy of temperance over continence, his courtiers romanticize the heroic agonism of the perpetual rational struggle against appetitive desire – a characteristic of both classical continence and early modern ambition.

A similar reversal, and a similar combination of classicism and mercantile ambition, informs the most famous Renaissance literary treatment of temperance: book 2 of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser dubs the second of his six epic-romantic quests 'The Legend of