

Chapter 3

MAD MANNERS

Courtesy, Conflict, and Social Change

—SARAH CONRAD SOURS

A strange little scene occurs late in the first season of *Mad Men*. One would be hard-pressed to justify isolating any one strange little scene in a series full of them, especially to justify the claim that one's pet scene reveals what the series is "all about." The series is about many things, and there are many strange little scenes to tip us viewers off to the writers' interests and to engage and encourage our own. Our most compelling interests are always ourselves, of course, and the strangeness of strange scenes provides a thin barrier to our seeing ourselves in them or through them. Like good science fiction and speculative fiction, good period fiction is as much about the creator's period as about the period depicted; we must meet ourselves as strangers in order better to understand ourselves.

The strange scene I mean takes place during the overnight festivities accompanying the 1960 presidential election.¹ Two supporting characters enact a parody for the rest of the office, a one-scene play that will show the gathered crowd its own fundamental conflict—what Dr. Miller will later describe as the fundamental conflict of "what I want versus what's expected

1. "Nixon vs. Kennedy," S1/E12.

of me.”² Ken Cosgrove and Allison the secretary³ enact the scene. She walks by, and he initiates a chase: “You better run.” She accepts (that is, she starts giggling and running). The men in the room know Ken’s purpose before she does. They start guessing colors. Only when Ken “catches” her does he reveal what game they have been playing: he will forcibly discover the color of her underwear, literally uncovering it and displaying it to the public eye. When he has done so (“Who had blue?”), he pulls her up, offers his arm, and says, “Can I walk you home?” making an elaborate show of the ending of a pleasant date. This parody of rape followed by a parody of courtesy plays to laughs and cheers and inspires at least one copycat couple. (Immediately afterward, a man takes down another giggling secretary in the background.) Peggy Olson quietly makes her exit, but no one else seems to understand the full meaning of the little play. It serves, for them, as mere entertainment.

This little one-scene play represents what the entire series will be for us viewers: a play that shows us who we are, but by parodying us to ourselves so well that we risk being satisfied with the entertainment of it. The series has signaled from the first episode that courtesy will be a key lens through which to view the characters: small gestures of courtesy and discourtesy will reveal their personalities, motivations, and moral frameworks. More importantly, courtesy will be a lens through which to examine the immense change being wrought both in the time period depicted and, possibly, in our own. By the time Ken comically offers Allison his arm, we understand that this series will not allow us to content ourselves with comfortably simplistic analyses.

COURTESY AND SOCIAL CONTROL

A simplistic definition of courtesy might place it on the “what’s expected of us” side of that fundamental conflict Dr. Miller names. Courtesy is, minimally speaking, a set of social behaviors broadly considered normative in a given society. Other people in society expect certain behaviors of us when we interact with them, and they sufficiently communicate those expectations such that fulfilling them is possible. It is expected that I offer my girlfriend my arm as I walk her home; it is expected that I smile up at my boyfriend as he walks me home. If these expectations are not met, one or both parties will notice. This basic understanding of courtesy will get us through the first

2. “Christmas Comes But Once a Year,” S4/E2.

3. Secretaries don’t require last names, at least not until they manage to become engaged to one of the partners. Unlike “Miss Calvet” (“Tomorrowland,” S4/E13), Allison never manages to do that, so she must remain without a last name.

few episodes of the series well enough, but as the series progresses, understanding its cultural critique requires a fuller description of what courtesy is and how it functions. The series does not itself offer such a description, even in bits and pieces, but it does evidence a sophisticated understanding of the cultural function of courtesy. Thus, it enables the viewer to see that courtesy is not simply on the “what’s expected of me” side of the conflict; it is instead an integral part of the fruitfulness of the conflict itself. Courtesy may depend on expectations, but it is not simply a list of expectations that one may adhere to or transgress. It is instead a system of communicating, renegotiating, and enforcing desirable social behaviors.

One can distinguish this system from other systems of communicating, renegotiating, and enforcing behavior, even when those systems overlap. Although the first communicators and enforcers of courtesy are parents, courtesy is distinguishable from familial culture in that the parents’ wishes are subject to norms beyond themselves. The parent teaches the child *society’s* expectations, apart from and in addition to his own.⁴ Although religiously-framed moral values may undergird both the content and the goal of courtesy rituals, courtesy is distinguishable from religion in that it can and does exist in religiously plural societies. Different courtesy rules may apply between religious strangers than between religious friends, but the existence of rituals that do not presume religious agreement, or that negotiate potential hazards of cross-religious interactions, suggests that courtesy has a different function than religion.⁵ Moreover, courtesy norms are often framed without specific reference to the ultimate reality addressed by religious systems, again suggesting that its functions are separable from the functions of religion.⁶ Although courtesy norms, like legal ones, are systematic, promulgated, changeable, and enforced, courtesy is distinguishable from law in that its norms are promulgated, enumerated, adapted, and enforced without reference to the coercive power of the state. Discourtesy is not criminal and does not incur civil liability, and responsibility for its correction is diffused throughout society rather than concentrated in any

4. This is most obvious when a parent distinguishes between public and private behavior: “When we’re at home, you can do such-and-such, but when we go out to eat, you must thus-and-so.”

5. There is, admittedly, a certain Euro-centrism to this claim. It presumes the particularly Western notion of religion as an entity distinguishable from culture. Confucianism, if it is a religion at all, makes no appreciable distinction between religion and courtesy.

6. Again, this claim is easier to sustain in a predominately Western discourse. The substitution of “ultimate reality” for “a divine figure” is intended to make room for various forms of monism, non-theism, and humanism as religious entities, but such an inclusion is not self-evidently justified.

governing body. Courtesy, then, is a form of social control that extends beyond the family unit, that is intelligible without reference to ultimate reality, and that functions without recourse to state-sanctioned violence.

As a form of social control, courtesy has two primary elements: the grammatical and the political. These two factors are distinguishable but inseparable: the gestures of courtesy are a kind of language shared by the participants, the goal of which is the management of power differentials. Actions have meaning apart from the verbal utterances that may accompany them, a meaning that may reinterpret the verbal utterances themselves. Gestures must be capable of making statements, asking questions, correcting misunderstandings, offering persuasion, and signaling assent. That shared grammar of behavior allows the communication of relative status and power within a particular social body, of compliance and violation, and of the imposition of sanctions. If actions can have meaning, they must also have structures of intelligibility that allow for communication and secondary reflection on their meaning in ways that may be equally non-verbal. We might call these structures the rituals of courtesy—complex interactions that are often minutely scripted such that all parties involved can be trained in their performance and meaning.

These communications facilitate relatively peaceable social interaction. To be “in society”—that is, to be with at least one other person—is to be in a relationship at least partly structured by status and power differences. Where power differences exist, so too does danger. Personal insults can lead to interpersonal violence,⁷ or they may poison future relationships,⁸ so courtesy norms guide individuals in not offering insults, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Courtesy cannot manage power differentials, however, without attending to them rather minutely. One needs to know one’s status and power *relative to* another person, so that one can show appropriate deference, exercise appropriate authority, use appropriate forms of address, and so on. Courtesy norms, then, allow one to judge one’s position in and relationship to other members of the social body so that positional and relational differences may be observed. Compliance with those norms both acknowledges *and perpetuates* the status and power differentials being negotiated. By last-naming those whom I am expected to last-name and by answering to my first name when those who are authorized to first-name me do so and by insisting that those unauthorized to first-name me use

7. Witness Lane Pryce’s and Pete Campbell’s fisticuffs in “Signal 30,” S5/E5.

8. So, Roger Sterling can’t do client hospitality late in the series because of his prior discourtesies toward Burt Peterson. (“New Business,” S7/E9.)

my last name, I submit to and enforce the distribution of status that drives naming conventions.

To describe courtesy in such a way is already to acknowledge that courtesy is a moral undertaking, or at least an activity that admits of moral inflection. Any of the elements of courtesy described above may be described in moral terms. The preference for peaceable rather than violent interactions may be described as a moral preference rather than a self-interested one; the obligation to preserve social order may be described as a moral obligation rather than a pragmatic one; submission to socially constituted authority may be described as a just recognition of morally constituted authority. As a careful study in the minutia of social courtesies, *Mad Men* is also at least potentially a careful study in the ethics of being in society.

COURTESY AS MORALITY

How courtesy relates to morality is a difficult question. Many characters in the series are portrayed operating under the conventional assumption that courtesy is transparent to substantive morality. Courteous people are good people, and rude people are not. Roger Sterling's secretary, Caroline, seems genuinely grieved by the death of Roger's mother—whom she liked because “she was always so polite to me, when she could hear me.”⁹ Mrs. Sterling must have been good, however little Caroline knew her, because she was courteous to Caroline. Courteous people are morally good, and morally good people are courteous. Conversely, failures of courtesy indicate moral failures. Rebecca Pryce—comparing American to British life with a pair of fellow expatriates—says, “I don't find Britain any more moral than here nowadays. The boys look like girls, and the girls . . . they don't seem to be concerned with manners, do they?” She equates manners with morals, and both can be judged by dress—that is, by how an individual has decked his body out in symbols of submission to or rejection of cultural expectations.¹⁰ Betty Draper, wishing to deliver a stinging rebuke to squatters who didn't help her locate a runaway, accuses them of the worst thing she can think of—bad manners: “You have bad manners. You deserve to live in the street of this pigsty, and I hope you get tetanus or crabs or whatever else is crawling around here.”¹¹ Bad manners not only merit disapproval, they

9. “The Doorway,” S6/E1.

10. “Signal 30,” S5/E5. For an example of how such social pressures function without recourse to governmental control, see Graybill and Arthur, “Social Control,” 25–26.

11. “The Doorway,” S6/E1.

merit divine or karmic retribution in the form of the worst things she can think of—disease and a filthy home.

These are unsophisticated, unreflective judgments about trivial matters. But courtesy is treated as a guide to character in more substantive matters as well. When Joan and Greg Harris give a dinner party in their home for his boss, a colleague, and their wives, his boss's wife clearly feels confident evaluating Greg's fitness to be a surgeon (which entails more than his competence *as* a surgeon) through *his* wife's ability to host a dinner party. "The fact that Greg can get a woman like you" means that his career prospects must be good.¹² Joan's creative confidence in entertaining evidences her good character, and her good character evidences his. Greg understands this dynamic as well as Joan, even to the extent that they fight over the seating arrangements for the dinner. Greg wants to cede the head of the table to his boss, knowing the man will expect such deference, while Joan wants to seat people according to Emily Post's guide, knowing that their wives will expect such evidence of correct etiquette. Both the deference and the etiquette signal fitness for membership in the society of surgeons and their wives; they signal a willingness to conform to the expectations of the group to which the Harrises wish to belong. Good manners portend good professional and personal relationships.¹³

Similarly, Don Draper unknowingly woos an important client with his easy manners. Discovering the country club's bar untended and another guest looking for a drink, he jumps behind the bar, makes a drink for himself and the guest, and engages him in a brief conversation. His small kindness—offering a drink, offering conversation, offering sympathy and a funny story—makes an outsized impression on the stranger, later revealed to be hotel magnate Conrad Hilton.¹⁴ The anonymity of the exchange elicits Connie's positive evaluation: Don's casual courtesy is extended to the other man as a fellow man, not as a potential client. Overly accustomed, we are perhaps meant to infer, to a certain deference because of his name, he appreciates Don's courtesy all the more because it was offered freely, without reference to Connie's status. Of course, Connie misreads his own motivation. We have only to imagine Hollis, the black elevator operator, or Betty, the proper housewife, in Don's place to understand why.¹⁵ Only a gentle-

12. "My Old Kentucky Home," S3/E3.

13. Creatively confident hostess that she is, Joan comes up with a solution to this argument, on which more below.

14. "My Old Kentucky Home," S3/E3.

15. Roger Sterling has primed us to think of men like Hollis, by performing in blackface in the preceding scene, and the comparison with Betty will suggest itself a few scenes later when she meets her own mysteriously significant stranger.

man of a certain race and class can share a drink with Connie, man to man. A “negro” or a “girl” doing the same would merely be fulfilling an expected service, one he would scarcely notice. Don’s careless confidence signals membership, just as Joan’s good housekeeping does. Don, like Connie, was not born to wealth, but now Don, like Connie, belongs in formalwear at a country club and can thus be trusted with Connie’s business. Whatever Connie’s self-understanding, the near-identity of manners and morals remains: the small kindness of ducking behind the bar to make himself and a stranger a drink is taken as evidence of something more substantive, something worth using to guide business decisions.

Shared courtesy norms communicate belonging, just as courtesy missteps can signal not-belonging. Not-belonging is expressed in subtle ways: through ignorance of another’s language of courtesy, through blocked or repulsed offers of courtesy, and through refusal to extend courtesies to perceived outsiders.¹⁶ Though Peggy Olson’s date attempts to be courteous (accepting a meal he didn’t order), he misfires at first because Peggy is “the kind of girl that doesn’t put up with things.”¹⁷ She doesn’t initially interpret his reluctance to correct the order as an expression of courtesy. Presumably intended as a kindness both to the waiter, by not troubling him, and to his date, by not causing a potentially embarrassing scene, Stevie’s offer of courtesy is misunderstood because he offers it in a social language Peggy does not share. Peggy, accustomed to issuing directives by this point in the series, does not see the trouble to the waiter, and would not be embarrassed. Don knows enough to bring food to a family sitting shiva, but not enough to know what to do with his shoes or the definition of a minyan or why he can’t be counted in one. His offer to help make up the minyan is blocked, but not even directly—his status as an outsider is disclosed from one insider to the other: “He can’t. He’s not Jewish.”¹⁸ Shirley and Dawn can know themselves to be outsiders—if they were confused on that point—because few at SC&P trouble to distinguish between the two black secretaries, confusing their names often enough that it becomes a shared joke between the two.¹⁹ Learning names is an offer of courtesy no one bothers to extend the women—it

16. Although one could reference the economic language of blocked exchanges, the language here is from improvisatory theater. I am indebted to Samuel Wells’s discussion on offering, accepting, and blocking, in *Improvisation*, 103–14.

17. “Severance,” S7/E8.

18. *Ibid.* Even after these small proofs of his ignorance, he interrupts Barbara in order to pretend to knowledge he doesn’t entirely have—“I’ve lived in New York a long time”—blocking his hostess’s gentle offers of cross-cultural courtesy, her willingness to serve as cultural translator for him.

19. “A Day’s Work,” S7/E2.

is blocked by social structures that influence perception and that explicitly name “negroes” as outsiders.

The cumulative effect of such blocked courtesies can be permanent hostility. Though we viewers are not witness to Ken Cosgrove’s relationship with other execs at McCann Erickson, we see the result. Ferguson Donnelly accuses him of ethnocentric arrogance: unlike Cosgrove, other people “don’t walk around the office like their shit doesn’t stink, and then go out and tell the world we’re, what, a bunch of black Irish thugs?”²⁰ That it is phrased as a question tells us what we need to know: there need have been no direct confrontations, no blatant insults (of the sort to which Peggy and Joan will be subjected at McCann), no overt shows of contempt. Their mutual dislike was likely cemented by a series of miscues, blocked courtesies willfully misinterpreted as petty discourtesies, originating, perhaps, in cultural distance and spurred on by intellectual dissimilarity. Cosgrove, in his turn, knows he is not one of them: “I never fit in. I’m not Irish, I’m not Catholic, I can read.” Their private lives—the literary pursuits Cosgrove carefully hides from his colleagues and the narrowness and chauvinism McCann execs try to gloss over with charm—cannot mesh, and even though they are kept rigorously private, the difference generates public strife. Ken and Ferg have nothing to share apart from work, no social or religious ties in common, nothing to bridge the gap between the civility owed relative strangers and the kindnesses exchanged between genuine intimates. Their attempts at connection have gone awry, and nothing remains but to assume the worst of each other.

Courtesy can have this function because courtesy norms both presume and enact a kind of agreement on moral norms. Only shared judgments about good and bad, right and wrong, things worth pursuing and things worth avoiding sustain shared social rituals. Only a shared understanding of how claims to status are sorted out at a dinner table can provide guidance in arranging the seats (or in selecting the right manual for providing such guidance). Only a shared understanding of the moral status of the nuclear family and its relationship to the state can provide a justification for preferring the liturgy of the Draper’s family meal to the squatter’s scavenged goulash. Only a shared understanding of who ought to serve and who ought to be served and in what manner can provide a foil against which making someone a drink can be understood as exceptional and therefore indicative of anything in particular. By acting out the rituals correlative to these shared moral judgments, and by objecting to and correcting any transgression of them, group members confirm their membership in the group and signal their compliance with its moral norms. The acknowledged and implicit

20. “Severance,” S7/E8.

goods of a society are in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the rituals of social interactions.

Self-control is the primary moral value inscribed in courtesy expectations of the period of *Mad Men*. Where good morals and good manners coincide, their mutual expression bespeaks self-possession and restraint. Even good things must be expressed and enjoyed “tastefully” (that is, moderately). Roger, confronted with Don’s disgust at Roger’s behavior with his new wife, quotes his mother’s dictum, “it’s a mistake to be conspicuously happy.”²¹ But Roger has misapplied the dictum. He thinks his happiness with Jane has prompted anger and jealousy; he interprets his mother’s advice as a counsel to self-interested prudence. He should rather have understood that his unguarded displays of affection toward his second wife transgressed the boundaries of self-control. They were tasteless and vulgar precisely because they were so exuberant. Don does not allow Roger’s interpretation to stand: “No one thinks you’re happy. They think you’re foolish.” Roger’s exuberant affection becomes a social faux pas that opens him up to the private criticism of his peers, and shows him to be a man without wisdom. Don’s words prove apt, as, quite predictably, Roger’s open infatuation will soon turn to patent contempt. Roger ridicules Jane’s ignorance and youth to Don (“Which one is Mussolini?”), and later tells her to “shut up” when she asks the time.²² The man who cannot channel his emotions into socially acceptable forms cannot be trusted to guard those emotions when they endanger his relationships. He cannot be trusted to feel the right emotions at all.

Social expectations express this moral value but they also cultivate it. Peggy exemplifies moral formation through good manners.²³ Peggy seems not only to offer sincere expressions of courtesy, but also to cultivate her own self-mastery through adherence to courtesy norms. As such, she is implicitly contrasted with Pete Campbell—whose courtesies are often pro forma or transparently insincere and who is therefore never quite his own master. He is often shown as inept, someone whose attempts at courtesy are too ham-handed or ill-informed to be successful.²⁴ Most of his failures of

21. “My Old Kentucky Home,” S3/E3.

22. “A Little Kiss,” S5/E1.

23. The language of formation is different than the language of control used earlier. Both are necessary fully to understand the role of courtesy. One must describe the processes of social control in order to see how courtesy norms differ from laws and religious rituals. But the language of formation is necessary to see how courtesy norms are integrated into more explicit religious or philosophical commitments such that they cease to be merely external controls.

24. See, for example, his gift-giving missteps with Japanese executives from Honda (“The Chrysanthemum and the Sword,” S4/E5), or his clumsy attempt to school Lane Pryce in the etiquette of engagement congratulations (“Tomorrowland,” S4/E13). One

courtesy, though, are shown as failures of self-control. He is too selfish to master his negative emotions—which often leak out as peevish comments toward secretaries, his wife, and other subordinates.²⁵ He is excessively attentive to what is due his status, thus showing his insecurity with that status. A characteristic moment comes after the merger between SCDP and CGC: at their first joint conference meeting, to which he arrives late, he finds one chair too few at the table.²⁶ He asserts his authority over the recording secretary, asking her (not impolitely) to find him a seat; she instead offers him hers, which he accepts, prompting Ted Chaough, in turn, to offer his seat to the displaced woman. Though Roger Sterling diffuses the effect of Ted's gallantry by calling attention to it, the gesture has already shown Pete's status-consciousness to be clumsy and selfish. Similarly, when the firm rehires Freddy Rumsen after he achieves sobriety, Pete's concern with his own position blinds him to the fact that everyone else in the room intentionally avoids mention of Freddy's former drunkenness.²⁷ He intends to embarrass Freddy by bringing it up, but Sterling interrupts him (a superior can do that) to wrestle the conversation back to where it will preserve Freddy's dignity. Less concerned with others' status and feelings than his own, and too childish to exercise control over those feelings, he often causes embarrassment with his tactlessness.

Though Peggy, too, occasionally misspeaks in ways that create embarrassment, she more frequently exhibits courtesy toward those with whom she interacts. Many examples of Peggy's courtesy toward others are played for comic effect. Early in Season 3, she finds herself trapped in an incomprehensible conversation with Roger Sterling, who is emoting because his daughter has just threatened to disinvite him from her wedding.²⁸ True to form, his self-centeredness prevents him from engaging what she says, but she is enough master of herself to play her assigned role in the conversation. Similarly, much later in the series, she becomes trapped in a telephone conversation with Ted Chaough's pastor while trying to reach Ted.²⁹ Though on a matter of some urgency, she allows herself to be distracted by his in-

is "not supposed to congratulate the bride," true enough, but one is also not supposed to call attention to others' breaches of etiquette.

25. See, e.g., "Out of Town," S3/E1, after learning of Cosgrove's and his joint promotion; or "The Grown-Ups," S3/E12, where he takes out his bad mood on his secretary.

26. "Man with a Plan," S6/E7.

27. "Christmas Comes But Once a Year," S4/E2.

28. "Love Among the Ruins," S3/E2.

29. "The Doorway," S6/E1. This conversation immediately follows the exchange between Caroline and Roger Sterling, above, about his mother's courteousness. Thus the audience is primed to be attentive to Peggy's.

creasingly detailed questions about her family and religious upbringing. She cannot quite bring herself to refuse his questions or insult him, despite her frustration. (She does allow herself to challenge his handwriting speed.) She carefully couches her suggestion that he is a bad message-taker in respectful language. She even returns his closing salutations (presumably “Peace be with you”) with the correct response (“And also with you”), despite their religious differences and her disinclination to be involved in a religious community by this point in the series. He has made an offer of good will, and she has accepted and reciprocated, albeit with a pardonable eye-roll.

These moments might be mistaken for proof of Peggy’s unreflective conventionality. We viewers might view her as trapped in these conversations because she is too “nice,” rather than because of her self-conscious formation of her own character through intentional acts of kindness. Her interaction with Pete Campbell after the announcement of his wife’s pregnancy holds the key to interpreting these scenes.³⁰ It fits the same pattern: awkward or unpleasant conversation in which she nonetheless participates with verbal marks of respect and kindness toward the other person. This time, however, the viewer sees that her actions are carefully chosen and undertaken at some cost to herself. The conversation is more than awkward: it is positively painful, dredging up her profound sense of loss at having (secretly) borne Pete’s child and given it away. She becomes aware of the expected child when Clara, a secretary, hands her a card while asking for a contribution to a gift for the Campbells. She masters herself enough to say, innocently but not *too* innocently, “Trudy’s pregnant?” but hands the card wordlessly back and leaves the room. She appears overmastered by her emotion, and the viewer perhaps expects she will not participate in the congratulatory moment. (Clara has signaled what we should feel by pursing her lips in annoyance; why does Peggy refuse? Without a word? How rude!)

Her next move is a surprise: she has not left to wallow in or even to hide her feelings—she has gone to congratulate Pete personally. Her words are as warm as they are correct, and though the viewer understands the full emotional import of the moment, an in-universe observer would see nothing untoward. The act is one of quiet but astonishing bravery. Given the easy path to meeting social expectations—a signature on a card requires little and betrays nothing—Peggy instead faces down emotional pain and performs a *more* substantive act than that which was required.³¹ We realize that

30. “The Rejected,” S4/E4.

31. Lest we think that she is callous rather than courteous, the next scene confirms that it has indeed been painful for Peggy: she retreats to her office and quietly bangs her head on her desk. Her cool demeanor does not spring from indifference or disregard but from self-possession.

her small acts of courtesy have been neither unreflective nor (merely) conventional. She has chosen acts of kindness and respect even when she could have chosen otherwise without offense. She has met social expectations not out of timidity or childishness but out of a sense of moral obligation, and therefore she does more than merely or grudgingly meet them. Because she has done what she ought, over and over, she is able to do what she ought even when she feels otherwise.³² Her self-mastery goes all the way down.

Yet, this very scene suggests an interpretive problem with courtesy: does the self-control it cultivates represent a genuine virtue or a kind of deception? If Peggy does one thing while feeling another, if her calm courtesies mask turbulent emotions, if her behavior meets expectations while denying desire, is it not possible that courtesy precludes rather than cultivates integrity, exactly to the extent that it divides the internal from the external self? Late in the series, Megan Calvet's father, Émile, raises this exact issue about another character, and thereby raises a question the attentive viewer has been wondering all along: are Don Draper's efforts to please sincere? "*Il a l'air un peu faux*," Émile opines—there is something a bit false about his "air," his manner.³³ The possibility of pretense does not bother him: he has just said of his daughter that she "pretends to find interesting what I find interesting because she loves me." To offer such pretense evidences affection, not untrustworthiness. To smooth over a potentially awkward situation (hosting the new bride's parents after a rather sudden engagement and marriage) through expressions of more warmth than one feels is an overture of friendship, not deceit. What bothers Émile is that his wife responds to those overtures with more warmth than she should feel; Don lights Marie Calvet's cigarette and remembers her favorite drink, and she takes more pleasure in his attention than she ought. Still, he correctly adduces that Don's charming manners are not self-interpreting. No act of courtesy has only one possible meaning, and the possibility that the person performing the act intends a double meaning—that is, intends to deceive some or all of the recipients and observers of the act—is a troubling one. The series suggests, indeed, that courtesy is (or at least may be) a lie, but an artful one, a sophisticated and powerful one.

32. Thomas Aquinas aptly describes the process of self-mastery through habituation: repeated actions form an inclination to the same action. If the repeated actions are consciously chosen, the habit, once formed, makes the performance of the action more natural, even in the presence of difficulty. *Summa Theologica* I-II.51–52, I-II.56.4.

33. "At the Codfish Ball," S5/E7.

COURTESY AS DECEPTION

The least artful and least successful forms of deceptive courtesy are those that call attention to themselves as courtesy. Self-professing courtesies are those most transparently insincere. The more one calls attention to one's own courtesy, the less likely it is that one actually intends to be courteous at all. Don Draper masks his reluctance to answer questions about himself with various excuses, but the pretense of self-effacing courtesy is a favorite. So, he deflects a reporter's questions about his childhood with, "We were taught that it's not polite to talk about yourself."³⁴ This recalls the scene early in the series where he deflected Roger Sterling's innocuous question about whether or not he had had a nanny growing up: "I can't tell you about my childhood; it would ruin the first half of my novel."³⁵ He is clearly jesting, and the remark suits the humorous badinage Sterling seems to prefer. Betty Draper, though, is unsatisfied (presumably having heard dozens of such remarks), and she resumes the subject in the car on the way home. Required not just to deflect a question but to deflect a question about his pattern of question-deflecting, he appeals to courtesy: "Maybe it's just manners but I was raised to see it as a sin of pride to go on like that about yourself." The dramatic irony here is no mere stylistic flourish: it calls into question the sincerity of all such deflections. Yes, the viewer knows more about Don's identity than the characters to whom Don speaks, but even without such questions, we know enough to distrust people who draw attention to their acts of courtesy.

Whether or not the ostensibly courteous person names her actions as courtesies, courtesies are often used to disguise frank self-assertion. Roger Sterling murmurs plausible-sounding condolences over the phone, presumably to the wife of someone from whom he'd hoped to drum up business—all the while flipping through his rolodex for another hopeful client.³⁶ When that fails, the principal members of the firm attend a competitor-colleague's funeral, scoping for the decedent's disaffected clients.³⁷ The rituals of mourning prove an apt cover for their self-interested pursuits. Similarly, offers of social friendship are often thinly-disguised attempts to secure status or curry favor. Pete Campbell's offers are often the most thinly disguised of anyone's: witness his clumsy attempts to glad-hand Lane Pryce

34. "Public Relations," S4/E1.

35. "Ladies Room," S1/E2.

36. "Hands and Knees," S4/E10.

37. "Chinese Wall," S4/E11.

after receiving news of his promotion,³⁸ his smarmy thanks to a Korean War veteran interviewing Don,³⁹ or his transparent glee at having scored the Drapers as dinner guests.⁴⁰ He comes to be so well-known for this tactic that Bert Cooper can openly mock one such display late in the series: “Crocodile tears. How quaint!”⁴¹ This is the trouble with ostensible courtesy that is transparently self-assertive: no one is fooled. We are all Bethany, the young woman who recognizes and calls out Don Draper’s attempt to manage his way up to her apartment (and presumably into her bed) after their first date. When he says, “Let me walk you up,” (such a polite thing for a date to do!), she responds, “I know that trick.”⁴² We all do.

When courtesy succeeds, it can function not only to cover self-assertion but actually to collapse any difference between generosity and self-asserting power. Magnanimity displays security in one’s own status; thus small gestures of kindness, which may seem to be gifts or offers of friendship, are at the same time proclamations of superiority.⁴³ Ted Chaough shows himself to be more secure than Pete Campbell in the scene where there were too few seats at the conference table (see discussion above). Magnanimously offering his seat to the secretary whose seat Pete usurped, Ted confidently perches on a console along the back wall of the conference room. He loses nothing by giving away his seat. His status is secure, and his generosity only further cements it. Unlike Pete, he does not need to fight for a place at the table—he belongs there no matter where he sits. Earlier in the series, Roger Sterling has taken Freddy Rumsen for a night on the town as a send-off—essentially firing him for drinking excessively (even by their standards).⁴⁴ After their night of drinking and gambling, Roger makes a show of offering Freddy the first cab home. Again, this costs Roger nothing—another cab

38. “Out of Town,” S3/E1.

39. “Public Relations,” S4/E1.

40. “Signal 30,” S5/E5.

41. “The Quality of Mercy,” S6/E12. Pete has just pretended to be “reluctant” to take over one of Ken Cosgrove’s accounts.

42. “Public Relations,” S4/E1. No one is fooled—including the person attempting to be charming. By the time Don reaches his nadir, he doesn’t even bother with the cover of charm. Summoned to his apartment in the middle of the night, Diana-the-waitress appears to expect a little enticement. Don instead abruptly cuts short their conversation: “It’s three in the morning. You know why you’re here. Do you want a drink or not?” (“New Business,” S7/E9).

43. Aristotle defines magnanimity as the superior person’s sense that he really is superior. Generosity belongs to the magnanimous person precisely because it shows his greatness; the greater person gives, the weaker receives. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.3.

44. “The New Girl,” S2/E5.

arrives straightaway—and in no way changes the essential reality that Roger does the firing and Freddy has been fired. Their statuses fixed, this magnanimous act (like their ostensible kindness in taking Freddy out on the town to begin with) is scarcely generosity at all. The signal characteristic of such acts is that they do not imperil the actor in any way; indeed, they often smooth the way for even greater exercises of raw power. It is not that the act of courtesy disguises an act of self-assertion—it *is* an act of self-assertion. It is a proclamation of status, power, and even dominance, for all that it presents itself in the garb of friendship.

If, in courtesy, an act of kindness can be identical with a display of dominance, so too can an act of command be identical with a display of deference. Courtesy is a tactic for managing others, one whose relative deceptiveness often depends on the status differential at play. Faye Miller has alerted us to this dynamic by telling us (and Don) the fable of The North Wind and the Sun, the point of which is that “kindness, gentleness, and persuasion win where force fails.”⁴⁵ Kindness and gentleness are not goods in themselves but are strategies to acquire what one wants from others. Courtesy thus manipulates in its very appearance of renouncing coercive power. Lane Pryce’s father, Robert, manages Lane’s mistress, Toni, out of the room so that he can beat his son into submission in private. Toni has no idea that she is about to be managed out of Lane’s life as completely as she has been managed out of the room: Robert has spoken to her with nothing but gentleness.⁴⁶ Joan Harris reproves the self-asserting John Hooker for not understanding how to use courtesy to manage people out the door: when Burt Peterson is fired, he makes a spectacular show of anger and defiance, trashing his office and insulting all his coworkers before leaving. “If you had spoken to me,” she chastises Hooker, in an unfailingly sweet voice, “I would have been waiting with his coat and his rolodex.”⁴⁷ Master of people that she is, she would have managed the situation to the benefit of the company and for the preservation of the fired man’s dignity without ever having to use threats or coercion to do so.

Lane Pryce is the master of these sorts of manipulative shows of deference. In order to convince Pete Campbell to accept the hiring of a rival, he produces an apparently sincere, glasses-off, manly-look-in-the-eye pseudo-apology before blatantly appealing to Pete’s vanity: “I apologize. It was wrong of me not to consult you. Roger Sterling is a child, and frankly

45. “The Summer Man,” S4/E8.

46. “Hands and Knees,” S4/E10.

47. “Out of Town,” S3/E1.

we can't have you pulling the cart all by yourself."⁴⁸ Similarly, discovering a picture of a beautiful girl in a found wallet, he masks his salacious interest in the girl as deferential courtesies toward her when he telephones her about returning the wallet. When the girl's boyfriend later comes to collect the wallet, the man demonstrates just how effectively Pryce's courtesies had disguised his interests: "my girl said you were real polite."⁴⁹ So convinced is this man of (and by) Pryce's courtesy that he insists on giving Pryce a cash reward for the wallet, not even missing the picture Pryce has already stolen. "You're a real gentleman," he says, but "this" (the cash reward) "is the way we do things."

The supreme example of Pryce's ability to manipulate others through apparent deference comes when he persuades Joan to sleep with the Jaguar executive in order to win the account.⁵⁰ Desperate for a Christmas bonus to settle back taxes, he persuades her to prostitute herself out by pretending to object to her doing it all. Pete Campbell has already clumsily made the same attempt, but Pryce will succeed where he failed. His pretense of objection and affection and *delicacy* (unlike Campbell, he can manage the conversation such that neither of them need to use the word "prostitution") not only persuade her to do the deed, but to do it for a financial reward that suits his interest. She will sleep with the Jaguar exec in exchange for a partnership rather than an immediate cash settlement, preserving (so he had hoped) his Christmas bonus.

That this ploy succeeds so brilliantly—just as the rest of Pryce's attempts to control his life fail—suggests that we might look to his character for the beginnings of an answer to the question with which this section began: whether courtesy is essentially deceptive. Deception may or may not be at the heart of courtesy, but when courtesy consists of nothing *but* deception (charm, manipulation, strategy, control), it cannot sustain the pursuit of genuine moral goods. Like Don Draper, whose easy charm eventually gives way to petulant self-gratification, and unlike Peggy Olson, whose self-mastery confers genuine moral strength, Pryce has no resources on which to draw when his financial difficulties overwhelm him. His courtesies have masked his lack of self-control, all the more so because they have enabled him to be so successful at controlling others.

48. "Waldorf Stories," S4/E6.

49. "A Little Kiss," S5/E1.

50. "The Other Woman," S5/E10.

COURTESY AND ITS ABROGATION

This is finely wrought. The writers' attention both to courtesy in the time period depicted and to how courtesy works in any time period is excellent. What makes the series exceptional, though, is how it is equally attentive to the meaning and role of courtesy's abrogation: that is, of intentional acts of discourtesy. Just as acts of courtesy may be multivalent and equivocal, discourtesies may function and may be interpreted in a variety of ways.

The very first episode alerts us to the threat discourtesy (or the perception of discourtesy) poses to those in tenuous social positions. Rachel Mencken notes that Don can flout convention (asking an overly personal, implicitly insulting question) with impunity, while her gender constrains her to observe conversational conventions more carefully: "If I weren't a woman, I could ask you the same question."⁵¹ Men can survive open discourtesies toward women, especially women who have transgressed social boundaries. Freddy Rumsen can slap Peggy's bottom with a file folder and call her "sweetheart";⁵² male account executives can make sexual jokes at their female colleagues ("You worried that Leggs are gonna spread all over the world?");⁵³ and junior copywriter Joey can draw and publicly post a salacious cartoon of Joan.⁵⁴ Even when the discourtesy extends to threats of violence (witness Joey's "walking around like you want to get raped"⁵⁵ comment in the same episode), men understand themselves to be insulated from any social costs to these discourtesies and veiled threats because other men will reliably laugh off their misbehavior. (Don gives the typical "Boys will be boys" dismissal—in those actual words—in response to Joan's complaint about Joey's "ungentlemanly" behavior.⁵⁶)

Women cannot afford such discourtesies. They cannot even afford to call men out for their misbehavior in any but the most oblique way. Similarly, "negroes" cannot afford any but the most formal and deferential behavior. Thus, Hollis pointedly refuses Pete Campbell's disingenuous offer of informality: in response to Pete's, "It's just us, it's just Hollis and . . ." Hollis knows better than to respond anything other than, "Mr. Campbell."⁵⁷ Hollis no doubt remembers better than "Mr. Campbell" how "Sonny, from

51. "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," S1/E1.

52. "Maidenform," S2/E6.

53. "Severance," S7/E8.

54. "The Summer Man," S4/E8.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. "The Fog," S3/E5.

the elevator, and some janitor” were scapegoated after Peggy reports a theft early in the series.⁵⁸ Those with the lowest status can least afford any kind of misstep, because their positions are in constant peril.

Roger Sterling, on the other hand, can act with the confidence that his petty discourtesies will be read as a sort of charming insouciance. He can walk in late to a meeting where an underling will be fired, just as he can (later) take malicious delight in re-firing that same underling.⁵⁹ He can insult a waitress (“Hey, Mildred Pierce!”) with no cost save the tepid protests of his companions (“I’m sorry about my friend, he’s—” “Witty?”).⁶⁰ He can use a crass sexual analogy to describe a business relationship, all the while apologizing to the recording secretary (whose “delicacy” as a woman he is presumably offending) yet continuing the analogy, too entranced by his own cleverness to desist.⁶¹ Transgressive humor, particularly humor at others’ expense, is only acceptable coming from those with power.

Whether the relevant power disparity is social or professional, acknowledged or implicit, innate or constructed, courtesy missteps imperil the weak(er) more than the strong(er). Conversely, just as the powerful can afford generosity without threatening their position, the powerful can transgress cultural expectations without threatening their cultural status. Indeed, the crassest and most deliberate offenses may function as dominance displays. Thus, a transgression may be calculated to claim and proclaim status; to flout common courtesies is to flaunt one’s social power. Conrad Hilton can call Don Draper at any hour, can usurp Don’s position in his own office, and can make any number of outrageous demands; he is both absolutely (because of his immense wealth) and situationally (because of the service provider’s dependence on the good will of the client) more powerful. In the context of such a power differential, Connie’s “Did I wake you” is as disingenuous as Don’s “No, no, I’m up.”⁶² Connie is saying, rather, “Do you acknowledge my right to wake you whenever I choose?” and Don replies, as he must, in the affirmative. It is Don’s responsibility not only not to be offended by Connie’s discourtesy, but to preempt any suggestion of guilt Connie might feel for having exercised his power in this way.

If Connie is a needy, demanding infant (as Betty observes⁶³), Lee Garner, Jr., is a schoolyard bully. Not only is he, like Connie, a wealthy client,

58. “Nixon vs. Kennedy,” S1/E12.

59. “Out of Town,” S3/E1; “Man with a Plan,” S6/E7.

60. “Severance,” S7/E8.

61. “A Day’s Work,” S7/E2.

62. “Souvenir,” S3/E8.

63. “Wee Small Hours,” S3/E9.

but with the formation of SCDP he is also The Client—the client on whom the entire firm depends, the one whose wishes must be met at all costs. He makes demands that transgress the boundaries of courtesy—insisting, e.g., that Roger Sterling don a Santa suit after he has politely declined—simply to prove he can; the more power he has to effect his will, the more urgently his will wills to be unchecked. He portrays his own pleasure-seeking as the innocent hedonism of a child: “Reminds me of when I was a kid. Remember that? You ask for something, and you’d get it, and it made you happy.”⁶⁴ But this is patently false: the joy of getting his way comes not from the thing he has gotten nor even the getting of it but the offense he has given in the process. The offense is necessary to prove his power. If courtesy is that which protects the weaker from the brute power of the stronger, then discourtesy is a declaration by the stronger that they will not be constrained. The frank exercise of raw power regardless of social expectations displays a belief that the powerful will not suffer for having flouted convention. The weak(er) must constrain themselves by observing courtesy norms, because flouting them costs too much. The strong(er) pays no cost at all—or, no appreciable cost.

There is another kind of violation of courtesy—one that performs neither the weakness of the weak nor the strength of the strong but something entirely other. Some apparent discourtesies are actually strategic negotiations, carefully calculated risks that are taken not to *display* social power but to *acquire* it. These strategic violations may, for example, communicate an invitation to greater intimacy. Joan Harris signals her and her husband’s desire for a warmer relationship with his superiors with the phrase, “We don’t stand on ceremony.”⁶⁵ The phrase is, itself, a kind of ceremony: the protestation against formal courtesies *is* the formal invitation to more familiar courtesies. The proposed relationship would still be guided by courtesy expectations, the set of expectations appropriate to intimates replacing those appropriate to acquaintances. The warmth of the Holloway-Harris party is intercut with scenes from the Sterlings’s Derby party to highlight both the success of Joan’s strategy and the appeal of the intimacy won thereby. The Sterlings cannot secure those sorts of friendships; people who do not particularly like each other have nothing but ceremony to stand on. Joan’s risky move has proved profitable, but it was nonetheless a risk: her warmth may have been misread as proof of ignorance, or judged as tasteless informality, or rebuffed as a premature overture of intimacy.

64. “Christmas Comes But Once a Year,” S4/E2.

65. “My Old Kentucky Home,” S3/E3.

In an environment that demands aggressiveness and ambition, a certain willingness to dare disapproval is actually an asset. Still, these dominance displays are fraught, and Don Draper deploys them masterfully. When Honda Motorcycles sets up a highly structured competition among rival ad firms to win their business, Don strategically goads their rival into breaking the rules of the competition and then withdraws, brusquely accusing the Honda execs of unfairness.⁶⁶ His rudeness is calculated to impress, and it does. When he gets word that his partners are trying to force him out of the firm by picking up a tobacco company as a client, he arrives uninvited to a meeting with them.⁶⁷ His forceful persona once again turns a losing situation into a relative win, and the risk proves well-calculated. Certainly these scenes function as both narrative device and character study: Don is the principle agent of his own narrative, or at least he imagines himself to be. More important for our purposes, though, is the attention given to the politics of these calculated offenses. Don is not rude to Honda execs because he is more powerful than they—quite the opposite. He is in such a weak position, relative to them, relative to his competitors, that his only opportunity for advancement is this tactical discourtesy. He negotiates through rudeness, enacted through the language of courtesy. By enacting an offense typical of a stronger person, a weaker person can secure the power or position he lacks.

COURTESY AND SOCIETAL CHANGE

These moments of calculated offense are among the most important of the series. In these moments of strategic discourtesy, we witness the mechanism of social change at work. If strategic discourtesies may signal an individual's renegotiation of his own position in a given society, they may also signal a renegotiation of *the givens of society* themselves.

It is no accident that the characters in whom we see this phenomenon most clearly are those at some significant social disadvantage at the beginning of the decade: white women struggling against “traditional” mindsets that limit their employment, and black women struggling to find employment at all. Tactically appropriating courtesy and discourtesy to their own comparative advantage, these characters effect a renegotiation not just of their place in the social order but of the social order itself. Strategic transgressions of courtesy may be an opening proposal, as it were, for

66. “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword,” S4/E5.

67. “The Runaways,” S7/E5.

new patterns of interaction in light of societal changes. Carla the maid,⁶⁸ presumably in light of the slowly changing role of African-Americans in American society, uses calmly commanding language to forestall attempts to intimidate and insult her. When Gene Hofstadt, Betty's father, attempts to dominate and insult her, she quietly but forcefully says, "There'll be no more of that," to which Gene acquiesces.⁶⁹ While ever at the mercy of the whims of her employer—as her unjust dismissal from the Draper-Francis household will later show—growing cultural sympathy for the Civil Rights Movement allows her to exercise some authority over a relatively weak member of her employer's family. As social boundaries change, courtesy norms can be renegotiated, and strategic transgressions become the means by which those rules are negotiated. The social order can only change so much, however, and her attempt to enact a similar renegotiation with Betty a year or so later ("It was a mistake—there's no need for that kind of talk") fails.⁷⁰ Betty rejects her renegotiation and fires her without a reference.

Courtesy norms must also be renegotiated when moral boundaries change. If courtesy enacts and reinforces shared moral judgments, courtesy also becomes the technique through which the meaning of new moral arrangements is negotiated. Sometimes those renegotiations are unsuccessful: witness Peggy's failed attempt to signal the moral equivalence of marriage and co-habitation through the ritual of an "announcement dinner." Her mother refuses to accept Peggy's proposed renegotiation, and in defiance of all conventions of proper guest behavior, Peggy's mother demands her cake back when she discovers she has brought it to dinner at her daughter's apartment in error: "I'm not giving you a cake to celebrate youse living in sin."⁷¹ Her words and her actions are an intentional affront, but the affront is necessary to describe the moral gulf that has opened between Peggy and her mother. They disagree on the moral status of Peggy's new venture (although Peggy's demeanor when Abe first asks her suggests that she, too, finds cohabitation less satisfying than marriage), and that disagreement cannot be smoothed over by a shared ritual of celebration. Such a shared ritual would be a miscommunication: the manners would not cohere with the morals they are intended to enact.⁷²

68. Again, women in serving roles do not require last names.

69. "My Old Kentucky Home," S3/E3.

70. "Tomorrowland," S4/E13.

71. "At the Codfish Ball," S5/E7.

72. It would be easier to dismiss Mrs. Olson's words as merely cruel or judgmental if she had not earlier been shown in a more favorable light. When Peggy unexpectedly delivers a baby and suffers a mental breakdown because of it, she is shown supporting rather than condemning Peggy ("The New Girl," S2/E5). Although she sometimes

Sometimes renegotiations are too inchoate to effect any change, but merely articulate the recognition that change must occur. Henry Francis proposes to Betty, before her marriage to Don has ended. He recognizes that the situation does not match traditional courting rituals, yet his first wish, after having expressed his love for Betty and his desire to marry her, is for, precisely, a traditional courting activity: “I wish I could take you to the movies right now, that some theater was playing your favorite movie.”⁷³ He struggles to redefine such conventions as courting when his very courting transgresses convention.

Madison Avenue, the new moral universe created by the *Mad Men* themselves, is a toxic and intoxicating mix of avarice, sexuality, intoxication, and constant terror.⁷⁴ In this new moral universe, confusion inevitably arises, and courtesy norms seem in a constant state of flux, if they function at all. The rituals of something like courtesy are still there, though. The trappings of class and education are what differentiate an acceptable LSD party⁷⁵ from a mere drug den.⁷⁶ Adultery is expected, but there are rules, for the sake of both the wife and the mistress. Open flirtation is acceptable in the new suburbia but Pete commits a real violation by sleeping with an actual neighbor rather than someone from the city.⁷⁷ If a woman comes to a married man’s apartment in the city, she should know better than to “linger in the hallway.”⁷⁸ Don’s girlfriend does not want him to mention his wife at her apartment because it “makes me feel cruel.”⁷⁹ Allison the secretary betrays her adherence to other moral conventions than the ones operative on Madison Avenue by appearing to expect a relationship after having had sex with her boss. Don must tutor her in the moral boundaries operative at the office: he speaks brusquely and matter-of-factly to her after she clearly

speaks sharply to Peggy, her supportiveness is marked enough to prompt resentment from Peggy’s sister: “She does whatever she feels like, with no regard at all. You’re too easy on her, you know that” (“Three Sundays,” S2/E4).

73. “The Grown-ups,” S3/E12.

74. There are a number of memoirs of the period, but one that has enjoyed a revival due to the success of the series is Jerry Della Femina’s *From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave You Pearl Harbor: Front-Line Dispatches from the Advertising War*. Della Femina’s is remarkable not only for how it describes but how it displays the moral world he inhabited. It was, to put it mildly, less than admirable.

75. “Far Away Places,” S5/E5.

76. “The Doorway,” S6/E1.

77. “Collaborators,” S6/E2.

78. “Collaborators,” S6/E2.

79. “Ladies Room,” S1/E2.

signals a desire for shared intimacy at work.⁸⁰ Megan, on the other hand, displays her understanding of these new moral conventions. After she and Don have sex on his office couch, she declines his pro-forma offer of a meal and continues calling him Mr. Draper.⁸¹ She operates comfortably with the new conventions.

Peggy, however, proves the most adept at managing new moral boundaries with skill. Her transgressive career—success in a “man’s” job in a “man’s” world—opens her up to criticism and jealousy, and changes in the broader society force her to recognize that the Bay Ridge manners she came to the City with will not suffice.⁸² She has a learning curve in this respect, to be sure. In the first season, Peggy is frustrated at how her conventional behavior is mocked rather than respected: “I follow the rules, and people hate me. . . . And other people, people who are *not good*, get to walk around doing whatever they want.”⁸³ At some points, she attempts to mimic Don’s directness and finds instead that it opens her to criticism from her coworkers⁸⁴ and does not particularly succeed with clients.⁸⁵ She continues addressing the other *Mad Men* by their last names, even after she has become one of them. Indeed, it is Joan who first begins to insist that the other “girls” use her last name—they had been continuing to call her “Peggy,” as befitted her as a secretary.⁸⁶

When Bobby Barrett advises her to treat Don as an equal, she does begin to call him “Don.”⁸⁷ She is emboldened, no doubt, by the fact that he has required her help bailing him out of jail and covering up his affair with Bobby Barrett: she is not as absolutely powerless as she has been. That boldness continues to grow throughout the second and third seasons. She grows increasingly comfortable adapting to courtesy norms appropriate to her position in the company (even when her gender threatens to trump her job title in others’ eyes)—asking for Freddy Rumsen’s office after he is fired, refusing to get Roger Sterling coffee during their midnight sack of the Sterling Cooper offices.⁸⁸ She does not always succeed—once, for example, she receives a sharp dressing-down from Don for attempting to worm her way

80. “Christmas Comes but Once a Year,” S4/E2.

81. “Chinese Wall,” S4/E11.

82. “I’m from Bay Ridge! We have manners,” (“Ladies Room,” S1/E2).

83. “Nixon vs. Kennedy,” S1/E12.

84. “Collaborators,” S6/E2.

85. “Far Away Places,” S5/E5.

86. “For Those Who Think Young,” S2/E1.

87. “The New Girl,” S2/E5.

88. “The Mountain King,” S2/E12; “Shut the Door. Have a Seat,” S3/E13.

onto an account.⁸⁹ But those failures primarily serve to show that she has understood and responded to the change in her position. She begins to act like an ad man, although with far more self-possession than the Mad Men around her. Her prior conventionality has not trapped her in a conventional position; instead, it has given her the wherewithal to manage subtle courtesy cues to her own benefit.

Peggy's mastery of these cultural forms of negotiation gives her tremendous power in a period of moral and social change. She is clever enough to come up with creative solutions to novel situations—more creative than Don's standby, the risky dominance-display-cum-power-play. She wittily deflects a lesbian come-on with enough humor and kindness that the rejected suitor remains a friend.⁹⁰ (This is the essential role of courtesy, after all: to manage potential social conflicts.) She had already learned to do so with male colleagues, but she adapts these courtesies to new moral situations in a way others cannot.⁹¹ She challenges Stan's pretense at unconventional morality by herself violating convention in the most direct and challenging way possible: offering to work in complete nudity with him.⁹² He proves unable to do so, and she has freed herself from his barrage of insults. Freedom is, in fact, the defining characteristic of her personality. Marshall McLuhan suggested that his generation's preoccupation with courtesy manuals resulted from a childish need for security among those who were fundamentally not free.⁹³ Peggy's social creativity shows us that she is genuinely free; manners are, to her, less a set of rules to follow than a set of tools by which to live well.

An exceptionally well-crafted series, *Mad Men*—like all good period fiction—says as much about the present as it does about the period it depicts. We, too, live in a period of immense social and moral change; we, too, struggle to articulate the requirements of civility and courtesy in the face of that change; we, too, find ourselves unexpectedly called upon to

89. "Seven Twenty Three," S3/E7.

90. "The Rejected," S4/E4.

91. Indeed, the series implicitly compares her with two other characters who find themselves deflecting similar same-sex advances and with far less success: Megan rebuffs the wife of her director ("The Better Half," S6/E9) somewhat more forcefully, and Pete repulses Bob Benson's oblique come-on by calling such a relationship "disgusting" ("Favors," S6/E11).

92. "Waldorf Stories," S4/E6.

93. "The socially immature cling aggressively to the books of Emily Post with the same baleful discomfort as the mentally exempt latch onto *Reader's Digest*," Marshall McLuhan, *Mechanical Bride*, 51. This creativity is also a prime characteristic of Joan Holloway-Harris's character: caught between slavish adherence to Emily Post and her husband's boss's potential expectations, she is able to come up with a creative solution to her dinner party problem.

respond to rituals of courtesy or discourtesy, offers of intimacy or enmity, displays of dominance or deference, often while being too shocked at the strangeness of the moment to be able to respond to it as we might after due deliberation. What are the new courtesies surrounding cell phone use: is it my obligation to strive not to overhear a private conversation being held in public, or is it the cell phone user's obligation to hold such conversations in private? Which is more important when one sees a co-worker who appears pregnant: avoiding potential offense or offering affirmation and support? Are offers of assistance for persons with handicapping conditions belittling or kind? What is the correct terminology for unmarried romantic partners? When should sexual orientation be indicated on a famous person's Wikipedia entry? Which personal questions count as invitations to friendship and which count as micro-aggressions? If we are to learn anything from *Mad Men's* careful study, it must surely be that such questions will not be answered by some self-proclaimed expert producing a guide to which the socially timid must minutely adhere. They will be answered organically and democratically, in the mundane embodied wisdom of ordinary folk struggling to live well.

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