

The captivity of James II: Gestures of loyalty and disloyalty in seventeenth-century England.

In his answer to Parliament's nineteen propositions, Charles I (or rather Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland), elaborated on the impact that agreeing to the two houses' demands would have on the British monarchy:

'We may be waited on bare-headed; We may have Our hand kist; The Style of Majestie continued to Us; And the Kings Authoritie, declared by both Houses of Parliament, may be still the Style of your Commands; We may have Swords and Maces carried before Us, and please Our Self with the sight of a Crown and Scepter ...but as to true and reall Power WE should remain but the outside, but the Picture, but the signe of a King.<sup>1</sup>

The King's *Answer* posits a clear separation between the outward form and style of monarchy, and the substance of royal power. The former, Charles and his advisers seem to be suggesting, can be maintained even while the latter is being drained away. The distinction is an important one given that anthropological approaches to ritual in have suggested that in pre-modern societies, often no clear division was made between the symbolic action – say kissing the hand – and the value it signified. I'm thinking here of the anthropologist Mary Douglas' separation of 'restricted' ceremonies (where there is no clear distinction between the action and the values it signifies – in this case loyalty) and 'elaborated' ceremonies (where social signs are deemed to be separate from the things they signify and perhaps even arbitrary in form – ie having no relation to the thing itself). We will return to this distinction between the symbols and the substance of royal authority at the end of the paper.

Historians are beginning to follow the practice of sociologists and anthropologists in seeing gesture as a significant mode of human communication. There's clear evidence of this growth in interest in the Past and Present conference that was organised at Sheffield last year. However, work on the history of gesture has so far largely concentrated on its role in the early modern period in demarcating and enforcing social and sexual hierarchy. That focus is partly justified by the pre-occupation of early modern conduct books with correct bodily deportment. Similarly, lots of stuff on this in books on rhetoric. However, beyond expressing power relationships created by social status or gender, gesture had more explicitly political aspects in the early modern period. There were some obvious ways in which people could use their bodies to demonstrate loyalty: in the genuflections that accompanied the taking of oaths and covenants [fig.1]; in the kissing of hands, as both a sign of submission and of loyalty [fig. 2]; and in the making of loyal healths.<sup>2</sup> The significance of gesture looms particularly large during the capture of James II by Kentish fishermen in December 1688. The treatment of the King by his subjects is suggestive of the ways in which the 'ceremonial' aspects of gesture could become problematic once there had been a very clear cleavage between the authority a gesture was supposed to represent and the substance of that authority itself.<sup>3</sup> This episode could be fitted into a Whiggish narrative of de-sacralisation and modernisation, bundled together with other ominous signs like the moment when James II crown slips from his head at his coronation.<sup>4</sup> However, this paper will suggest that the evidence of James' captivity rather offers qualified support to James C. Scott's thesis that displays of obedience and submission both through speech and gesture were often

strategic and concealed a 'hidden transcript' that allowed the less-powerful to retain a 'voice under domination.'<sup>5</sup>

As has been noted by Sir Keith Thomas, when writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries spoke of gesture, they meant something more than we understand by that term today. Gesture has been a source of interest for twentieth and twenty-first century sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists.<sup>6</sup> One of the leading authorities on gestural communication, Adam Kendon, has defined gesture as a 'label for actions that have the features of manifest deliberate expressiveness.'<sup>7</sup> Although there is evidence that in early modern England too, observers distinguished between actions borne of the will and those that were the product of habit or involuntary reflex, discussions of gesture in this period largely blurred the distinction between voluntary and involuntary motions.<sup>8</sup> For early modern writers, gesture meant the posture and deportment of the whole body, not merely specific conscious physical movements. John Bulwer, the first English author to making a thorough study of gestural language, argued that it was vital to be able to understand the signs of the whole body

'For the lineaments of the body do disclose the disposition and inclination of the mind in general, but the motions of the countenance and parts do not only so, but do further disclose the present humour and state of the mind and will. For .... as the tongue speaketh to the ear, so the gesture speaketh to the eye.'<sup>9</sup>

According to Bulwer, the connection between bodily movement and the will was so strong, that it was unlikely that these gestures would be feigned. Of the lifting up of hands to God in prayer he said,

'this outward addition or adjunct of piety, the opening and LIFTING UP OF THE HANDS is a natural manifestation of the uprightness and integrity of the heart, and of the sincerity of the affections, For deceit naturally hath no will, though hypocrisy sometimes may affect to dilate and extend the hand.'<sup>10</sup>

[Image of Quaker woman to illustrate hypocrisy.] For Bulwer then, bodily gesture, in the case of prayer, formed a virtuous circle, at once embodying and extending the pious feelings which had prompted the action in the first place.<sup>11</sup> (For similar reasons, Robert Sanderson, the leading English authority on oath-taking, argued that ‘solemn’ oaths, those taken with certain gestures, carried a heavier obligation than those were merely oral or written assent was given. The assent of the body indicated that this was not an oath made impulsively, but the product of the individual’s considered will. Taking such oaths without the intention of honouring them was very dangerous, as the performative aspects of these oaths meant that others would be more likely to follow your bad example.)<sup>12</sup>

As its centrality to oath-taking makes clear, gesture had obvious political ramifications in the early modern period, though historians have usually only treated those aspects which could be described as ‘political’ in the broadest sense. Gesture, in this period (and it is fair to say others) was taken as a vital indicator of social status. Conduct books repeatedly contrasted the ‘rustical’, even ‘bestial’ ‘gesticulation’ of the lower classes, with the refined ‘gesture’ of the upper echelons of society. In one of the earliest works on civility of this kind, Erasmus’ *De Civilitate* (translated into English by Robert Whittington in 1554), the humanist repeatedly warned against using gestures favoured by ‘slutish personnes’: wiping one’s nose on one’s sleeve was a habit of ‘fishmongers’ best avoided, chewing bones should be left to ‘dogges’ and winking was a vulgar habit of mere ‘craftsmen.’<sup>13</sup>

Using the correct gestures distinguished a gentleman from his inferiors. There was a closely observed code of gestural behaviour for when different social classes had to interact (which in noble households was on a daily basis). The authors of conduct books emphasised that inferiors were to appear clean and washed before their

superiors, they were not to speak unless spoken to, they were not to fidget or touch their hair or their bodies whilst being addressed, they were not to invade their masters' personal space and they were not to affront them in other ways, such as by leaning on their furniture.<sup>14</sup> These rules were to be observed not only between members of the same household but also in interactions with strangers, especially when greeting superiors. Inferiors were expected to observe 'hat honour', removing their headgear in the presence of their betters and directing their gaze to the ground, rather than insulting looking the other person in the eye.<sup>15</sup> The Quakers refusal to observe 'hat honour', seeing it in the words of George Fox as 'Hypocritical Salutations', was an affront not only to noble dignity, but, it seemed, political authority and the social order as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

The historiography of gesture in the early modern period has mainly concentrated on its role in defining and policing social boundaries.<sup>17</sup> As has already been shown, such a focus is a reflection of the importance placed upon correct deportment in early modern conduct manuals. Heinrich Roodenburg has noted that a crucial aspect of the manuals was the way in which they strengthened and crystallised 'social hierarchy, engraving its codes even on the body, on its comportment and gestures.'<sup>18</sup> Gesture, in the broadest sense, reflected and enforced power relationships.

Antoine de Courtin wrote that

'all our actions in respect of other persons, are either absolute and independent, or dependant according to the difference of superiority, equality or inferiority. To the first all things are lawful, because they command the others; and having no right to censure, the inferior must be contented to suffer. The second are at liberty among themselves; but the third are more particularly obliged to the Rules of modesty.'<sup>19</sup>

The appropriateness of a gesture was dependent upon context and audience: familiarity in demeanour displayed by an inferior to a superior was a gross insult, however, if the roles were reversed, a show of informality by a master to his servant bestowed a great honour upon the inferior whilst reflecting the humility of the superior.<sup>20</sup> This kind of noble ‘magnanimity’ was applauded by William Cecil, Lord Burghley in his advice to his son:

Towards thy superior bee humble, yeat generouse wth thy equalles, familiar yet respectie towards they inferiors, shew much humilitie, as to bow they bodie streatch forth they hand and to uncover they head and such like popular compliments the first prepares a way to advancement the second makes thee knowne for a man well bred the third gaines a good report, wch once well gotten may eacely bee kept, for humility taketh such roote in the mind of the multitud as they are easiar wone by such unproffitable curtesies then by churlish benefites<sup>21</sup>

However, the exercise of familiar gestures was supposed to flow in one direction only, downward. As Anna Bryson has put it the ‘superior was formally in control of the demeanour of the inferior.’<sup>22</sup>

However, the use of gesture in the political realm remains relatively unexplored. Recent research has uncovered the important connections between oral, manuscript and printed material. Historians working across the early modern period have picked up on the significance of seditious speech, either as evidence of the existence of a ‘hidden transcript’ of plebeian resistance to authority, or as a means of accessing popular beliefs around monarchy, or as proof of the connections between the mass of the English population and early modern news networks.<sup>23</sup> There has, as yet, been no equivalent work relating to gesture. To some extent, the emphasis in current historiography upon speech or the written word reflects the legal structures in

place to deal with sedition in early modern England. There were laws against seditious speech and against seditious libel, but none passed specifically punishing incendiary gestures. One exception to this was the 1650 Blasphemy Act which proscribed blasphemous actions as well as speech and writing. However, in the most famous trial carried out under that statute – that of James Nayler – despite the obvious gestural symbolism of the Quaker's entry into Bristol, the Commons appeared to be preoccupied with the question of whether Nayler thought he was God, not whether his gestures gave this impression.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, though there were no obvious statutory restraints on gesture, in the way that there were for speech and writing, this is not to state that gesture was seen as an insignificant part of political communication. Sir Thomas Elyot in his Boke Named the Governour was clear that true majesty was signalled through correct bodily deportment, by an 'honourable and sober demeanour', rather than a 'haughty or fierce countenance.'<sup>25</sup> Equally, majesty and authority could be profoundly insulted, challenged and threatened by gesture, as much as by speech or by writing. In 1549, a royal herald sent to deliver a final offer of pardon to the Norfolk rebels at their encampment on Mousehold Heath was the object of a very clear gesture of defiance. Alexander Neville's 1572 history of the rebellion described how the herald was confronted by

'an ungracious boy, putting down his breeches, [who] shewed his bare buttocks, and did a filthy act: adding thereunto more filthy words.'

Though the scene appears comical, the swift and fatal response to the boy's actions delivers a sobering reminder of how seriously such gestural affronts to authority were taken. Neville recorded that following the boy's actions



‘At the indignity whereof, a certaine man being moved (for some of our men were on the river, which came to behold) with a bullet from a pistol, gave the boy such a blow upon the loines, that sodainely stroke him dead.’<sup>26</sup>

Examples of the delivering of political insult through gesture as vivid as this are rare. Reconstructing the gestural language of politics is not, however, an impossible task. Looking beyond particular instances of the use of gesture in political ways, there were a number of recognised political ceremonies which also required the use of genuflections. In a religious context, such ceremonies had already been a source of great contention in the seventeenth century. The controversy over Quaker social testimony has already been mentioned, but we could also think of the debate over kneeling at the receiving of communion or bowing at the name of Jesus provoked by the enforcement of Laudian innovations in worship. ‘Scandalous’ or ‘malignant’ ministers in the 1640s were frequently charged with enforcing such rituals and with being great cringers and bowers before the ‘table’ now moved ‘altar-wise’. Opponents of these innovations also responded with a gestural language of their own, refusing to bow, kicking or destroying copies of the Book of Common Prayer, or pulling down and destroying altar rails.<sup>27</sup> In broader terms, we could see iconoclasm itself as form of religio-political communication through gesture. Yet, in the seventeenth century there were also a number of recognised ways of displaying one’s obedience and affirming allegiance through gesture. In the early modern period, the monarch’s body (mystical and physical) was both the hinge and hub of loyalty and allegiance.<sup>28</sup> Many of the recognised gestures of loyalty (oaths, kiss of submission, making of loyal healths) focussed upon the person of the king. The ‘captivity’ of James II reveals how the breach of the king’s personal space was not merely

physically invasive but had overtly political ramifications, disrupting the supposed sanctity of the monarch's body.

Over the course of three days between 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of December, as he was effectively held captive in the Kentish port of Faversham, James suffered a series of physical indignities to his person that he seems never to forgotten. We have five different accounts of James' first flight, mostly written by those sympathetic to the King's plight. The most well-known of these comes from the memoirs of the Jacobite peer Thomas Bruce, Second Earl of Ailesbury.<sup>29</sup> Other accounts are provided by the Kent MP, Sir John Knatchbull, Captain Thomas Southouse, mayor of Faversham and Richard Marsh, the Faversham brewer who first identified the King.<sup>30</sup> We also have an anonymous account of the King's capture which is by far the most explicit in describing the physical insults that James was subjected to.<sup>31</sup> While there are some differences between the narratives, all are attentive to the politically loaded nature of the gestural communication between the King and his captors. The extent to which norms of bodily control were breeched during James' brief imprisonment is indicative of the low ebb to which respect for his monarchy had sunk.

On the night of 10<sup>th</sup> December 1688, terrified by anti-Catholic rioting in London, James fled the capital, accompanied by two trusted army officers, Sir Edward Hales and Ralph Sheldon. However, the King and his companions got no further then Kent. James's escape craft was boarded by a group of seamen and musketeers who had been searching the area around Sheerness for a 'prize.'<sup>32</sup> [Fleeing priests, ministers, etc. – example of Jeffries.] Hales, well-known and little-liked locally, was quickly recognised by the seamen. The three gentlemen were intimately searched by the sailors, with the King most closely inspected of all (James' 'breaches were undone & examined for secret treasure, so indecently as even to the discovery of

his nudities.’)<sup>33</sup> The search of the King’s person was conducted by a sailor called Harry Moon, whose zeal in his task even unsettled some of his fellow seamen. Moon not only physically humiliated James but also cursed him to his face.<sup>34</sup> At this point, it is usually accepted that the seamen did not know the King’s identity, believing instead that he was a fleeing Jesuit priest (the sailors reportedly called him ‘old Rogue, ugly, lean-jawed hatchet-faced Jesuite, popish dog.’)<sup>35</sup>

The harsh treatment continued as the boat was landed at Faversham at 10 o’clock the following morning – whilst Hales and Sheldon, recognised for gentlemen, were carried ashore, the King was forced to wade through the shallow water to get to dry land.<sup>36</sup> They were met by the current mayor, Captain Thomas Southouse, and several other gentlemen.<sup>37</sup> The musketeers and seamen remained hostile to their prisoners, Sir John Knatchbull later reporting that they had pitchforks and muskets thrust in their faces, before being bundled into the carriage.<sup>38</sup> The three men were then taken to the Queen’s Arms inn. It was at this point, as James disembarked from the coach, that he was recognised by the brewer, Richard Marsh. Marsh reported that, as soon as the King’s identity was revealed, the assembled gentlemen ‘owned him for their sovereign’, whilst the Mayor, Southouse, fell to his knees in order to kiss the hand of his monarch. Seeing this sign of loyalty and submission, the watching crowd reportedly cried ‘the King’, ‘the King.’<sup>39</sup>

It is here that there is a significant divergence between the account of James’ captivity presented by the Earl of Ailesbury and the other narratives. Ailesbury reported that from this moment on, the seamen acted as a loyal guard to the King, staying up all night to ensure that none ‘should touch so much as a hair on the king’s head.’<sup>40</sup> It must be remembered, however, that Ailesbury only arrived in Faversham late on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> December, once the King had been moved from the inn

to the mayor's house. The other accounts consistently present a different, and far more negative picture of James' treatment by the seamen and commonality in Faversham, with some narratives suggesting a class divide between the gentlemen and 'the Rabble' in their attitudes to their monarch.<sup>41</sup>

The anonymous account suggests that the revelation of James' identity only led the seamen to guard their 'prize' even more closely, as they became convinced that the gentlemen of the town were attempting to hatch a plan to allow the King to escape (a contention that is supported by Southouse's and Knatchbull's version of events). It was reported that when the Earl of Winchelsea, who visited James on the night of 12<sup>th</sup>, attempted to get the King moved to the mayor's residence 'great opposition was made by the Seamen, & as the K. passed down the stairs, swords were drawn & threatening expressions used by the guards.' It was only once it was agreed that the seamen could accompany the King, that they acquiesced to allowing James to be moved to Southouse's residence.<sup>42</sup>

At the Mayor's house, James passed a slightly more pleasant evening, condescending to allow the gentlemen of the town to dine with him, but the next morning he faced fresh assaults upon his dignity. Whilst the King sat in the window of Southouse's residence, the East Kent gentry read out the Prince of Orange's declaration, an act that was greeted with vociferous cheers by the crowd that had also assembled around the mayor's house.<sup>43</sup> Inside, the King was as closely guarded as ever and his personal space no more respected than it had been on board the ship, some of the seamen guarding James 'so narrowly, that tis said they followed him up to his Devotions, nay were so indecent as to press near him in his retirement for nature.'<sup>44</sup> When, by the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>, Ailesbury had reached the King, he reported that James' room was 'filled with men, women and children, and talking as if

they had been at a market.’<sup>45</sup> Unshaven and unwashed, James cut a pathetic figure, reminding Ailesbury of the portrait of the king’s father, Charles I, made during his trial. By the following morning, December 14<sup>th</sup>, the lifeguard under the command of the Earl of Feversham sent out to the King by the council of peers had reached Rochester. After suspicions about the Earl’s orders were finally allayed, James left Faversham for what turned out to be his final visit to London.<sup>46</sup>

The memory of his captivity was clearly a painful one for the King. James excluded ‘all ... who offered personal indignity to us at Faversham’ from a royal pardon issued in exile in 1692.<sup>47</sup> A pamphlet published in the same year gave an account of the King’s thoughts on ‘being forc’d a Shore, from his Vessel near Feversham, and the Tumultuous Insolency of the Rabble, and the ill Treatment His Majesty received from them there.’ [fig. 3]<sup>48</sup> Here James compared his travails with the torments suffered by Christ on Calvary:

‘Sometimes they furiously seize on his Person and haul and drag him along the Streets: At last they all conspire to take away his Life; and condemn him to a sharp and cruel Death. ... Say now, my Soul, for when thy dearest Lord indur’d all this, and infinitely more: Canst thou complain of thy little Troubles, and Affronts by the

Mobilie, when the King of Glory was thus afflicted. Canst thou complain of thy meanly furnisht House and Vessel, when the Son of God had not where to lay his Head.’<sup>49</sup>

The obvious trauma that the King suffered during his short captivity in Faversham was not only a result of his morbid belief that there was a conspiracy to kill him but also a consequence of the disruption to the usual gestural codes of authority and loyalty whilst he stayed at the Queen’s Arms inn and the mayor’s house. James rightly noted that the behaviour of the seamen, the crowd and at least some of the gentlemen did not return to normative patterns of obsequiousness once his identity was revealed. The King’s reduced circumstances forced changes to the bodily deportment of even those that remained loyal to him. Ailesbury, having shortly arrived at the mayor’s house after a long ride, reflected that he could not kneel before the King ‘by reason of my jack-boots.’<sup>50</sup> The earl had already noted the inappropriate chatter of the people within the mayor’s house (when they should have stood silent before their superior) and he also discussed the King’s difficulties in dressing, washing and feeding himself in the absence of his usual retinue of servants: ‘The King being thus destitute, and no person to serve him, Doctor St. Johns, a most worthy man and civil lawyer, came from his house near to that place and offered his service and lay in the King’s room until I came, and Mr Platt [an inn-keeper] ... served him in the nature of Page of the Back Stairs, and he helped to dress him.’<sup>51</sup>

James’ first letter from Kent, dated 12<sup>th</sup> of December called for Feversham to ‘speak to some of my most necessary servants to come to me, and bring with them some linen and cloaths.’<sup>52</sup> This request reflected more than just James’ desire for a good shave and a clean shirt. As historians of the court, especially David Starkey, have noted, the staff of the Bedchamber effectively regulated access to the King’s

personal space, representing the barrier, both physical and mystical, between the people and the person of the monarch.<sup>53</sup> In calling for the servants of the bedchamber in his first request for help, James not only wished to cleanse his physical body but also to restore the purity of his mystical body, polluted by the unseemly closeness of the 'rabble'. Sir John Knatchbull's account suggests that the King's experience in Faversham brought him close to a breakdown. Sir Basil Dixwell, accompanied by Knatchbull, tried to convince the King to demand that Feversham show his orders from the council before entering the town. Knatchbull stated that when they came in 'he [the king] turned from the window and seeing Sir Bazill come towards him, I observed a smile in his face of an Extraordinary size and sort: so forced, awkward and unpleasant to look upon, that I can truly say I never saw anything like itt. He tooke not notice of me, tho I was just bending my knee to kiss his hand, and hee immediately turned to Sir Bazill; but upon Mr grimes touching his sleeve, he turned about to me and I kissed it [his hand].'<sup>54</sup>

Modern analysts of gesture, especially Erving Goffman, have observed that failure to respond to gestural cues is often a sign of mental instability.<sup>55</sup>

The gestural insults that James was forced to endure during his captivity in Kent could be incorporated into a 'Whiggish' narrative of the modernising influence of 1688-9 in the political realm, as it stripped the sacral elements from kingship. After James, the thaumatological powers of British kings in 'curing' scrofula were only regularly exercised by the exiled Stuarts. Similarly, the parallels made between kings and Christ through their Maundy Thursday ritual of cleaning and washing the feet of the poor, were gradually eroded as this performance was replaced by the handing out of a cash dole.<sup>56</sup>

However, the significance of the apparent decline of sacral monarchy can be questioned if we consider the status of these gestures of loyalty as both physical actions and ‘ceremonies’. As already mentioned, in the religious sphere, the ceremonial was a contested area in the seventeenth-century. Yet, as Anna Bryson has pointed out, it was not only ‘puritans’ who raised objections to ceremony. There was a strain through all conduct literature which suggested that injunctions of conduct books could become hollow, meaningless, even hypocritical, if followed too slavishly. Philip Carter has suggested persuasively, talking of literature on manliness in the eighteenth-century, that the very actions that were supposed to confer masculinity upon a subject could rob the individual of these properties if they became overly observant of them. (This was the point about noble ‘magnanimity’, that it displayed the gentleman’s social autonomy, his prerogative to dispense with social conventions rather than become a prisoner to them.) There was, then, a tension at the heart of most conduct literature (one which the work of John Bulwer largely overlooked): gesture was described as natural, an expression of internal feelings, yet the very fact that guidance on appropriate gesture was deemed necessary indicated that it was possible to dissimulate with one’s body.

I would argue that James’ captivity in Kent is better read in synchronic, rather than diachronic terms: as an example of one of those moments of ‘political electricity’ when subordinate groups move into overt resistance.<sup>57</sup> What happened in Faversham in 1688 was a public declaration of the ‘hidden transcript’ of hostility to James II. However, the responses were more varied and less consistent than Scott’s rather univocal model of popular politics allows. The people of Faversham did not react uniformly to the presence of their King and some, like Harry Moon, shifted from aggressive assertiveness to prostrate submissiveness. (Moon, along with the other



sailors who had captured James, flung himself on the ground before the King and begged for forgiveness, which James reportedly gave. Given what we know about James' comment regarding Faversham in 1692, it seems reasonable to doubt the sincerity of both parties here).<sup>58</sup> Contrary to the opinion of John Bulwer, who saw such a strong "sympathy" between heart and hand, James II's experiences suggest that gesture, like other forms of political language, could be used strategically. This was a fact recognised by contemporaries, including that 'royal actor' Charles I. Back in the 1640s, the radical hermit and vegetarian Roger Crabbe had spoken of those 'labouring poor Men, which in Times of scarcity pine and murmur for want of Bread, cursing the Rich behind his Back, and before his Face, Cap and Knee.'<sup>59</sup> As Crabbe indicated, public observance of gestural norms was dependent on the people's on-going assessment of the real, non-mystical power of the object of their loyalty. As James' experience in Faversham suggests, in certain circumstances the kiss of submission could quickly turn into the kiss of Judas.

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