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Grant McCracken

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Article abstract

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A Wonderful Linkage of Beings: Hierarchy and the Cultural Instruments of Social Organization in Elizabethan England

Grant McCracken
University of Guelph

The social hierarchy of Elizabethan England was stoutly and exactly "hinged". At every point ranks touched in the hierarchy, cultural instruments worked to establish a connection between them. The purpose of the present paper is to give an anthropological account of two of these cultural instruments, showing how they served the concept and the practice of Elizabethan social organization. The cultural instruments in question are courtesy and child exchange.

La hiérarchie sociale du temps de l'Angleterre élisabétaine était très fermement établie. Lorsque les rangs se rejoignaient dans la hiérarchie à quelque niveau que ce soit, des instruments culturels travaillaient à créer des liens entre eux. Le présent article se propose d'examiner deux de ces instruments culturels d'un point de vue anthropologique, tout en démontrant leur contribution à l'organisation sociale élisabétaine. Les instruments culturels dont il sera question sont la courtoisie et l'échange d'enfants.

Thomas Aquinas described the medieval hierarchy as a "wonderful linkage of beings" (In Lovejoy, 1936: 79). In doing so, he acknowledged the extraordinary powers of organization possessed by the principle of hierarchy. The purpose of the present paper is to examine the "wonderful linkage of beings" that constituted the hierarchy of Elizabethan England. I am particularly concerned to show how this linkage was created by two particular institutions: courtesy and child exchange. I will treat these institutions as "cultural instruments," and describe how each participated in the transformation of a remarkably heterogeneous and fractious group of 16th century English men and women into a relatively unified, orderly body politic.

On their face, these two cultural instruments represent clearly different aspects of Elizabethan life. Courtesy governed the ritual of public greeting between superordinate and subordinate parties. Child exchange directed the movement of children as servants from subordinate households to superordinates ones. But this diversity conceals a commonality. Both of these cultural instruments, as I shall try to show, possessed a significance for the organization of the hierarchy. Both worked according to the same logic, and issued in the same structural consequences. Both gave unity and definition to the Elizabethan

body politic, rendering it a "wonderful linkage of beings".

The Elizabethan Hierarchy: Structural Characteristics

Modern and contemporary accounts of Elizabethan society show us a social world almost entirely under the dominion of the principle of hierarchy. This principle, a little in the manner of a jealous, demanding monarch, sought to make itself the arbiter of every social relationship. It insisted that there was no social order "excepte it do contayne in it degrees, high and base" (Elyot, 1907: 4). It insisted that human beings could not interact except as superordinate and subordinate parties. It presumed to calibrate the precise distance between these parties, and, then, to dictate what must transpire between them.

But this was just the fine work, the everyday work, of government. As a larger, organizing frame, the principle of hierarchy fashioned a status continuum embracing a Monarch on high and a masterless wretch below. As a cultural "operator" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 136), the continuum had remarkable powers of organization. It could array any group of English men and women at table in exact order of their precedence (e.g., Jones, 1917: 172). Indeed, it gave this relative status location to every member of the kingdom. Hierarchy's claim to, and powers of, dominion were thoroughgoing.

The hierarchical continuum was divided into several groups, variously called ranks, classes, orders, degrees, and estates. Modern and Elizabethan observers disagree on the number and the nature of these groups. There are at least two: gentry and commonality (Laslett, 1971: 23-24; Mulcaster, 1581: 198), sometimes four (Smith, 1583: 18-34; Harrison, 1577), and as many as six: peers, county elite, lesser gentry, husbandmen and yeomen, labourers, and dependents (Stone, 1965: 51; cf. Cressy, 1976: 34-35). This uncertainty was the work of many things, including an Elizabethan classificatory scheme that could "lump" with great generality and "split" with equal discretion. It also reflects the indeterminacy of categories like that of the merchant class (Mohl, 1933: 13), changing rates of social mobility, and the changing process of transmutation by which people moved from group to group (Esler, 1966: 34-37; Stone, 1967: 23-24; Zagorin, 1971: 29).

If the cultural categories of the hierarchy were uncertain, so were the principles by which they were distinguished. For instance, the two-category scheme was construed variously by Elizabethans. It

was the distinction between those inspired by honour and those driven by profit (Segar, 1602: 209), those worthy of memorial and those who deserved obscurity (Ferne, 1586: 82-83), those who honoured the spirit of the gift and those who were indifferent to it (Oglander, 1936: 246), those who lived by administration and those who lived by manual labor (Mohl, 1933: 10-11), and, finally, those who ruled and those who must be ruled (Ferne, 1586: 4).

Modern scholarship adds to this multiplicity of perspective. It suggests, for instance, that the superordinate category in the superordinate-subordinate dyad was, alternatively, a medieval presence flourishing in the early modern world (Mohl, 1933), a Burgundian import that anticipates the humanist revival of learning (Kipling, 1977: 29), and a Renaissance development of Platonic (Major, 1964: 9), Aristotelian (Watson 1960: 63), or Stoic (Ustick, 1932: 149) character.

But this only begins to gauge the full complexity of the Elizabethan hierarchy. For swirling in and out of the "global culture" of every period are competing, alternative ideas (Sahlins, 1977: 24). In the Elizabethan case, one of these was the notion of equality. Some Elizabethans were skeptical about the legitimacy of the hierarchical distinctions, calling them the "mere fiction or device of men in a higher place..." (Meriton, 1607: 2Bv). Even a hierarchically minded church encouraged the notion when it reminded citizens of their equality before God (Cleland, 1611: 2-3; Mohl, 1933: 339; Owst, 1933: 292; Romei, 1598: 187-189; White, 1944: 126). Still others took issue with the distinctions of the hierarchy on the grounds that they were the result of a violent usurpation of power (Kelso, 1929: 34; Hill, 1958: 57; Hobday, 1979). These arguments for equality made up what one modern observer calls "a small but disturbing body of democratic opinion" (Major, 1964: 18).

A rather different but equally powerful challenge to hierarchy's reign existed in the tendency towards radical discontinuity. This tendency prompted men and women of high standing "almost [to] contempteth the lower sort" (Anonymous, 1555: 6*v). When superordinates acted in this high-handed manner, they implicitly challenged the idea of hierarchy as a *graduated* system of status. Their arrogance implied that the distinctions of the hierarchy were not differences of hierarchical degree but differences of special kind. In these instances, superordinates demanded to be treated as though they were "another kind of men" (Smith, in White, 1944: 248). In its most extreme form, Elizabethans refused even to recognize the humanity of their subordi-

nates. "A servant, and hee that is hired...are taken well nigh for no men" (Cleland, 1598: 155-6). When superordinates gave in to the temptation of radical discontinuity, they treated "fellow" men and women as different creatures. They accepted only the differences in the hierarchy and refused its commonalities.¹ As if the challenges of equality and radical discontinuity were not enough, the dominion of hierarchy was also challenged by the apparent nature of the world it sought to organize. For cosmological reasons and political ones, this was seen to be a world of imminent disorder. The body politic was vulnerable to "strife, warre, discord, envie, rankor, burning, sacking, wasting, spoyling and destroying," all in all "a very uncertaine ground to build upon" (DeMalynes, in White, 1944: 79). Elizabethans were thought to be prone to revolt. It was assumed that they wished "the subversion of all nobility as by the sedicious attemptes of Case, Straw, Ket and others, we may be well admonished" (Ferne, 1586: 2: 28). In the contemporary view, they were driven to disobedience both by a psychological/physiological constitution over which they had little control (McCracken, 1982b: 94), and the "blynd inveaglings, crafty abusings and perillous Inticements" of the agent provocateur (Elizabeth I, 1760: 589). The poor and low-standing were the most inclined to disobedience. But Elizabethan political psychology held that the children, women, and young men of all ranks were untrustworthy (McCracken, 1985: 517; Thomas, 1976). In this scheme a wide range of Elizabethans were vulnerable to the "frantique and furious headines" that robbed humans of their reason and society of its order (Blandy, 1576: 24).

The disorder that threatened the body politic came not just from subversive citizens. It was also a consequence of the very nature of the body politic. Heterogeneity was a fundamental assumption of the Elizabethan cosmology, and it was thought to characterize virtually everything in the sublunary universe. In the words of La Primaudaye, "all things were created out of divers natures and properties, and manie of cleane contraries" (1586: 92). Heterogeneity characterized the elements of the universe and the humours of man, and both tended towards a state of discord as a result (Anderson, 1927: 26-60; La Primaudaye, 1586: 92; Lewis, 1964: 94). In this world of correspondences, it was supposed that heterogeneity also characterized the political associations of men. Society was a composite of disparate elements, of "contraries", "dissimilitudes" and "many and diverse vocations distincte and different" (Ratcliffe, 1578: 8Or). Larke took for granted the nation's "great diversitie and dissimilitude of

condycyons and maners..." (1550: 2Cr). According to the Elizabethan scheme, as in some others, political diversity and dissimilitude were seen to be the inevitable result of the very nature of social and political association.

There are, then, many reasons why the Elizabethan hierarchy should have proven a problematical, and sometimes unmanageable, means of organizing the body politic. The hierarchy was built out of and attended by many structural difficulties.

It is also probable that the realities of everyday life in a hierarchy helped to create additional difficulties. It is, after all, in the very nature of hierarchy to breed frustration and hostility. This is especially true at the places in the hierarchy where one rank meets another. Typical dwellers of a hierarchy, living at the borders between ranks, are asked to accept that relatively small social differences between men and women (e.g., those of birth, income, achievement, education) justify major social distinctions between ranks. Here, where the ranks touch, subordinate parties can see their superordinates clearly and intimately. It does not take exceptional powers of observation to detect that all that separates profoundly different categories of person are relatively modest social differences. The opportunity to see across class lines is irksome for superordinates as well. Those occupying the lower border of their rank are sometimes irritated by how few real differences in honor and goods separate them from their putative inferiors. There is no definite evidence that Elizabethans experienced these common irritations of hierarchical life. Neither is there any compelling reason to think they escaped them.

Inter-rank irritations, if these existed, would have been made worse by the fact that at every border there was the constant movement of status-anxious Elizabethans. There was, first of all, a crowd of unhappy families fighting to halt their slide into obscurity. There were also more fortunate families seeking by fair means and foul to move upwards. Elizabethans engaged fiercely and unrelentingly in the business of status competition and social mobility. The processes by which they did so proved fertile ground for anger and resentment. It helped to make rank boundaries a site for the systematic manufacture of social tensions.

In sum, the Elizabethan hierarchy was an exceedingly delicate, complicated and vulnerable instance of social organization. In cross-cultural perspective, it exhibits some of the structural intricacy that has been observed in India (Dumont, 1972) and the hill tribes of Burma (Leach, 1954). It is the object of the present paper to argue that there is a

piece of this complexity that has gone neglected, a structural characteristic of the hierarchy we have ignored. This unexamined aspect of the hierarchy is important because it served in the preservation and management of this precarious social order. The Elizabethan hierarchy possessed cultural instruments that helped endow it with organization, consistency, and harmony.

Elizabethan Hierarchy: Cultural Instruments

The creation of unity in a hierarchy such as the Elizabethan one was not an impossible political objective, merely a vexing, difficult one. La Primaudaye argued that while nothing could be done about the dissimilitudes themselves, it was possible to manage the "disorder that groweth amongst them, that they may be reduced to a convenient agreement" (1586: 727). The creation of convenient agreement was indeed one of the great objectives of Elizabethan hegemony and statecraft.

There were many cultural instruments used to achieve this objective. With only limited military power to rely on, Elizabeth and her ruling elite took full advantage of the rhetorical, propagandistic, and symbolic devices at their disposal. Elizabeth I was, without question, one of the great masters of Renaissance rituals of monarchical self presentation (McCracken, 1984; Strong, 1977). She exploited the propagandistic opportunities of her pre-coronation progress, her summer progresses, and her court. Like subsequent British monarches (Thompson, 1974), she made her public appearances deliberate acts of political theatre. All of them served as cultural instruments with which Elizabethans sought a "convenient agreement" of the disparate forces threatening the hierarchy.

But these are not the instruments that concern us here. We are concerned with a class of instruments that lay deep inside the social organization of the period, rarely open to contemporary scrutiny or manipulation. Unlike the instruments so brilliantly and consciously exploited by Elizabeth and her court, this class of instruments operated according to the logic of the social system and without the aid or understanding of any particular party. This class of instruments was a covert one, largely concealed from contemporary and modern observers alike.

The effect of this class of instruments was the maintenance of the inter-rank relations of the hierarchy. This was not a simple question of creating unity. Mere unity was not a welcome objective in the Elizabethan hierarchy. Instead, these instruments sought a special kind of connection. They sought to bind hierarchical ranks without blurring the differences

and distinctions between them. As "hinges," these instruments sought a species of connection that did not destroy the separate character of the units so connected. This class of cultural instruments of Elizabethan England were, to this extent, an important part of the social architecture of the period.

Two cultural instruments are examined in this paper. One is the courtesy of the period. The second is the child exchange system. I shall treat these instruments in turn, describing how each served to "hinge" the hierarchy, to connect proximate ranks, and to inscribe the principle of hierarchy more deeply into the surface of Elizabethan life.

Courtesy as a Cultural Instrument

"Courtesy" (i.e., the informal rules governing the ceremony of daily life) was a matter of great interest to Elizabethans, perhaps more than it is to moderns (Craig, 1925: 300).² One Elizabethan, Chapman, was prepared to argue that the Goddess "Ceremony" was the author of all civil life (In Gordon, 1954: 55). Another suggested that his countrymen, deprived of etiquette, "walke awyre and wander without lighte, Confoundinge all to make a chaos quite." (In Nichols, 1823, III: 482). Some Elizabethans were persuaded that the expressive powers of courtesy could eclipse even those of language (Mares, 1972: xix).

Especially greeting, leave-taking, and public acknowledgment were charged with semiotic significance, and more particularly, political meaning. The aspect of courtesy that concerns us here is the Elizabethan concern for the greetings between superordinate and subordinate males during a public meeting.³ The chief semiotic burden of the greeting was to see that differences of rank were properly acknowledged (Gainsford, 1616: 100v).⁴ Men and women were called upon to use facial expressions and body movements to "distinguish the degrees and qualities of persons" (Bryskett, 1606: 244). They were asked to remember especially that "the least signe of honor is not arbitrarie or indifferent but to be performed and in no wise to be neglected according to the commandment of God" (Pricke, 1609: 7Dv).

Referring to the Italian version of this courtesy, Guazzo said it was amusing to observe these greetings, especially at a distance. At a distance, people could be seen "skipping, leaping, and dauncing" in the performance of their social duties (1581: 77r). Predictably, Guazzo was less amused at having to perform these ceremonies himself, and described them as "nothing else but a paine and subjection" (1581: 3r). Playing the deferential subordinate (as every Elizabethan with the exception of the monarch

was called upon to do) could be trying. In the words of one weary individual, subordinates were constantly "creeping and crouching to keepe that [which] we have and winne that [which] we wish" (Churchyard, in Nichols, 1823, II: 786).

Elizabethans routinely used courtesy to construct and to destroy social relationships. Della Casa reminded his readers of the importance of using one's hat to acknowledge and create friendships (1581: 73r). Puttenham concurred (1589: 239). But if gesture could create relationships, it could also destroy them. The final stages of the quarrel between Arthur Hall and M. Mallerie was conducted almost entirely with gestures and "great lookes" on their public meetings. These hostilities gave way eventually to a duel, perhaps the ultimate ritualized exchange of public gestures (Hall, 1816: 13).

But a much more famous conflict was also negotiated in the language of gesture. When Elizabeth refused to consider a piece of policy suggested by Essex, he gave her a scornful look and turned his back. Elizabeth responded in kind (i.e., non-verbally) and boxed his ears. Essex replied with an unthinkable gesture: he put his hand to his sword as if to draw it. This final piece of "courtesy" cost him dear. He was eventually restored to court but never to his monarch's favour (Luke, 1974: 640-41). It is perhaps not surprising to observe that this conflict was negotiated in gesture instead of speech. Gesture was, after all, an important medium for the representation of Elizabethan social relations.⁵

The chief devices for the show of etiquette and the acknowledgement of rank were removal of hats, lowering the body (by kneeling or bowing), "giving the wall," and greeting guests. Hats were in constant use indoors, out of doors, and at church. They were not removed except in deference to another (Cunnington, 1974: 27). As Cleland interprets this gesture, it "signifieth that we wil obey his commandements and yeeld him al authority over us" (1611: 177-178). This gesture was thought particularly apt as a way of signifying deference because it uncovered the worthiest part of a man, his head. It was done with the right hand because this was worthier than the left (Caroso, in Wildeblood, 1973: 80).

Elizabethans felt strongly about these gestures. When Lord Borough passed Sir Oliver Lambard at Court, he was surprised and annoyed when the latter neglected to remove his hat. Challenged, Lambard said flatly that he "owed [Lord Borough] not that Duty." When Lord Borough suggested that he might remove Lambard's hat for him, Lambard reminded him that he was at court. Lord Borough replied that only this kept him from adjudicating the

matter with his rapier (Collins, 1746, II: 41).

Bowing was still more obvious in its symbolism. Cleland suggested that it "declareth we submit our selves unto him & that we wil not remain equal, but wil humble and make our selves inferiour" (1611: 177-178). When individuals passed in the street, another way they could show deference was by "giving the wall." They would let the superordinate pass closest to the wall, "the most honourable place" (Cleland, 1611: 181). Another important gesture was receiving a visitor. The principle was simple: the farther the host went to the perimeter of his property to receive the visitor, the more honor he paid him. The most deferential way to receive a guest was, therefore, to greet him at the edge of one's property. The least deferential was to have him ushered into one's presence (Nichols, 1823, III: 252; Collins, 1746, I: 170-171). Where a visitor was received between these two points served as a rough but reliable indication of the extent to which the host wished to honor him.⁶

These devices all entered into the public exchange of gestures. Elizabethans insisted that subordinates show deference or "reverence" when they encountered a superordinate in public (Guazzo, 1581: 93v; Pricke, 1609: 4Fr, 8Hv; Wilson, 1553/1560: 17v; Stow, 1605: 1411).⁷ But Elizabethans were also particularly insistent that superordinates offer a reciprocal gesture of their own when they encountered a subordinate in the street (deCourtin, 1678: 115, 254; Elyot, 1907: 40v- 50r; Guazzo, 1581: 72v, 171v; Moryson, 1907: 266-267). The ceremonial exchange of gesture in the Elizabethan world was a reciprocal matter. In Guazzo's words "wee are bound to resalute those which salute us, bee they our inferiours or equals" (1581: 38r). No less a figure than Lord Burleigh advised: "to thy inferiors show humility and some familiarity, as to bow thy body, stretch forth thy hand and uncover thy head" (In Percy, 1609: 41).

The Elizabethan courtesy literature took special pains to instruct the parties most likely to fail in this reciprocity: the young and the upwardly mobile. It was commonly held that one of the excesses of Elizabethan youth was to demand too much and to give too little in their public greetings. Heron, for instance, instructed the young men to adopt a less "loftie" attitude (1575: 96). Newly arrived Elizabethans also tended to forget themselves on the public stage. Braithwait complained of those "surly Sirs whose aime is to be capp'd and congied to." These men may be new to their rank but already they "knowe how to looke bigge and shew a storme in [the] brow" (1641: 34-35). Greene disliked those who

appeared in public as if in a procession, chiding the "artificial bragart" who steps "so proudly with such a geometrical grace" (1954: 133).

If young men and the upwardly mobile were inclined to err in the reciprocal exchange of public courtesies, senior and well established Elizabethans were more reliable. One of the very few exchanges of which we have a visual record is portrayed in a woodcut published in John Derricke's *The Image of Ireland* (1581). This shows an exchange that took place between Sir Henry Sidney and the Irish chieftain Turogh Lynagh O'Neale. The occasion for this exchange was the submission of O'Neale to Sidney during the latter's campaign to subdue the rebellious Irish tribes. The woodcut shows both halves of the exchange. In the foreground, we see O'Neale kneeling before Sidney who is seated in his tent surrounded by knights. O'Neale's posture is a full kneel as befits the nature of the event. This is not only the acknowledgment of superior rank but an act of submission to a greater military and sovereign power. In the background, a standing Sidney is depicted embracing a kneeling O'Neale at the edge of the English camp. As reciprocal acts of courtesy, these separate moments of etiquette appear together in the diplomatic record of event.

Another, better known, example of the public exchange of courtesies appeared in Elizabeth's pre-coronation procession. Elizabeth responded to the pageants and exhibits of the pre-coronation procession with reciprocal gestures. When the crowd indicated with words and gestures "a wonderfull earnest love of most obedient subjectes toward their soveraigne," Elizabeth responded with language and especially gesture that "did declare herselfe no lesse thankfully to receive her Peoples good wyll, than they lovingly offered it unto her" (Anon., 1558-9: 38).⁸

But let us ask why gesture and courtesy should so preoccupy the courtesy literature and the public stage. Why did Elizabethans care so deeply about the reciprocal exchange of ceremonial gesture between superordinate and subordinate? A glimpse of the answer to this question comes in a famous passage from Sir Thomas Elyot. Some thirty years before the Elizabethan period, Elyot offered this ethnographic observation from the streets of England:

Howe often have I herde people say, whan men in authoritie have passed by without makynge gentill countenance to those whiche have done to them reverence: This man weneth [i.e., wishes] with a loke [i.e., look] to subdue all the worlde; nay, nay, mennes hartes be free, and wyll love whom they lyst. And therto all the other do consente in a murmur, as it were bees (1531: 130).

The murmur of the Elyot's crowd tells us that courtesy was important to Elizabethans because it was charged with political significance. Implicit in this murmur was the expectation that subordinates who gave reverence to their superordinates would be reciprocated. Here was the further expectation that superordinates who refused this gesture could expect their subordinates to take a changed view of their political responsibilities.

Let us return to Elyot's account, and see what happened when the superordinate played his role correctly.

Whan a nobleman passeth by, shewyng to men a gentil and familiare visage, it is a worlde to beholde how people takethe comforte: howe the blode in their visage quickeneth: howe their flesshe stireth, and harts lepeth for gladnesse. Than they all speke as it were in an harmonie, the one saith, who beholding this mans moste gentill countenance, wyll nat with all his harte loue him? Another saith, He is no man, but an aungell; se howe he rejoyseth all men that beholde him. Finallye all do graunt that he is worthye all honour that may be given or wished him (1907: 132).

The reaction was an extraordinary one. When a superordinate played his part correctly, a powerful physiological change was evoked in his subordinates. They rushed to express their approval. They flattered the superordinate with metaphors that promoted him in the hierarchy (to the rank of angel). Finally, they declared the superordinate worthy of his high standing and the deference they have just paid him. It is as if these subordinates were moved to bestow a counter-prestation upon the superordinate. In return for his simple act of acknowledgment, they gave him a gift of appreciation, reverence, and affirmation.

Both reactions of the Elizabethan crowd, anger in the first instance, joy in the second, tell us that Elizabethans cared about courtesy because there was a great deal at stake there. In one case, it meant that the subordinate withdrew from his relationship with the superordinate. In the other, it meant that the subordinate was propelled into this relationship. Elizabethans cared about courtesy because vital aspects of their political association were played out there.

Did this practice and sentiment exist in the Elizabethan period thirty years hence? Vaughan, sounding a little as if he may have cribbed the form of his sentiment from Elyot, issues a similar ethnographic observation in the early 17th century:

if a Noble man, that is proud and haughty of countenance, should passe by them [i.e., the people] without any semblaunce of gentlesse, they [will be moved to speak ill of him and] they care not who heares them: their tongues are their owne (1608: K6r).

Apparently, the practices observed by Elyot were active even beyond the reign of Elizabeth. It is, of course, impossible to be certain of their scope or their frequency. As part of what Malinowski (1922) called the "inponderabilia" of everyday life, courtesy found its way into the historical record only when performed by personages as great as Sidney and Elizabeth on occasions as important as a chieftain's submission or a pre-coronation procession. Otherwise, the continuous flow of gesture and counter-gesture moved too swiftly over the surface of everyday life to leave a substantial impression of its role and significance there.

The Larger Implications of Courtesy

Anticipating the theoretical developments of a later anthropology, Edward Sapir (1931) suggested that society is the composite of the acts of communication that take place within it. In this view, society is created and recreated by the symbolic gestures of those who inhabit it. Courtesy served Elizabethan society in just this way. It helped to create the Elizabethan body politic by fashioning a link between the ranks of the hierarchy. Still more important, it caused Elizabethans formally to acknowledge and embrace the political principles of the hierarchy, especially the separateness and the asymmetry of its classes. It is surely not accidental that this crucially important activity took place in what was for Elizabethans a key medium for the expression of political relations, the gestures of the body. In this discipline of the body, apparently, Elizabethans had undertaken a discipline of the body politic.

The greetings performed by Elizabethans was an unambiguous process of exchange. The opening gift of deference was offered by the subordinate. This gift was accepted and then returned in the form of acknowledgment by the superordinate. This gift was, in turn, accepted by the subordinate and returned in the form of appreciation. Deference, acknowledgment, and appreciation moved back and forth in the form of gift, counter-gift, counter-gift. Exchange has long been seen as an instrument of social integration, as a means of "securing or of displaying the interlocking of social groups" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 109). There is by now a substantial literature that demonstrates how frequently human communities have resorted to this instrument to

bring unity to otherwise fractious body politics (Ernest, 1978; Gouldner, 1960; Lebra, 1975; Lévi-Strauss, 1976; Marriot, 1968; Mauss, 1970; Paine, 1976; Schwimmer, 1974; Sillitoe, 1979).⁹ Indeed at first blush, the movement of greetings between subordinate and superordinate parties appears to be "standard issue" cultural practice and an unexceptional example of a well known, much documented ethnographic phenomenon. What makes this exchange so interesting, and so efficacious as a cultural instrument, is the way in which the logic of this exchange intersects with the logic of the hierarchy. Let us consider the exchange of gestures in its hierarchical context.

The first act in the exchange of courtesies had a clear hierarchical significance. When a subordinate paid deference to a superordinate, he acted out his political status in the manner of a mime. He played out subordination with the gestures of the body. We must be careful not to suppose that the subordinate's gesture was a simple, automatic signalling of deference. We must see that it was something more than a crude acknowledgement of relative standing. For the subordinate's part in the ritual of public greetings was active and much more purposeful than this. He was not merely acknowledging his subordination, he was creating it.

The rules of courtesy demanded that the subordinate participate in the very act of subordination by which his status was defined. By removing the hat, the subordinate was, in Cleland's words "yeilding authority." He was *making* himself smaller, more vulnerable. He was voluntarily disassembling the public front that protected and represented him in public. More particularly, he was removing his hat, a crucial part of the status armory of every Elizabethan. He was dismantling his own status claim in the presence of a greater one.

Lowering the body was still more obviously an enactment of subordination rather than merely a sign of it. The individual was making himself "humble and inferiour." Cleland's play on "inferior" is instructive. In Elizabethan courtesy, the literal and figurative senses of this term were synonymous. By making the body inferior in public space, the subordinate was making the self inferior in social space. When Elizabethan subordinates deferred to their superordinates, they were creating their subordinate status.

The opening gift in the exchange, then, was charged with unambiguous hierarchical symbolism. It gives us our first glimpse of how the exchange of gestures was captured by the hierarchy and made to express Elizabethan political relations. This ex-

change of gestures allowed Elizabethans to create, in Sapir's terms, the society in which they lived. Let us now take up the second gesture, the superordinate's gesture.

The Elizabethan superordinate came to the exchange of gestures from a position of advantage entirely consistent with his higher standing. He did not enter into an exchange of gestures until the subordinate had made his obligatory first gesture. If no first gesture was forthcoming, he could simply ignore the situation (or take to his rapier). Even when the first gesture was forthcoming, the superordinate could still outwardly ignore it, appropriating this piece of deference as his due.

This discretionary power left the subordinate at a great disadvantage. He was obliged always to make the first gesture. But when the gesture went unreciprocated, there was nothing he could do to rescind or recover it. Trapped by convention, he was both forced to make himself vulnerable and unable to defend himself when this vulnerability was exploited. Furthermore and more importantly, when the gift went unrequited, it assumed an interesting and unpleasant symbolism: it took on the appearance of an obligation. When deference went unacknowledged, the act of making oneself inferior took on the status of a requirement and, to this extent, a fully servile act.

The superordinate's part in the exchange, when he chose to play it, was charged with meaning. His gesture had the power to transform the subordinate's opening gesture from an obligation into a gift. It changed this gesture from something forced into something voluntary. Superordinate acknowledgment of the subordinate deference took away the opening gesture's taint of servility.

This account explains, I think, the reaction of the subordinates observed by Elyot when superordinates refused to answer subordinate deference. The intensity of this reaction, its anger and indignation, tells us that subordinates saw themselves as having been wounded by the superordinate. They reacted fiercely because they have been made to suffer the worst of social injuries, the imputation of servility. The strategies at their disposal were not numerous or very promising. They best they could do, in the circumstances, was to dress the wound with the language of disingenuous repudiation. They could do no more than marshal protestations that cast doubt on the idea of subordination (despite the fact that they had just moments ago voluntarily enacted it). This account also helps explain the reaction of Elizabethan subordinates to the superordinate who did acknowledge their deference. The intensity of

this response, its outpouring of gratitude and largesse, comes from the fact that these subordinates had just escaped one most unpleasant fate and been blessed with another, entirely happy one. A potentially servile offering had been transformed into a voluntary one, a gift. Their position has been elevated from that of drudges to that of men with free hearts and free tongues.

This act of largesse, in which the subordinate approves and rejoices the superordinate's standing, is the last act of exchange. Now that the subordinate's act had been made a voluntary gesture by superordinate acknowledgment, the subordinate makes an unambiguously voluntary gesture and bequeaths a second gift of this nature to the superordinate. This second gift is plainly driven by the gratitude occasioned by the superordinate's response to the first. The subordinate is now showing and confirming the voluntary intentionality that the superordinate was prepared to bestow upon him.

Here is the real power of the superordinate's gift. It drew the subordinate into the celebration of superordinate status merely by constructing him as a certain kind of social actor, capable of a certain species of social action. The superordinate's gift was so powerful it could prompt the subordinate to celebrate the very society that has just forced him to act out his own subordination and expose himself to the taint of servility.¹⁰

This takes us more deeply into the full cunning of the Elizabethan exchange of gestures. Every aspect of the practice appears designed to insure that the cultural instrument that would help create bonds between Elizabethans would also encourage the idea and practice of hierarchy. Let us review the exchange of gestures, and draw out the manner in which it served to emphasize the hierarchy.

The event always began with the subordinate being forced to offer an "uninsured" gesture of deference. Nothing was promised or guaranteed. The burden of initiation was so situated that the superordinate party needed never risk anything while the subordinate had always to do so. Second, the subordinate could not participate in the exchange of gestures without playing out his status, without creating, in Sapir's sense, the very subordination that defined his position. In this system there was no neutral acknowledgment. If a subordinate was to acknowledge a superordinate, he could only do so by enacting, and creating his own inferior status.

Third, this act of subordination could be simply appropriated by the superordinate. Granted, the courtesy literature of the Elizabethan period counsels them against this practice, but, just as plainly, it

would not have taken such pains to do so were the practice not widespread. On any given occasion, it was the unofficial prerogative of the Elizabethan superordinate to take possession of an acknowledgment and "pay" nothing for it. It was his prerogative to appropriate this acknowledgment, a superordinate behavior not unknown to other Elizabethan social relations. Fourth, when the superordinate did so, he inflicted a nasty social injury on the subordinate. He made it appear that this subordinate had offered up his act of subordination as a mechanical act of thoughtless obligation.

Fifth, it was also the prerogative of the superordinate to offer acknowledgement in exchange for deference. He was charged, or made to seem to be charged, with quite remarkable pragmatic power. In the exercise of the privileges and powers of his station, he could transform the subordinate's gesture from something coerced to something freely granted. The subordinate could not do this for himself. The only thing a subordinate was entitled to enact was his own subordination. For a more elevated status, he had to rely on the consent and participation of his superordinate. Sixth, so potent was the potential penalty and prize of courtesy that the subordinate who escaped the one and obtained the other, rushed to affirm the superordinate's superordinate position. Courtesy so manipulated the subordinate that he was caused to embrace, to applaud, the very system that put him at risk.

Each of these steps seems designed to affirm a different aspect of the hierarchy. The subordination of the subordinate, the superordination of the superordinate, the steepness and the expanse of the social ground between them, the vulnerability of the inferior party, the power and powers of the superior party, all of these are played out in courtesy. Every aspect of this piece of exchange seems designed to etch the principle of hierarchy more deeply into daily life of the body politic.

From the point of view of Elizabethan society at large, courtesy seems to almost to assume the status of an advertisement for hierarchy, relentlessly demonstrating its place and importance in the social world in one of the media that Elizabethans watched with greatest care. From the point of view of the individual, it seems no less effective. The individual began the public exchange of greetings by acting out, and so creating, his own subordination. He ended it by applauding and celebrating the superordinate status of the superordinate party. For both the individual and the collectivity, courtesy helped create bonds of exchange but never did it leave any doubt as to the nature of the tie between the parties so

bonded. Indeed, it is perhaps not too much to say that the price of bonding was a triumphant affirmation of the hierarchy that had driven distinctions between men in the first place.

If Sapir's concept of society encourages us to see Elizabethan courtesy in these terms, modern anthropology is still more insistent. Some anthropologists have come to insist that culture must be seen as something "always in production, in process" (Bruner, 1984: 3). Indeed, this perspective has even been made an argument for historical study, which, as Cohn suggests, "would shift the anthropologist away from the objectification of social life to a study of its constitution and construction" (1980:217). The study of courtesy shows us Elizabethans constructing their societies out of the small, everyday gestures of greeting that passed between superordinates and subordinates in the streets of 16th century England. Out of these trifling gestures some part of the unity and the cultural definition of the period was drawn. Courtesy was not the only cultural instrument at the disposal of the Elizabethans, but, as I have tried to demonstrate here, it was one of the most vital and cunning of techniques with which Elizabethans sought to contend with the extraordinary delicacy, complexity, and vulnerability of their social world.

Child Exchange

Child exchange also served as a cultural instrument in Elizabethan England. It served as a covert means of creating unity and emphasizing hierarchy. Child exchange was indeed one of England's strongest hinges. It represented a vast, complicated institution that touched virtually all of the children of the body politic and most of its families.¹¹

The Elizabethan child exchange system directed the movement of children from the families of one rank to the families of another. The movement was an ascending one: when a child left his own family for another, he or she always moved upward in the hierarchy. The movement had a carefully successive character: the families who gave their children to the rank above took children from the rank below. The movement had a carefully graduated character: children tended to move between immediately proximate ranks. This movement of children was in fact a movement of servants: when a child entered the family of a higher rank, he or she did so as a domestic servant. Participation in this system of child exchange was not limited to the low and middle ranks. For most of Elizabeth's reign, aristocratic families participated both as child givers and child takers.

Elizabethans regarded this child exchange sys-

tem as an opportunity to advance their children's educations. When children entered the home of a higher rank, they were exposed to practices, ideas, and individuals to which they had no access in their own homes. Serving at the table of another, higher class, they were expected to gather adult graces and political connections. Service in a superordinate household gave them a larger window on the world and a glimpse of the opportunities for advancement that existed there. Children were transformed by service.¹²

Like Elizabethan courtesy, the child exchange system had the effect of bonding hierarchical ranks one to another. But like Elizabethan courtesy it also had important implications for the definition of hierarchy. Like courtesy, it appears to have worked almost like an advertisement, a piece of instruction, that helped to inscribe the principle of hierarchy into the surface of the Elizabethan world.

The exchange of children worked to emphasize the asymmetry of the exchanging parties. It helped confirm the superiority of one party and the inferiority of the other. For the child-giver, the exchange represented a gesture of unmistakable deference. To relinquish one's children at all, to give them up to a higher home, to commit them there to the activity of service, all these acts helped to announce, and to create, one's subordinate status. The ability to take possession of others' children, to receive them from a lower home, to entertain them as servants, these acts helped to create a statement of one's superordinate status. If this exchange system helped, as exchange systems must, to create connections between potentially antagonistic parties, it also seemed in the Elizabethan case to have affirmed the hierarchical logic according to which these parties were organized.

But there is an important structural difference between child exchange and gesture exchange and this has implications for its cultural message. Elizabethan child exchange represents what Lévi-Strauss calls "generalized exchange" (1969:233). In a system of this kind, Lévi-Strauss suggests, exchange is always conducted on "credit" (1969: 265). It depends upon the confidence that what one rank gives to a higher one it will receive from a lower one. In the Elizabethan case, child exchange was not directly reciprocal, as the exchange of gestures was. It had the character of a spiral stair case.¹³

This aspect of child exchange gave it interesting properties as a cultural instrument. Two are especially important here: the role-shift demanded by child exchange and the deep integration it created.

The child exchange system gave every family the opportunity to play both child-giver and child-

taker. This means that while individuals were called upon to subordinate themselves through the act of child-giving, they also had the opportunity to enjoy the superordination implicit in child-taking. The act of exchange had the effect of forcing a role-shift in which superordinate parties were brought low and subordinate parties raised high (relatively speaking). This means that the hierarchy enacted the hierarchy not as an absolute distinction of high rank and low but as a shifting system in which most parties played both roles.

This vision of the hierarchy played out the very issue of trust on which the hierarchy itself depended. It said in effect: suffer your subordinate status that you, too, may play the superordinate. This was indeed the great sop that the hierarchy gave to its members, and one of the compensations for the irritations and indignities of low standing. The system that made them someone's subordinate also made them someone's superordinate.

Second, the child exchange system demonstrated that the hierarchy was not a system of small personal contracts between clients and patrons but a kind of spiral stair case embracing the entire body politic. This form of exchange forced connections between three levels in the hierarchy. It demanded that each unit of exchange have an intermediate family, a high family to whom they gave children and a low family from whom they took children. In other words, the bond created by this instrument was not two, but at least three, ranks deep. Child exchange created better, deeper integration than the courtesy system.

Courtesy and Child Exchange as Cultural Instruments

This paper has proposed that both courtesy and child exchange served the Elizabethan body politic as cultural instruments. Both helped to bind ranks and to define the hierarchical relations between them. The similarities between these instruments was marked. Both instruments forced the enactment of the low standing status and the idea of subordination. Both forced the enactment of high standing status and the idea of superordination. Both played out the special power of the superordinate. In both cases, the superordinate was made to seem blessed with the ability to transform objects and make them newly valuable to the subordinate from whom they came. In one case, the superordinate transformed deference into a voluntary gesture, and the subordinate into a creature of freedom and non-servile standing. In the other, the superordinate transformed the child into a more mature and worldly

creature. As we have just seen, their differences were also marked. The courtesy system represented direct exchange while the child system represented generalized exchange. This latter form of exchange allowed individuals to participate in the shifting of roles, and a deeper kind of integration than was occasioned by the courtesy system.

How delicately crafted was the "wonderful linkage" of Elizabethan England. To contend with the contradictions and hostilities constantly at work in their society, Elizabethans devised extraordinary cultural instruments to see to its stability. Everywhere hierarchy created social difference, Elizabethans found a way to bind the difference up. Everywhere the ranks touched, everywhere, that is to say, the possibility of division presented itself, Elizabethans created a finely crafted hinge. Some societies appear as if designed by modern engineers. Their principles of organization run through the social order as solid, continuous beams. Elizabethans chose their own, characteristically brilliant, principles of construction. At every point of potential difficulty they used cultural instruments of real cunning. We have examined only two of these. But we can be certain that several more operated to create the wonderful linkage of beings of the Elizabethan world.

NOTES

1. The notion of radical discontinuity was possibly a "bastard" implication of the Elizabethan conviction that men could rise to the level of angels or fall to the levels of beasts according to their virtue and accomplishments (Hayward, 1623: 251-252). It may also have reflected the Elizabethan conviction that nowhere in the great chain of being were differences of degree more profound than in the human community: "...certainly we find not such a latitude of difference, in any creature, as in the nature of man: wherein...the wisest excel the most foolish, by far greater degree, than the most foolish of men doth surpass the wisest of beasts" (Raleigh, 1986: 227).

2. Anthropologists have used courtesy in this general capacity before (e.g., Firth, 1972; Goody, 1972; Irvine, 1974), as have historians (e.g., Curtin, 1985) and sociologists (e.g., Elias, 1978). See Roosen (1980) on the use of courtesy and still more embracing forms of ceremony to negotiate the hierarchical standing of early modern nations. See Ranum (1980) on the strategic use of courtesy by officials of the emerging French state as a means of social control.

3. It is this focus on Elizabethan *males* that is responsible for the use, in what follows, of gender specific pronouns. The courtesy literature from which this discussion is drawn was directed mostly towards men.

4. Elizabethan courtesy was charged with a range of additional pragmatic functions, including the discrimina-

tion of cultural categories of age (Lady Jane Grey, in Greene, 1969: 611; Fenner, 1584: C3r; Pricke, 1609: 8Hv), gender (Castiglione, 1928: 189, 236), nationality (Moryson, 1907: 450; Ascham, In Park, 1961: 202; Castiglione, 1928: 128), and region (Campbell, 1942: 379; Gainsford, 1616: 28r). In the Elizabethan scheme, courtesy and gesture were seen to be governed by several key notions, including that of affability (Braithwait, 1641: 387; S.C., 1673: 34), conversation (Javitch, 1961: 35) decorum (Hall, 1943; McAlindon, 1973: 3), grace (Della Casa, 1576: 108); beauty (Castiglione, 1928: 3Cr; Rebhorn, 1978: 23, 69; Cicero, in Wildeblood, 1973: 30), reverence (Wilson, 1553/1560: 17v), and the outward expression of interior psychological and physiological conditions (Anderson, 1927: 114; Bulwer, 1644; Campbell, 1930; Fink, 1935: 241-242; Haydocke, 1598, II: 4).

5. I have discussed the particular advantages of using non-linguistic media for the representation of political issues elsewhere (McCracken, 1982a, 1988).

6. There are other gestures that make up Elizabethan and Renaissance courtesy, including shaking hands (Bulwer, 1644: 107; Cleland, 1611: 178; Wildeblood, 1973: 52), "following behind," (Stow, 1605: 1411), and kissing the hand (Cleland, 1611: 178; Wildeblood, 1973: 83).

7. Wilson defines "reverence" as "an humbleness in outward behavior, when we do our dutie to them that are our betters" (1553/1560: 17v).

8. This procession and its reciprocity is treated at length in McCracken (1984).

9. I have reviewed this literature elsewhere (McCracken, 1983a).

10. This account leaves two small questions unaccounted for: "were subordinates really without choice in their participation in the courtesy system?" and "were subordinates, when snubbed by superordinates, really, as they claimed, entitled to "love whom they lyste"?" Both these questions come down to the same issue: was there an element of choice for subordinates when they interacted with superordinates? As is still the case in the modern day, English courtesy appears to have fallen into that range of behaviors against which there is no legal or formal recourse (as compared to the French case discussed by Ranum, 1980). Apparently, Elizabethans could suffer no formal penalty for refusing to participate in, and for withdrawing from, a compliant attitude towards a superordinate. It is also true, however, that this behavior could incur the displeasure of the superordinate with unpleasant and even dangerous consequences. The answer to these questions must therefore be mixed: Yes, men's hearts were free. No, they could not withhold their deference with impunity.

11. I have described the Elizabethan child exchange system in detail elsewhere (McCracken, 1983a). The following is a summary account.

12. It is not just its summary form that makes this account of the child exchange system so slender. The historical record cannot answer many of the questions anthropologists are inclined to ask. We do not know, for instance, how superordinate and subordinate children

interacted, how the subordinate and superordinate families interacted after a child had passed between them, or how many of the responsibilities of parenthood were assumed by the master. Most of the ethnographic details of the child exchange system are simply lost.

13. I use the term "generalized exchange" to refer not to circular exchange, what Lévi-Strauss calls the "simplest formulae" of this exchange system (1969: 265). I use it to refer instead to "anisogamous" exchange (i.e., exchange between parties of different status) in which circular exchange is not achieved. This is, as Lévi-Strauss notes, the form towards which generalized exchange "leads almost unavoidably" (1969: 266). The distinguishing characteristic of generalized exchange systems is, in my opinion, that they demand that parties to an exchange must receive gifts from a party other than the party to whom they give gifts (and vice versa). This is what distinguishes generalized exchange from restricted exchange, this is what forces these systems to work on a kind of "credit," as Lévi-Strauss puts it (1969: 265), and this is what makes the concept so useful as a means of characterizing the structural implications of Elizabethan child exchange.

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