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Fear, hatred and the hidden injuries of class in early modern England

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'Class struggle... is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. But these latter things, which are present in class struggle, are not present as a vision of spoils that fall to the victor. They are alive in this struggle as confidence, courage, humour, cunning, and fortitude, and have effects that to reach far back into the past.'

H. Eiland and M.W. Jennings (eds.) Walter Benjamin: selected writings. Volume 4, 1938-1940 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 390.

'The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed'
Steve Biko, quoted in D. Barsamian (ed.), Propaganda and the public mind: conversations with Noam Chomsky (London, 2001), 165.

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I

Historical assessments of social relations in early modern England have often extrapolated from expressions of plebeian contempt for their rulers. The Wapping mariner who 'cared not a fart for the king' and Joan Hoby of Colnbrook (Buckinghamshire) who 'did not care a pin nor a fart for my Lord's Grace of Canterbury [i.e., Archbishop Laud]...and...did hope that she should live to see him hanged' both suggest that the labouring people of early modern England frequently rejected the passive deference expected of them by their rulers.¹ Social historians often balance such exclamations against evidence of popular deference, thereby concluding that early modern society sat uneasily between a status-based 'society of orders' and a modern class society.² But what are historians of social relations to make of such outbursts? Do they

¹ K. Lindley, Popular politics and religion in civil war London (Aldershot, 1997), 235; C. Hill, The world turned upside down: radical ideas during the English Revolution (London, 1972), 29. Early American historians should note the anger that early modern English labouring people sometimes displayed towards their rulers: notably, that evidence challenges nationalist characterisations of social relations, in which the values of hierarchical, status-bound *Ancien regime* Europe are contrasted to the rugged individualism and lack of deference allegedly obtaining within seventeenth and eighteenth century America. See for instance Michael Zuckerman's claim that social relations in early America were 'different from anything European' and that a hostility to deference was 'bred in the American bone': M. Zuckerman, 'Tocqueville, Turner and turds: four stories of manners in early America', Journal of American History, 85, 1 (1998), 13. For a provocative characterisation of English social relations as purely deferential, see J.C.D. Clark, English society, 1688-1832 (Cambridge, 1985).

² See, for instance, J.A. Sharpe, Early modern England: a social history, 1550-1760 (1987; 2nd ed., London, 1997), 126-9, 233-4.

represent the main, or even the only, plebeian reaction to authority?³ Should historians be forced into a choice: deference *or* defiance? Or should we analyse these two extremes *in relationship* to one another, studying the friction between deference *and* defiance?⁴ This paper will make a case for the latter approach. In particular, it will develop Keith Snell's insight that 'Deferential attitudes become a manner, one side of an habitual double-faced outlook, a form of self-presentation. They were buttoned in as a necessity for survival'.⁵

The title of this essay borrows shamelessly from that classic piece of radical sociology, Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's *Hidden Injuries of Class*, published back in 1972. The essay itself extends the growing rehabilitation of class as an analytical category in early modern history.⁶ In this first section, recent postmodernist approaches to class are summarised, and their usefulness for the interpretation of class in early modern England is explored. In the second section of the essay, the concept of class is shown to have a utility in the explanation of hitherto neglected aspects of early modern social relations. In a long third section, class categories are deployed in a more detailed assessment of the place of fear, deference, anger and hatred in early modern social relations.

The growing rehabilitation of class categories in early modern English social history writing represents a significant departure from the analytical traditions pursued by the 'new' social historians of early modern England in the 1970s and 1980s. I have argued elsewhere that, until recently, the 'new' social historians tended to characterise early modern social relations as only semi-modern, suspended between an older system characterised by deference, hierarchy and paternalism and the overt class struggles of the nineteenth century.⁷ For the social historians of early modern England, therefore, class was to be found elsewhere - beyond the period, in the structural transformations of the Industrial Revolution. Although early modern social conflicts could anticipate the class struggles of that later epoch, the 'new' social historians were clear that such struggles could not compare with the fully-formed, mature class conflicts and class identities that emerged from the 'making' of the English working class. However, the deconstruction of class carried out by the postmodernist historians of the 1990s has removed the

³ For which approach in early America, see Zuckerman, 'Tocqueville, Turner and turds', 26. For the polar opposite of Zuckerman's characterisation of early American social relations, see G. S. Wood [The radicalism of the American revolution](#) (New York, 1992).

⁴ For the former approach, see the recent round table: 'Deference or defiance' in [Journal of American History](#), 85, 1 (1998). For the latter approach, see my "'Poore men woll speke one daye": plebeian languages of deference and defiance in England, c. 1520-1640', in T. Harris (ed.), [The politics of the excluded, c. 1500-1850](#) (Basingstoke, 2001), 67-98.

⁵ K.D.M. Snell, 'Deferential bitterness: the social outlook of the rural proletariat in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' in M.L. Bush (ed.) [Social orders and social classes in Europe since 1500: studies in social stratification](#) (London, 1992), 165. For an important sociological perspective, see H. Newby, [The deferential worker: a study of farm workers in East Anglia](#) (London, 1977).

⁶ For this rehabilitation, see most recently K.E. Wrightson, "'These which be participant of the common wealth: class, governments and social identities in early modern England', forthcoming; D. Rollison, 'The spectre of a commonwealth: language and class struggle in England on the eve of the Atlantic world', forthcoming. I am grateful to both authors for granting me pre-publication access to these essays.

⁷ A. Wood, [The politics of social conflict: the Peak Country, 1520-1770](#) (Cambridge, 1999), ch. 1. For deference in nineteenth century England, see P. Joyce [Work, society and politics: the culture of the factory in later Victorian England](#) (Hassocks, 1980).

chronological end-point of this meta-narrative. Although its theoretical foundations remain the subject of much debate, the postmodern/linguistic turn taken by modern social historians in the 1990s has the potential to liberate early modern social historians from an imprisoning periodisation of class, enabling the concept to be deployed with greater freedom.⁸

Removing the period-specificity of class means that it can rank as a category of historical analysis alongside gender and race. Instead of searching for antecedents of modern class identities, early modern historians need to rethink class - as a category; as a relationship; as a structure - and thereby reconfigure the ways in which we conceptualise both the periodisation and the meaning of class. In this essay, I want to deploy class in a positive fashion, showing how class analysis can both add to existent areas of enquiry and open up new trails. The next section suggests, in no particular order, some of the new approaches which are revealed by the application of class analysis; the closing section of the essay focuses in greater detail upon one such area: the emotional and psychic content of class relations in early modern England.

II

It is a central claim of this essay that the 'linguistic turn' taken by postmodernist historians of class represents an opportunity for historians of social identities and class conflict in earlier periods. Some of the practices of postmodern historians (in particular, the emphasis upon language as a form of power; the hostility to grand narratives; the interest in understanding identities as relational and as constituted through discourse) can be usefully exploited in the exploration of social relations - not (as some postmodernist writers wish) to *dismiss* class as an analytical category, but to *rejuvenate* it, enabling us to understand early modern social conflicts in their own terms rather than as partial, distorted echoes of something that lay in the future. When combined with some of the surviving fragments of historical materialism - Gramsci's interest in cultural domination and the broader Marxist emphasis upon the significance of material inequalities to social life and struggle - such an analysis, far from imprisoning us within a restricted, late nineteenth/early twentieth century (masculine/urban/European) definition of class, in fact liberates us to reconsider earlier social conflicts in new and more interesting ways. So, what should this new history of class look like? What follows in this section comprises a rough-hewn attempt to suggest how class-based categories might illuminate some understudied aspects of early modern social relations.

Fundamental to the enterprise of rethinking social relations in early modern England ought to be the relationship between class and other forms of identity - regional identities (of which more below); gender (both gender and class are labels for active, dynamic, fluid forms of power relations; following Laura Gowing, we might say, that like gender,

⁸ For this postmodern/linguistic turn, see in particular P. Joyce, Visions of the people: industrial England and the question of class, 1840-1914 (Cambridge, 1991); J. Vernon, Politics and the people: a study in English political culture, c.1815-1867 (Cambridge, 1993); J.W. Scott, 'The evidence of experience', Critical Inquiry, 17 (1991), 773-97; G. Stedman Jones, Languages of class: studies in English working class history, 1832-1982 (Cambridge, 1983), esp. 1-24, 90-178.

class was always being constituted); patriotism (relatively weak in the early modern period, but nonetheless significant - hence, for instance, the English perception that the commons of France were humiliated and subordinated by the French nobility, and the mid-seventeenth century popular willingness to believe in a court or papist conspiracy to reduce the commons of England to a similar condition) and religion (for instance, the popular perception of the early reformation as a plot by rich men to destroy the commonweal - social historians have not always been sensitive to the history of religious ideas, often seeing them as 'vehicles' for social identity or social protest; in place of seeing religious conflicts as either peripheral, or as 'reflections' of true/real material disputes, we need to pick apart the complicated, historically specific relationship between the two).⁹

Perhaps surprisingly, the history of labour remains to be written for the early modern period. Although there are a number of valuable studies of individual groups of workers, the social organisation of labour, the cultural meanings of work, its relationship to local patterns of subordination and independence, the character and extent of labour disputes, and the precise characteristics of labour processes remain only partially understood. Here, it is essential that older traditions of economic history and labour history be rejuvenated, and that the work of recent cultural historians' dealing with the construction of identities be exploited in order to comprehend the relationship between work and collective identities.¹⁰ In some cases, such as amongst migratory wage labourers, trade identities are likely to have been weak. In other cases, such as organised artisanal trades, work identities are likely to have been sharply delineated along the lines set by local power relations, gender, custom, and social practice. According to witness testimonies taken in 1635, for instance, the weavers of Gloucester explained how they maintained an 'auncient Company or fraternity', the legal basis of which was built upon both oral tradition and written records. On St Anne's Day, the weavers came together in their 'auncient comon hall' to select the new master of the fraternity. The common hall also formed the repository for the weavers' archive, which was 'carefully kept under three locks and keyes'. The ornate institutional structure of the weavers' company created occupational

⁹ On class and gender in the early modern period, see L. Gowing, Domestic dangers: women, words and sex in early modern London (Oxford, 1996), 4-6. Nineteenth-century historians have been more interested in the relationship between class and gender. See, in particular, L. Davidoff and C. Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English middle class 1780-1850 (London, 1987) and A. Clark, The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class (London, 1995). Early modern English popular nationalism has yet to be explored. On court/papist conspiracy to reduce the commons of England to French subordination, see A. Wood, Riot, rebellion and popular politics in early modern England (Basingstoke, 2002), Ch.4.III. On popular perceptions of the early reformation, see A. Wood, The 1549 rebellions and the making of early modern England (Cambridge, forthcoming), ch. 4. For an assessment of the relationship between class identity, local-political conflicts, and confessional struggles, see J. Walter, Understanding popular violence in the English revolution: the Colchester plunderers (Cambridge, 1999). For a formative discussion on the relationship between class and religion, see E.P. Thompson, The making of the English working class, (London, 1963), ch. 11.

¹⁰ For the new attention of labour historians to the pre-nineteenth century, see C. Lis, J. Lucassen and H. Soly (eds.), 'Supplement 2. Before the unions: wage earners and collective action in Europe, 1300-1850', International Review of Social History, 39 (1994). For a suggestive approach towards the historical relationship between gender and labour organisation, see M.E. Wiesner, 'Guilds, male bonding and women's work in early modern Germany', Gender and History, 1, 2 (1989), 125-137.

and political solidarities amongst some of the poorest people of the City of Gloucester: as one 84-year-old worker explained, 'the...fraternity doth for the most part consist of poore men havinge noe other meanes to live upon & to support the body of their fraternity but only their labour'.¹¹

A fuller understanding of patterns of labour, subordination and plebeian independence will lead us, amongst other places, to those popular senses of pride, credit, solidarity and humiliation that underwrote the well-recorded languages of insult of the period. Such street language has been much more fully studied for the history of gender identities than has been the case for social relations. Pursuing the now hoary insight that identities are relational, and in particular that assertive, positive identities are formed in opposition to a negative, imagined 'Other', what does it mean that terms like 'slave', 'hireling', 'bondman' and 'peasant' were considered insults in early modern England? Perhaps, it points towards the endurance of a deep social memory of the humiliations endured by labouring people under late feudalism; it might also hint at an assumption that commoners should not be overly deferential in their dealings with their superiors. Languages of insult, therefore, lead us back to the acceptable bounds of deference and resistance.

The recent historiographical emphasis upon the history of language has quite rightly concentrated upon questions of meaning and context; but there are other areas that require attention as well. Pursuing the insights of anthropology and sociolinguistics, we might observe that who gets to speak, when, and how, represent important indicators of power relations. We will see in the next section how plebeians were meant to speak when in the presence of their superiors. The tone and social organisation of speech is therefore important; so, too, is its accent. One of the means by which elites have achieved internal integration has been through speaking a standardised, 'U' form of speech, a style of verbal discourse deemed appropriate to public and professional contexts. A function of the imposition of 'appropriate' speech has been to stigmatise regional dialect, and thereby non-national/popular culture. Nowadays, it is often observed that this is a peculiarly English phenomenon (in the contemporary English context, 'U' speech is known as 'RP', or 'Received Pronunciation', or alternatively as 'BBC English'). The evidence seems to suggest that, by the late sixteenth century, as elite metropolitan English became the dominant strain of the language, so village elites in southern England sought to integrate themselves into the ranks of the ruling class through the subtle modulation of their speech. Hence, in answer to the proposition that 'the base people [are]... uncivill, rude, untowarde, discourteous, rough, savage', one conduct book advised that gentleman should distinguish between the speech of 'labourers and rustikes' and those who 'ought to bee put in the middest between Gentleman and clownes'.¹² Notably, these linguistic distinctions emerged at the same time as 'a growing discourse that linked disordered language and social disorder'. Contemporaries therefore spoke of 'the barbarous speech of your cuntrye people', and distinguished such speech from that used by 'the best sort'. This was linked

¹¹ For the Gloucester weavers, see Public Record Office [hereafter PRO], E134/11ChasI/Mich45. Women's work in the early modern period is much better represented in the secondary literature than is that of men: see the generations of research stimulated by A. Clark, The working life of women in the seventeenth century (London, 1919).

¹² Guazzo, The civile conversation, I, 175.

to middling sort social mobility: 'everie mechanicall mate abhorres the english he was borne to'. Similarly, it was observed in Suffolk that in contrast to 'the ruder sort', 'the artificer of the good townes' spoke in 'the best sort of language'.¹³ What remains obscure is the effects of this dialect shift upon plebeian culture: did the continued possession of 'non-U' speech amongst labouring people become a badge of pride (rather like the modern-day Liverpudlian accent known as Scouse)? Or, alternatively, did it become a shameful indication of cultural subordination (as many speakers of Essex English regard their accents today)? What did it mean, for instance, that figures representing the commonality in the popular drama of the mid-sixteenth century were represented as speaking in a common dialect? What did it mean that certain trade groups were distinguished not only by their dress, but also by their style of speech? How far were early modern plebeian collective identities formed within what socio-linguists would call a 'speech community'?

The politics of dialect speech are connected to another central aspect of class cultures: their relationship to regional identities. One of the many ways in which twentieth-century sociological stereotypes of class identity and class consciousness have been overly period-specific has been in the requirement that a 'real' or 'true' class consciousness be manifest on the level of the nation state.¹⁴ Yet, as Mike Savage suggests, class cultures have often been regional cultures - and why should this not be true of the many and varied regional cultures of late medieval and early modern England, just as it is demonstrably true of (for instance) Andalucian wage labourers, Rhondda miners, Catalan textile workers or Parisian proletarians in the modern epoch?¹⁵ Any new histories of the nexus between region and class ought, amongst other things, to analyse local peculiarities of dialect and accent, and study their relationship to social formations. We need, in other words, a linguistic history of class difference in early modern England.

All of this implies that we should be developing a social history of language.¹⁶ Drawing away from Edward Thompson, it seems that we are coming to view the linguistic constitution of social identities in the creation of new social categories as *at least as* important as the experience of material deprivation, exploitation and immiseration. The linguistic constitution of class is very political - both in the narrow and in the broad sense of the term. Thus, both in the English Revolution and the French Revolution, the invention of new social labels - 'middling sorts'; 'middle classes'; 'middle class' - were deeply implicated in the contingent political struggles generated by those revolutionary

¹³ J.M. Williams "'O! When degree is shak'd": sixteenth-century anticipations of some modern attitudes toward usage', in T.W. Machan and C.T. Scott (eds.) English and its social contexts: essays in historical sociolinguistics (New York, 1992), 71-3.

¹⁴ For the association between 'nation' and 'class', see L. Colley, 'Whose nation: class and national consciousness in Britain, 1750-1830', Past & Present, 113 (1986).

¹⁵ M. Savage, 'Space, networks and class formation', in N. Kirk (ed.), Social class and Marxism: defences and challenges (Aldershot, 1996), 58-86.

¹⁶ See the agenda laid out in P. Burke, 'Introduction', in P. Burke and R. Porter (eds.), The social history of language (Cambridge, 1987). Early modern social historians have not really pursued Burke's proposition, leaving language to historians of elite political thought and to cultural historians.

situations.¹⁷

The 'invention' of social categories in political struggles highlights the importance of changes in languages of social description. Much important work has already been done here by Keith Wrightson and David Cressy, concerned with the emergence of a 'language of sorts' which Wrightson sees as predating (and in some respects, anticipating) nineteenth-century class-based terminology.¹⁸ But there are other issues to explore as well - for instance, the contrast between everyday languages of social description and the harsher, more vicious languages of class, characteristically deployed during occasions of public contestation, or in moments of angry plebeian social criticism.

III

This leads us to the hidden injuries of class in early modern England. One new dimension that is opened up by the application of class to early modern history is that of the social expression of emotion. Domination, subordination and resistance did more than maintain a fluid, contradictory, conflictual system of social relations; they also generated feelings: repression, anger, frustration and humiliation. What remains of this essay therefore represents an attempt to understand the importance of '*freedom and dignity*' - and of their reverse: subordination and oppression - in early modern labouring people's lives. As Sennett and Cobb put it:

'Class is a system for limiting freedom: it limits the freedom of the powerful in dealing with other people, because the strong are constricted within the circle of action that maintains their power; class constricts the weak more obviously in that they must obey commands. What happens to the dignity men [and women] see in themselves and in each other, when their freedom is checked by class?'¹⁹

With this in mind, Sennett and Cobb contrast American working class political culture of the 1960s and early 1970s with the 'sense of working-class solidarity' they believe characterised the British and French working class at the same time.²⁰

From the position of hindsight, in the aftermath of the historic defeat of the British labour movement in the 1980s, such national comparisons seem exaggerated; but the *spirit* of the comparison remains a useful analytical starting point. The important point that Sennett and Cobb made is that the successful assertion of collective agency by one

¹⁷ For approaches to the 'middling sort/middle class' in the 1640s and after 1789, see K. Wrightson, 'Sorts of people in Tudor and Stuart England', in J. Barry (ed.), The middling sort of people: culture, society and politics in England, 1550-1800 (Basingstoke, 1994), 28-51; Wood, Riot, rebellion, ch. 4; D. Wahrman, Imagining the middle class: the political representation of class in Britain, c.1780-1840 (Cambridge, 1995); L. Hunt, Politics, culture, and class in the French Revolution (Berkeley, CA, , 1984.)

¹⁸ D. Cressy, 'Describing the social order of Elizabethan England', Literature and History, 3 (1976), 29-44; K. Wrightson, 'Estates, degrees and sorts: changing perceptions of society in Tudor and Stuart England' in P. Corfield (ed.), Language, history and class (Oxford, 1991), 30-52.

¹⁹ Sennett and Cobb Hidden injuries, 28.

²⁰ For a similarly overdrawn, and yet nonetheless useful, perspective, see C. Kerr and A. Siegel, 'The inter-industry propensity to strike: an international comparison', in A. Kornhauser, R. Dubin and A.M. Ross (eds.), Industrial conflict, (New York, 1954).

generation of workers can generate a political tradition within which later generations are socialised, creating solidarities that rulers find difficult to break and even in some circumstances entirely to comprehend. Equally, Sennett and Cobb argued the opposite: that political traditions are not fixed and immutable. Instead, the strategic defeat of working-class movements (again, such as that experienced by the British labour movement in the 1980s) can *break* proletarian political traditions. For Sennett and Cobb, and for me, the story does not end there. Class, after all, is not only about resistance and struggle; it can be (perhaps is most often) about subordination, suppressed anger, bitten lips. This closing section of the essay therefore explores the tension between subordination and resistance, focusing in particular upon the content of four aspects of the lower class experience: subservience, fear, anger and hatred. As well as contributing to the literature concerning social relations in early modern England, this essay also seeks to contribute to the small but significant body of historical material concerned with the social expression of emotion.²¹

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in social relations and social conflict in early modern England.²² Such studies have emphasised the collective and individual agency of working people. In these studies, authority has been presented as constantly negotiated between ruler and ruled. Likewise, social relations have been characterised as fluid and contingent. The result has been the development of a uniquely subtle body of work on social relations. But this work has been so *very* subtle that it has understated the blunt asymmetries of class that often operated within early modern society.²³ In contrast, this essay develops a rather darker, more pessimistic analysis. Instead of focusing upon the negotiated nature of power, for what remains of this essay we will study the interlocking of subordination and resistance. This approach is intended not only to modify historical approaches to social relations and the nature of authority in early modern England; it also raises question marks over the theoretical foundations of that work.

²¹ For medieval and early modern Europe, see P. Roberts and B. Naphy (eds.), Fear in early modern society (Manchester, 1997); B.H. Rosenwein, Anger's past: the social uses of an emotion in the middle ages (Ithaca, 1998). For the broader application of social history of emotions, P. Stearns and C.Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: clarifying the history of emotions and emotional standards', American Historical Review, 90, 4 (1985), 813-36. For other useful perspectives, see L. Abu-Lughod and C.A. Lutz, 'Introduction: emotion, discourse, and the politics of everyday life', in L. Abu-Lughod and C.A. Lutz (eds.), Language and the politics of emotion (Cambridge, 1990), 1-23; M. Berezin, 'Secure states: towards a political sociology of emotion', in J. Barbalet (ed.), Emotions and sociology (Oxford, 2002), 33-52; D. Reid, 'Towards a social history of suffering: dignity, misery and disrespect', Social History, 27, 3 (2002), 343-58.

²² See, for instance, S. Hipkin, 'Sitting on his penny rent: conflict and right of common in Faversham Blean, 1596-1610', Rural History, 11, 1 (2000), 1-35; S. Hindle, 'Custom, festival and protest in early modern England: the Little Budworth Wakes of St. Peter's Day, 1596', Rural History, 6, 2 (1995), 155-78; S. Hindle, 'Persuasion and protest in the Caddington common enclosure dispute, 1635-1639', Past and Present, 158 (1998); Wood, Politics of social conflict.

²³ This approach is most clearly stated in M.J. Braddick and J. Walter, 'Introduction. Grids of power: order, hierarchy and subordination in early modern society' in M.J. Braddick and J. Walter (eds.), Negotiating power in early modern society: order, hierarchy and subordination in Britain and Ireland (Cambridge, 2001), and is implicit in the introduction to P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), The experience of authority in early modern England (Basingstoke, 1996). For a case-study which suggests a different picture, see my 'Subordination, solidarity and the limits of popular agency in a Yorkshire valley, c.1596-1615', Past and Present, forthcoming.

Much of the recent work on early modern social relations has been written in the shadow of James Scott's perceptive analysis of domination and resistance. Scott argues that in highly stratified societies, rulers maintain public domination through the theatrical display of their power. Subordinates correspondingly conceal their antagonistic and angry feelings behind a mask of deference. Taken together, this combination of authority and deference constitutes the 'public transcript' within which social relations are openly performed. Scott distinguishes the artificiality of plebeian behaviour in the 'public transcript' from an authentic 'hidden transcript' of popular resistance. Articulated within concealed locations such as peasant alehouses, this 'hidden transcript' limits elite authority through the maintenance of cultures of resistance amongst the subordinated. Hence, for Scott, everyday life represents a site of contestation and resistance.²⁴ Within Scott's formulation, therefore, deference is presented as merely skin-deep, little more than a thin veil obscuring barely suppressed class hatred. We will see shortly how this assessment of power relations enables a full appreciation of deference and subordination in early modern England; but we ought to note its clear implication: that displays of deference, constituting mere disingenuous disguises, leave the dignity, self-respect and assertiveness of working people essentially untouched.

Despite the subtlety of Scott's work, there are good reasons to question the sharp distinction he draws between the subordinates' public deference and their private thoughts. This criticism has been anticipated in Sennett and Cobb's earlier work. In contrast to Scott's supposition that workers' endurance of subordination leaves their consciousness untouched, Sennett and Cobb propose that workers 'feel class and self joined'. Thus, those who become socially mobile 'feel terribly ambivalent about their success, and the ambivalence they treat as a sign of vulnerability in themselves', while those who remain within the working-class 'are also touched by the feeling of a powerlessness embedded in the self'.²⁵ In Sennett and Cobb's analysis, therefore, the experience of social subordination leaves its mark upon the self-confidence, assertiveness and identity of the worker. They invoke Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony in order to pose a critical question: 'If a man feels he obeys someone he ought to obey, what happens to his own self-image?'²⁶ The answer developed by Sennett and Cobb suggests strongly that James Scott's dismissal of Gramscian theories of hegemony is premature.²⁷ Instead, Sennett and Cobb suggest that, within working-class cultures characterised by the absence or near-absence of legitimating institutions and autonomous political traditions (classically, in the modern epoch, a national trade union movement and/or a working-class political party), the internalisation of subordination by working people represents a key element within the domination exercised by ruling elites.

Recent work in early modern English social history has redefined the 'political' to include a wide variety of challenges to the status quo. In doing so, some writers have been drawn

²⁴ J.C. Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts* (New Haven 1990).

²⁵ Sennett and Cobb, *Hidden injuries*, 36-7.

²⁶ Sennett and Cobb, *Hidden injuries*, 77.

²⁷ For this dismissal, see his *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*, (New Haven, 1985), 317-28

to Adrian Leftwich's materialist formulation of politics, in which he argues that politics is constituted through struggles between contending social groups over scant resources.²⁸ Perhaps the best early modern example of such conflict is to be found in struggles over fuel rights. Development theorists have shown how in poor, upland districts of Nepal and Pakistan, up to a quarter of peasants' total income is spent on fuel.²⁹ We have no such statistics for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; but the importance of access to firewood to early modern working people is apparent in the frequency and desperation of struggles over fuel rights. Certainly, the young Marx saw in conflicts over rights to fuel the most elemental of all forms of class struggle.³⁰ It is notable that labouring people were often willing to prostrate themselves before their lords in order to secure access to fallen branches; similarly, gentlemen used such occasions for the restatement of their authority. When poor people came to a gentleman's house to plead for firewood, the lord often required supplicants to recognise that he had granted their request only out of grace, and that they took wood from his estate by his 'licence', rather than according to any customary right. On such occasions, in other words, power was renegotiated in the interests of the lord.³¹

Negotiations between ruler and ruled over rights to wood were often conducted within a combination of seignenorial force and plebeian deference. After two 'poor men' were whipped through their home town of Wirksworth (Derbyshire) for 'stealing' timber from Sir William Armin's wood in nearby Cromford, subsequent claimants to rights over timber from Cromford Wood were made 'to humble themselves', and to promise never again to repeat their offence.³² The willingness of subordinates to enter into such humiliating agreements sometimes stemmed from the defeat of earlier attempts to enforce customary rights. In 1585, the Forest of Hatfield Broad Oak in Essex was enclosed, and the lands divided between the lords of the two neighbouring manors. In 1611, remembering the earlier enclosure of the Forest, 130 men and women broke down the enclosures in question, claiming that they were only asserting their 'rights'. But by 1674, popular opposition to lordly control over Hatfield Broad Oak had diminished to isolated expropriations. That year, one Essex labouring man was made to set his mark to a document stating that he would never steal wood from Sir John Barrington's estate.³³

²⁸ A. Wood, 'The place of custom in plebeian political culture: England, 1550-1800', *Social History*, 22, 1 (1997), 46-60; K. Wrightson, 'The politics of the parish in early modern England', in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds.), *The experience of authority in early modern England* (Basingstoke, 1996), 10-46; S. Hindle, 'Power, poor relief and social relations in Holland fen, c.1600-1800', *Historical Journal*, 41, 1 (March, 1998), 67-96.

²⁹ E.A. Wrigley, *Continuity, chance and change: the character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge, 1988), 53.

³⁰ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected works*, 37 vols. (London, 1975-1998), I, 224-63.

³¹ For examples, see PRO, E178/7153; PRO, E133/7/942. For claims to popular rights to timber, see for instance PRO, STAC2/21/93; PRO, STAC3/6/30; PRO, E163/16/14; PRO, DL4/35/8.

³² PRO, DL4/109/8.

³³ Essex Record Office [Chelmsford], D/DBa L11; W. Hunt, *The puritan moment: the coming of revolution in an English county* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 35. J.A. Sharpe, 'Enforcing the law in the seventeenth century English village' in V.A.C. Gattrell, B. Lenman and G. Parker (eds.), *Crime and the law: the social history of crime in western Europe since 1500* (London, 1980), 113. For other late seventeenth-century examples of labouring people being forced to sign away their rights, see PRO, DL4/123/1686/7; Derbyshire Record Office, D258M/28/20v

So fraught an issue was popular access to timber that even the most humble and deferential petitions in pursuit of a right to firewood might enrage a powerful lord. In June 1612, 21 'very poor men' of Pitstone (Buckinghamshire) wrote a petition to their lord, Sir John Egerton, 'humbly beseeching' that they might 'for the succour of their great necessity and some comfort unto their poor estate' have some wood as 'help for their fire'. Despite the deferential tone of the petition, Egerton perceived a levelling intent within the document (at the time, he was experiencing problems with the wealthier tenants of the village) and required that the 'very poor men' withdraw their petition. The 'very poor men' responded with a second, still more humble, petition, in which they

most willingly submissively and sorrowfully acknowledge[d] that we have justly offended your honour by a late petition offered to your Lordship in kind of tumultuous manner.

Like the claimants to wood in Cromford and Hatfield Broad Oak, the petitioners went on to

acknowledge and confess, that neither we nor in our memory, any of our case and condition had any manner of right to take wood there, nor ever had any in fact, but what was either given us, or what we did steal.³⁴

It is difficult, of course, to gauge the effects of such humiliation upon the consciousness of groups such as the 'very poor men' of Pitstone. Certainly, we can see that fuel rights constituted a highly sensitive point within social relations; clearly, in some cases, lords exploited the popular need for fuel as an opportunity for a restatement of deferential ideals; equally clearly, in other cases, lords used the criminal law, or their personal authority, to punish and humiliate claimants to customary rights.

Within the 'public transcript', the extreme deference of the 'very poor men' of Pitstone makes sense; how far, however, such statements constituted a mere veil behind which an offstage 'hidden transcript' remained hidden from their lord is impossible to say. But in at least one case, for at least a moment, it is possible to penetrate just such a 'hidden transcript'. In February 1624, William Barton was incarcerated in the town gaol of Colchester after he was found stealing wood. Following his release, he went to Sarah and Samuel Corke's alehouse, where he sat beside the fire, drinking ale and cursing the town authorities:

If this hard wether continue their are manye poore in St. Martes St Marie Magdalen St James and St Annes that will rise and we of St Peters will not stand and looke on and their be more pore then Riche and if they do rise we will begin first with the Bailiffs & pull them out of their porches and if the enmys shold come into this land he wold be the first wold turne unto them, and swore by god that he wold be the first that wold pull them out of ther houses.³⁵

What is remarkable about such reported words is the gulf that separates them from the language of extreme deference in which the 'very poor men' of Pitstone couched their

³⁴ H.A. Hanley 'The inclosure of Pitstone common wood in 1612', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 29 (1987), 191-2.

³⁵ Essex Record Office [Chelmsford], microfilm T/A 465/1, Colchester Borough book of examinations and recognizances, unfoliated. 18 February 1623 (i.e., 1624).

petitions. The contrast hints at the cognitive dissonance that lies unrecognised within James Scott's theorisation of his 'hidden transcript': if his model is correct (and its essential logic seems impeccable), the public transcript of elite domination has the effect of continuously disconnecting how subordinates *feel* from how they *act*.

Perhaps the clearest example of that cognitive dissonance is to be found in the contradictory relationship between popular litigation - in which the plebeian litigant was expected to identify her or himself as 'powerless' - and the clear fact of plebeian assertiveness explicit in the act of litigation against a gentleman, a lord or a master. Importantly, such formulations identify distinct and meaningful social polarities, suggesting that languages of class do more than simply reflect pre-discursive social structures; it might even be taken to imply that the postmodernists are correct in proposing that language *constitutes* identities, providing *the* key battlefield over which struggles are conducted. As Foucault put it, 'Discourse is not simply that which expresses struggles or systems of domination, but that for which, and by which, one struggles; it is the power which one is striving to seize'.³⁶

Such binary formulations were deployed in the attempt to defend common rights in Malmesbury in 1609. Here, the 'poor inhabitants' were set against opponents who were variously described as 'some of the wealthier sorte'; 'men of greate estate' and as 'some persons that have bene of the Richar Sort'. These powerful individuals had enclosed Malmesbury's common 'to their owne pryvate use and have denied the resydue of the Inhabitants housholders their common'. Again, therefore, we see the identification of social polarities feeding into the definition of community interests, and the identification of the enemies of plebeian community.³⁷ This example has been culled from complaints addressed to Westminster equity courts. Such records are usually somewhat exaggerated and rhetorical. However, the binary formulations identified here did more than simply distort the complexities of an already existent conflict; they also clarified that conflict, bringing social polarisation and local-political conflict into sharp focus. Again, therefore, legal language did more than simply *describe*; it also *constituted*. As Raymond Williams puts it, 'Language has...to be seen as a persistent kind of creation and re-creation: a dynamic presence and a constant regenerative process'.³⁸

Given this context, it is significant that in their complaints to central courts, lower class litigants often identified themselves as powerless, and their opponents as overbearingly powerful. Plebeian complainants identified the gentry as men and women 'of great wealthe moche Frened and allyed'; 'men of gret possessione and substaunce and well frened and alied'; 'men of greete substaunce & Riches and greetly alyed and Frened'; men 'of greate myght substaunce and power & ... wilfullnes'. The 'thretenynges' of the gentry were represented as terrifying and overwhelming to 'very poore and nedye folke', leading to their 'utter empov[er]ishmente & undoing forev[er]'. Likewise, one complainant to the Court of Chancery identified himself as 'A very poore man' who faced

³⁶ Quoted in R. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter discourse: the theory and practice of symbolic resistance in nineteenth-century France* (Ithaca, NY, 1985), 55.

³⁷ PRO, STAC8/138/8; PRO, C78/174/5; PRO, STAC8/130/3.1-12.

³⁸ R. Williams, *Marxism and literature* (Oxford, 1977), 31.

the 'synister and gredy dealing', 'cruell dealinges' and 'covetous mynd' of his landlord. Plebeian complainants emphasized their inability to contend with their gentry opponents because of their 'povertie'; others stated baldly that they were incapable of mounting effective opposition because of their 'Innocencie'. Alternatively, lower class litigants played upon their lack of social power and connections: another plebeian litigant told the Court of Chancery that he was 'A verye Pore man having nether Frenndeship kynred nor allye'; others told the Court of Star Chamber that they were but 'poore men, strangers unknowen and wtout Frenndes'.³⁹

Of course, such language was deployed in order to cast the gentry opponents of lower class litigants in the worst possible light; but at the same time, it also constructed a binary opposition between an apparently powerless commons and a clearly powerful gentry. Overstated and disingenuous though this terminology frequently was, it nonetheless provides an insight into how subordinates perceived linkages between wealth and power; and it hints at how plebeian litigants, in exploiting their relative lack of status, thereby helped to maintain a social discourse which emphasized their subordination and powerlessness. At the same time, in other words, as labouring people knowingly manipulated the terms of their subordination, so they helped maintain the logic of patriarchal and paternalist discourses. As the plebeian litigants quoted here became complicit in the maintenance of their own subordination, so they helped to maintain a kind of elite cultural hegemony: one from which they benefited in the short-term but which, in the long run, also helped to legitimate the existence of both ruling institutions - central courts - and ruling discourses - the language of paternalism.⁴⁰

Social polarities were identified not only within formal legal complaints to central courts, but also in moments of direct rebellion. It is notable that in the rebellions of 1536, 1537 and 1549, otherwise wealthy farmers identified themselves as part of a 'poor commons', a 'commonality', an 'estate of poorness', or simply as members of something they called 'The Povertie'.⁴¹ Likewise, labouring people often mobilised the language of community in defining social conflict. Thus, in 1620, the farmers and labourers who defended tenant right in the northern border counties drew a distinction between the 'landlords' (their opponents) and the 'neighbours' (a catch-all term, here used to identify all those who contributed to the struggle to defend tenant right): one leader of popular resistance demanded of an uncommitted tenant 'will you goe to your partners or the gentlemen'.⁴² The willingness of subordinates to assume that their rulers were engaged in a conspiracy to 'destroy' the 'poor commons', when combined with this highly charged language of class, seems indicative of a broader willingness to conceive of the world in terms of

³⁹ PRO, C3/154/6.1, 5; PRO, C1/1187/15-17; PRO, STAC3/3/42; PRO, C1/1204/99-101; PRO, STAC3/4/53. For a protracted dispute in which a lower class litigant consistently describes his conflicts with a powerful gentleman in terms of a disparity of power, see PRO, STAC8/265/4; PRO, DL4/69/23; PRO, DL1/320, answer of John Johnson.

⁴⁰ For hegemony and complicity, see T.J. Jackson Lears, 'The concept of cultural hegemony: problems and possibilities', *American Historical Review*, 90, 3 (1985), 573.

⁴¹ For references to 'the povertie', see PRO, STAC3/4/89; E. Lamond (ed.), *A discourse of the common weal of this realm of England* (Cambridge, 1893), lxiii; PRO, STAC10/16, fol. 153v; PRO, E36/120, fol. 176v.

⁴² PRO, STAC8/34/4.42, 44.

binary oppositions.⁴³

We shall shortly observe the anxiety felt by the gentry at the possibility of popular uprisings; similarly, their subordinates were periodically willing to believe that their rulers intended to famish, evict, or otherwise destroy them. William Pomyet, for instance, found himself in trouble in June 1549 for announcing, while drunk, that

Gents & Richemen have all catell & wolles & suche like things in ther hands nowe a dayes & the pore pe[o]ple are now Famysshed but C of us wyll rise one daye agenst them & I wylbe one.⁴⁴

Similarly, food rioters in Somerset in 1596 remarked that 'the rich men had gotten all into their hands, and will starve the poor'.⁴⁵ Such popular anxieties were probably at their sharpest during the 1530s and the 1540s, and were intimately connected to the early reformation. Rumours that the Crown intended to introduce a taxes on ploughs, bread and church christenings were important contributory factors in the outbreak of the Pilgrimage of Grace. All of this was represented as an attempt on the part of an unshackled Crown to 'utterly to undo... the commonalty of the realm'.⁴⁶ Similarly, the Western Rising of 1549 was spread into Devon by rumours that the gentry intended to burn the commons out of their houses and to pillage their property if the commons refused to give over their rosaries and holy bread and water.⁴⁷ Over the other side of the country, one rebel priest was caught wandering through Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, spreading the rumour that the besieged gentry at Kings Lynn murdered pregnant women and poor men in the fields.⁴⁸ That the lower orders found such rumours credible speaks volumes about the extremes within which early modern social relations operated: subordinates who were supposed to accept without question their humiliating place within the social hierarchy instead were willing to believe that their rulers intended their destruction.

Likewise, it is revealing that the early modern gentry were also willing to believe that their subordinates plotted their destruction. The gentry were constantly aware that their numbers were small, and that the commons had good cause for complaint: as Fulke Greville put it in 1593, as 'if the feet knew their strength as well as we know their oppression, they would not bear as they do'.⁴⁹ In the tense aftermath of Kett's rebellion, one Norfolk gentleman fled his manor, convinced that his tenants intended to 'mayme hurte or kill' him.⁵⁰ Similarly, the economic circumstances of the 1590s led one commentator to worry that 'tall lusty men and extreame pore' might 'streight murmer and rayse commocions'.⁵¹ If observable economic distress did not stimulate social anxieties

⁴³ On the language of binary division in early modern culture, see S. Clark, Thinking with demons: the idea of witchcraft in early modern Europe (Oxford, 1997).

⁴⁴ Norfolk Record Office, NCR 16A/4, fol. 61v.

⁴⁵ J. Strype, Annals of the Reformation, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1824), IV, 407.

⁴⁶ M.L. Bush, The Pilgrimage of Grace: a study of the rebel armies of October 1536 (Manchester, 1996), 32, 46, 202.

⁴⁷ H. Ellis (ed.), Holinshed's Chronicles, 6 vols. (1577 and 1587, new. edn., London, 1807-8), III, 942.

⁴⁸ BL, Lansdowne MS 2, fol. 60r (no 25).

⁴⁹ C. Hill, 'The many-headed monster' in his Continuity and Change in seventeenth-century England (London, 1974), 61.

⁵⁰ PRO, C1/1380/55-6.

⁵¹ B. Sharp, In contempt of all authority: rural artisans and riot in the west of England, 1586-1660 (Berkeley, 1980), 34.

amongst the gentry, their reading of history, or their memory of earlier commotions, could easily do so. Thus, the gentry of the northern border counties petitioned Parliament in 1581 against an act designed to strengthen tenant right in the North; the gentry argued that if the bill became law, the 'under-sort and tenants' would become aggressive, and, in the style of Jack Straw and Wat Tyler, would eventually rebel.⁵²

Unsurprisingly, the English Revolution intensified such anxieties. The Earl of Pembroke was convinced that 'We hear every base fellow say in the street as we pass by in our coaches, That they hope to see us afoot shortly and to be as good men as the Lords; and I think they will be as good as their words, if we take this course.'⁵³ Again, such social anxieties were coloured by a strong sense of history. The Earl of Dorset worried that 'my children had never been borne, to live under the dominion of so many Cades and Ketts, as threaten by their multitudes and insurrections to drowne all memory of monarchy, nobility, gentry, in this land'.⁵⁴ The lower orders of early modern England were well aware of the their rulers' anxieties and were sometimes willing to exploit them: in February 1642, the porters of London, for instance, petitioned Parliament to warn that unless they received some relief, the harsh economic circumstances of the time would "force your petitioners to extremities, not fit to be named, and to make good that saying, that necessity hath no law'.⁵⁵

Perhaps elite anxieties were not so misplaced. Certainly, later printed accounts of Kett's rebellion stressed the rebels' hatred for the gentry. As Holinshed put it, the rebels

chiefly declared a spitefull rancor and hatered conceived against gentlemen, whome they maliciously accused of inordinat couetousnesse, pride, rapine, extortion, and oppression, practised against their tenants and others, for the which they accounted them worthie of all punishment.⁵⁶

Once the Norfolk gentry fell into rebel hands, they were brought to 'judgment' under the rebels' Oak of Reformation where the rebel council sat.

When it was asked of the commons, what should be done with those prisoners, they would crie with one voice; Hang them, hang them. And when they were asked why they gave so sharpe judgement of those whome they never knew, they would roundly answer, that other cried the same crie ; and therefore they ment to give their assent with other, although they could yeeld no reason, but that they were gentlemen, & therefore not woorthie to live.⁵⁷

Scrutiny of mid-sixteenth century criminal court archives suggests that Holinshed's Elizabethan account of popular hatred for the gentry, while overstated, was not without some basis. Three years after Kett's rebellion, it was reported to the Norwich magistrates that a tailor called Bonor had said, while amongst company

at a poore mans house nere Magdalen gates... [that] This yere woll be as trowblous a yere as ever was and that he wold Jeopard his lyef uppon it and

⁵² S.J. Watts, *From border to middle shire: Northumberland, 1586-1625* (Leicester, 1975), 31.

⁵³ J. S. Morrill, *The revolt of the provinces: conservatives and radicals in the English Civil War, 1630-1650* (London, 1980), 36.

⁵⁴ Walter, *Understanding violence*, 19.

⁵⁵ Lindley, *Popular politics*, 135.

⁵⁶ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, 963.

⁵⁷ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, 969.

Thomas Wake being there asked him, whye, and Bonnor sayd that if there be not a way founden to compleyn to the quens grace [concerning grievances against the local gentry] that The gentyln[en] shalbe taken sleapers in their bedds & kylled all in a nighte.⁵⁸

Two years earlier, the baker William Mordewe shocked a gentleman's servant with his opinion 'That if it pleased the king to make him hangman to a greate meany of Gentylnen he could fynde in his harte to hange a greate meany Gentylnen'.⁵⁹ Similarly, an anonymous libel of found in Norwich in 1595 opened with the declaration that 'For seven years the rich have fed on our flesh', before going on to warn that

There are 60,000 craftsmen in London and elsewhere, besides the poor country clown who can no longer bear, therefore their draft is in the cup of the Lord which they shall drink to the dregs, and some barbarous and unmerciful soldier shall lay open your hedges, reap your fields, rifle your coffers, and level your houses to the ground. Meantime give licence to the rich to set open shop to sell poor men's skins. Necessity hath no law.

The author of the letter was never found. In a sharp letter to the Mayor of Norwich, the Privy Council noted how 'the poorer sort' of the City were responsible for the document, 'whereby you may pereceave to what mutinous and hawghty term that kind of people is carried, not in any sort to be tollerated.' But the letter went on, in terms which confirm how early modern social relations could be negotiated from a set of contradictory positions:

Howbeyt wee thinck yt allso verie expedient to let you, the maiour, understand by way of admonicion that wee hold yt requizit that you take better order for the releif of the poor inhabitantes there by procuringe them worke and by other good meanes then yt seemeth you have don'.⁶⁰

The Privy Councillors, then, responded to the exaggerated threat of class war with a combination of anxiety and amelioration. Indeed, John Walter has persuasively argued that such libels fulfilled a *function*: within a delicately balanced social system, such dangerous words might have the effect of recalling the elite to their traditional duties, and so ensuring that popular complaints were heard.⁶¹ Walter's powerful argument does not deny the significance of such popular anger for the social history of emotions: albeit mostly from the apparent safety of the plebeian alehouse, early modern labouring people were willing to articulate feelings of intense anger and hatred towards their rulers.

One outstanding characteristic of the plebeian critique of their social superiors focused upon the body as an emblem of class society: in clothing, odour, decoration, health, height and girth the rich were known from the poor.⁶² It should not therefore be

⁵⁸ Norfolk Record Office, NCR 12A/1(a), fol. 37r-v. For those grievances against the gentry, see R.W. Hoyle, 'Agrarian agitation in mid-sixteenth century Norfolk: a petition of 1553', *Historical Journal*, 44, 1 (2001), 223-38.

⁵⁹ Norfolk Record Office, NCR 12A/1(a), fol. 80v.

⁶⁰ *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Salisbury*, XIII, 168-9; *Acts of the Privy Council, 1595-6*, 88-9.

⁶¹ J. Walter, 'Public transcripts, popular agency and the politics of subsistence in early modern England' in Braddick and Walter (eds.), *Negotiating power*. The delicacy of that balance is best discussed in E.P. Thompson, *Customs in common*, ch. 2.

⁶² See A. Bryson, 'The rhetoric of status: gesture, demeanour and the image of the gentleman in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England', in L. Gent and N. Llewellyn (eds.), *Renaissance bodies: the human figure in English culture, c. 1540-1660* (London, 1990), 136-53.

surprising that the poor dwelt upon flesh, clothes and blood in hateful description of their betters. Mendip miners, for instance, came to a merchant who had offended them and told him 'that they would kill him & cutt him in peeces & lett out his fatt guts out of his bellie'.⁶³ Accused of stealing firewood in 1650, Joan Walton of Chelwood (Somerset) responded by calling her gentleman accuser a 'fat gutted rogue', and threatening that 'she would make his gut as poor as hers before she had done'.⁶⁴ Labouring people, it is worth recalling, were much more poorly dressed than their superiors, and when in greatest need were obliged to sell their clothing.⁶⁵ Recognising that clothing was a badge of rank, 'for his apparrell sake' the Norfolk rebels of 1549 slew a 'gorgeously apparrelled' Italian mercenary.⁶⁶ When the gentleman Sir Roger Woodhouse fell into rebel hands, 'he was stripped out of his apparell'.⁶⁷ Within the plebeian language of class, body metaphors were much used to describe oppression: a manuscript pamphlet circulating amongst tenants on the northern borders warned how 'the Landlords will pull the skin over their eares & bray[k] their braynes or bones in morters'. Similar language was used in a play performed at Carlisle in 1619, which was critical of the 'oppressions' of 'Landlords': it warned that the gentry intended to 'picke & poole & peepe us to the bare bone'. Likewise, the Warwickshire rebels warned that the gentry intended to 'grinde our flesh upon the whetstone of poverty'.⁶⁸ The radicals of the 1640s spoke with the same tongue. Gerrard Winstanley saw the 'rich clothing' and 'full bellies' of the rich as a mark of class oppression. The anonymous authors of one Leveller pamphlet drew a similar contrast, observing how 'rich men in the City...drink wine in bowls, and stretch...upon Beds of Down.' Their 'russling silks and velvets' were the product of exploitation ('the sweat of our brows') and oppression (they 'grind our faces and flay off our skins').⁶⁹

If the gentry's desire to illustrate their authority through their clothing and demeanour called forth an angry plebeian critique, the expensive institutional and civic rituals that were intended to restate social hierarchy sometimes provided dramatic settings for the Rabelaisian rejection of authority.⁷⁰ In 1640, for instance, the mayor and aldermen of Norwich sat in the cathedral listening to a sermon; above them, in an overhead gallery, sat the intended audience for this display of civic and religious authority: the common people of the city. One of the audience, however, seems to have been little impressed by this display and

⁶³ PRO, STAC8/117/12. For another such example, see Norfolk Record Office, NCR, 12A/1(c), fol. 55r.

⁶⁴ D.E. Underdown, Revel, riot and rebellion: popular politics and culture in England, 1603-1660 (Oxford, 1985), 218.

⁶⁵ For poor people pawning their clothes, see PRO, DL4/90/24; The Moderate, 10-17 July 1649, BL, Thomason Tracts, E.565 (11). For labouring people's lack of clothing during dearth years, see Norfolk Record Office, NCR20A/10, fols. 2v-3r.

⁶⁶ B.L. Beer, 'The commosyon in Norfolk, 1549', Journal of medieval and renaissance studies, 6, 1 (1976), 89-90.

⁶⁷ Holinshed, Chronicles, III, 965.

⁶⁸ PRO, STAC8/34/4.45, 54; J.O. Haliwell (ed.), The marriage of wit and wisdom: an ancient interlude (London, 1846), 140-1.

⁶⁹ C. Hill (ed.), Gerrard Winstanley: the law of freedom and other writings (London, 1973), 92; D.M. Wolfe, Leveller manifestos of the puritan revolution (New York, 1944), 275. For an identical analysis, see Mercurius Populus, 11 November 1647, BL, Thomason Tracts, E.413 (14).

⁷⁰ For popular disinterest in ritual, see B. Klein, 'Between the bums and bellies of the multitudes': civic pageantry and the problem of the audience in late Stuart London', London Journal, 17, 1 (1992), 18-26.

did conspurcate and shit upon [the mayor] down from the galleries above; and the Sunday immediately after some of the gallery's let fall a stool which narrowly missed the mayor's head, and at another time one from the said gallery did spit upon aldermen Barret's head.⁷¹

It was left to the most radical of the Levellers to give fullest expression to the vernacular inversion of the ruling elite's pomposities. The anonymous authors of *Light shining in Buckinghamshire* coloured their critique of the legal system by inverting the rituals of the law. To these Levellers, class society had its origin in the extinction of English liberties by Norman tyranny in 1066. The mark of this oppression was still to be seen in the logic, language and rituals of the law. William the Conqueror had appointed lawyers and officers of the courts, 'and out of this rubbish stuffe are all our Creatures called Judges'. The Conqueror provided his officers with special robes:

'Hairy skind robes, resembling the subtle nasty Fox with his dirty Tayl. And because the Lord Keeper, Privy Seal, and Treasurers long tails should not daggle in the dirt, they must have another sycophant slave apeece to carry up for them with their hats of doing homage to the breech. Oh height of basenesse! What, will they creep in one anothers arses for honour? Why, his Majesties breath of honour it may be blows out of there, therefore he that holds up his gown that it might blow him that holds it up, and makes him be called Sir.'⁷²

All of this confirms Steinberg's observation that 'Domination through language always contains possibilities for its own subversion'.⁷³

Many plebeian responses to elite authority were therefore intended to invert established hierarchies, mocking the elite at those very moments at which hierarchy displayed itself in all its magnificence. But we have to be careful not to separate such inversions from the logic of the social system that was inverted. Such inversions only worked because they were unexpected. Within the world of everyday social relations, plebeians were expected to hold their peace before gentlemen. After all, as one widely read conduct book advised, 'It behooveth a Gentleman to speake better then a Plebeian'. Moreover, 'when the rich speaketh, every one keepeth silence, but when the poore speaketh, it is saide, what fellow is that?' Such verbal deference echoed the wider logic of paternalism and hierarchy, within which 'a poore man proud' seemed as inappropriate as 'a yong man without obedience, a rich man without charity'.⁷⁴

Subordinates were partially responsible for the maintenance of early modern England's profoundly unequal social system. Inhabiting within that hierarchical order, many labouring people knew that it was often best to defer to their superiors in order to gain an immediate objective. 'Tactical' such occasions may have been; but again, as with the protests of powerlessness which plebeian litigants rolled out in their complaints to central

⁷¹ J.T. Evans, *Seventeenth century Norwich: politics, religion and government, 1620-1690* (Oxford, 1979), 113.

⁷² G. H. Sabine, *The works of Gerrard Winstanley: with an appendix of documents relating to the Digger movement* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1941), 617-8.

⁷³ M.W. Steinberg, 'Culturally speaking: finding a commons between post-structuralism and the Thompsonian perspective', *Social History*, 21, 2 (1996), 208.

⁷⁴ S. Guazzo, *The civile conversation*, 2 vols. (1581-6; London, 1925), I, 145, 190; II, 17, 71.

courts, they also helped to constitute both the discourse of paternalism and the hierarchical order. Hence, when subordinates sought a favour from their rulers, they knew that it was best to 'make humble suite... upon there knees'. In some cases, it even made sense to come before their lord in 'submission and tears'.⁷⁵ The body language of deference also crept into written petitions: poor prisoners imprisoned in Cambridge wrote to Sir Robert Cecil, beseeching him 'uppon their knees' for their freedom; Wiltshire weavers wrote to the Privy Council requesting aid at a time of industrial depression, 'even upon our knees'.⁷⁶

The psychic consequences of labouring people buying into paternalist discourses - however knowingly, cynically or partially - may have been to have chronically impaired their individual and collective identities. Alex Shepard's recent work on workers' self identification is here very perceptive. She suggests that depositions at church court records, which required deponents to give an account of their material worth, can be deployed in order to get at workers' senses of themselves, of their neighbours, and of their place within the local pecking order.⁷⁷ In 1623, for instance, Anthony Mather, a young Peak Country miner, explained that he was 'worth nothing but the clothes on his backe' - such routine formulations both indicate something of labouring people's relative wealth and are also suggestive of their perception of their own *worth* - pointing, perhaps, towards one way in which material deprivation combined with the social subordination.⁷⁸ Certainly, in his study of 'proverbial sayings' Adam Fox has found that a great many proverbs advised 'a stoical resignation', pointing towards 'a sober acceptance of the world around, a world of economic hardship and social inferiority.' Such proverbs proposed that 'the pleasures of the mighty are the tears of the poor'; the poor 'pay for all' and 'suffer all the wrong'.⁷⁹

Throughout this essay, we have seen how plebeian anger interlocked with popular claims of powerlessness, and how class antagonism formed the mirror image of deference. In particular, we have seen how the lower orders of early modern England both contested and constituted the terms of their subordination. Following the early modern tendency to perceive of the world as divided into opposed polarities, much of the essay has been organised around a dichotomy between ruled and ruler. This now unfashionable polarity has its own problems; but it has, at least, enabled us to make sense of the contemporary willingness to perceive of the social world as a battleground between rich and poor, in which 'the poore hates the rich, because they will not set them on worke: and the rich hates the poore, because they seeme burdenous'.⁸⁰ One of the difficulties with such a polarity, however, concerns the ambivalent place of the 'better sort' of people -

⁷⁵ PRO, STAC8/227/3.6; K. Lindley, Fenland riots and the English Revolution (London, 1982), 54; for other examples see PRO, STAC8/227/35.13, 38.

⁷⁶ British Library, Microfilm, M485/82/379; B. Sharp, In contempt of all authority: rural artisans and riot in the west of England, 1586-1660 (Berkeley, CA, 1980), 71.

⁷⁷ A. Shepard, 'Honesty, worth and gender in early modern England', in H. French and J. Barry (eds.), Identity and agency in England, 1500-1800 (Basingstoke, 2004), 87-105.

⁷⁸ Lichfield Joint Record Office, B/C/5/1623, Bonsall.

⁷⁹ Fox, Oral and literate culture, 100.

⁸⁰ R. Kegl, The rhetoric of concealment: figuring gender and class in Renaissance literature (Ithaca, NY, 1994), 145.

tradesmen; farmers; wealthier artisans - within the social order. As two generations of social historians have now made clear, at the same time as they enclosed and engrossed fields, within many parishes this 'better sort' increasingly monopolised local offices such as village constable and Overseer of the Poor.⁸¹ By the late sixteenth century, links of clientage, deference and paternalism also operated *within* the village community, as well as between villagers and lords. Such relationships, again, produced their own antagonisms, such that, by the 1590s, within the south of England, the plebeian language of class shifted in its emphasis, increasingly blaming wealthier farmers for social ills, rather than (as in the 1530s and 1540s), the gentry.⁸² Within the polity of the village, just as within the wider polity of the realm, links of clientage and deference constituted one of the forces that bound together a profoundly unequal society.

Despite the willingness of social historians to allude to their existence, networks of clientage and paternalism have yet to be studied in any systematic fashion. Some hints as to how paternalism operated can be found within the papers of the Cheshire gentleman Sir Richard Grosvenor. In a letter of advice to his son on how to maintain good lordship, Grosvenor encouraged his son to 'Bee charritable to the truly poore. Receive strangers, cloath the naked'. He also advised his son to protect aged servants, and to avoid oppressing his tenants 'lest otherwise the poore tennant cry... and God... take thire cawse in hand.' Proof that Grosvenor maintained the standards of charity that he commended to his son are to be found in the payments 'to divers poore' recorded in his account book. That Grosvenor's authority operated within a web of clientage which extended into the village is apparent from a payment made to a poor woman at the encouragement of her female neighbours.⁸³ Within the village, therefore, paternalism was also a powerful force. Hence, the established inhabitants of one Norfolk village protested at their vicar's attempt to extract a church tithe from 'ij pore men to the utter undoing of them their wyff[e]s and childrene'.⁸⁴ Likewise, at least in times of plenty, established villagers might encourage one another to go easy on the local poor. In 1582, Edward Tolwyn asked George Betts not to press his case to certain cottages not only because in Tolwyn's opinion, 'yt ded appeare he hadd no righte to yt', but also because 'they were poore Folke that dwelt in those houses'.⁸⁵

Whatever form new studies of paternalism take, they should not become too sugar-coated. Like the paternalism of the gentry, parish paternalism was a product of profound inequalities of wealth and power. Just like relationships between gentry and plebeians, class relations within the village could be defined by fear and hatred. Hence, the class dimension of witchcraft prosecutions, which saw poorer villagers deploying magic against their wealthier neighbours.⁸⁶ Similarly, the linkages of social, economic and

⁸¹ This literature is now synthesised into a powerful argument in S. Hindle, The state and social change in early modern England, c.1550-1640 (London, 2000).

⁸² Wood, The 1549 rebellions, ch. 5.

⁸³ R. Cust (ed.), The papers of Sir Richard Grosvenor, 1st Bart. (1585-1645), Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, 134 (Stroud, 1996), 32, 33, 34, 55, 57.

⁸⁴ Norfolk Record Office, DN/DEP/5/5a, fols.153v-154v.

⁸⁵ PRO, DL4/24/5.

⁸⁶ A. Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: a regional and comparative study (London, 1970), 147-58.

political power that defined the authority of the 'better sort' might allow them to intimidate, as well as to patronise, poorer villagers. In 1597, the aged inhabitants of Brandon (Suffolk) described how the common land known as 'pore mens lands' had once been 'sowen to the poore mens uses', but that now 'the Auncyentest & Chiefeste Inhabitants' had allowed its enclosure. The local poor had been forced to allow these enclosures to go forward because 'the poore men were afraid' to oppose their betters.⁸⁷ Just as rebellious commons resisted the authority of the gentleman, so the poorer sort sometimes rejected the paternalism of the parish. The evidence is fragmentary, and the subject requires much fuller study, but examples can certainly be found of paupers rejecting the authority of their parochial rulers. Here, too, social historians need to dig deeper: in particular, thanks to the diligence of Steve Hindle, the parameters of poor relief within the early modern parish have now been subject to exhaustive investigation; rather less, however, is known about the micro-politics of social relations within the increasingly polarised villages of early modern England.⁸⁸ Instead, studies of class relations (and this essay is no exception) have tended to focus upon the binary division between the gentry and the commons.

It seems to me, therefore, that there remains much to be done before we ditch class as a category of historical analysis. Interpretively, what I am suggesting is that social historians should raid a number of fields of thought: cultural Marxism; postmodernism; social anthropology; sociolinguistics. We need to historicize class and thereby to remove it from its privileged, reified position within high modernity: pursuing Marx's old proposition that 'The history of each and every hitherto existent society has been that of class struggle' takes us somewhere - it recognises that class was not simply a product of nineteenth-century industrialisation, and that it represents a powerful way of understanding struggles over material resources - but it also comes with a substantial theoretical and political burden. Most obviously, it presupposes that class struggle must be the *dominant* form of social relations in all given societies; what I have suggested here is something rather different - that class, like gender and race, is an injury we do to ourselves and to others which bleeds into all forms of human identities and relationships; but that it need not *determine* all, or in fact most, of those identities and relationships. Instead, class operates in relationship with, and sometimes in conflict with, other identities. Recognising this means thinking beyond the boundaries of established sub-literatures within social history. We need, therefore, a less rigid, more flexible history of class identities and social conflicts: one that does not require earlier struggles to match up to some imagined nineteenth-century ideal type; one that frees us to recognise class as a fluid, ever-changing, emotive, dangerous force in human affairs.

⁸⁷ PRO, E134/39Eliz/East8.

⁸⁸ For an important starting point, see S. Hindle, On the parish? The micro-politics of poor relief in rural England, c.1550-1750 (Oxford, 2004), 387-90, reiterated in his 'Civility, honesty and the identification of the deserving poor in seventeenth-century England', in French and Barry (eds.), Identity and agency, 38-59.